



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE
LAUNCH OF THE HEALTH-ON-WHEELS
INITIATIVE AT YORK AND TOMBO
COMMUNITIES, AND THE MINIBUSES FOR
SPECIAL NEEDS LEADERS,
7TH MARCH 2022**

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Madam First Lady,
Chief Minister,
Ministers of Government,
Our friend and partner, Ambassador Hu, Ambassador of the People's
Republic of China to Sierra Leone,
Development partners in the Health Sector,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning:

1. Let me start by thanking our friends, the Government and people of the People's Republic of China, who have believed in our vision for our country, invested in that vision, and assured us of their continued support. As Ambassador Hu Zhangliang has indicated, we will continue to work within a spirit of mutual trust and respect to deepen that relationship and expand areas of cooperation.
2. In 2018, I made a pledge to improve the human capital development outcomes of our nation. I did so knowing that only well-educated, healthy, and well-fed citizens can deliver sustainable and inclusive development for this nation.
3. Our commitments in our New Direction Manifesto and the Medium-Term National Development Plan align with global sustainable goals. But we see improving human capital development outcomes – improving health outcomes and educational outcomes – not just as mere objectives to tick off. We see them as requirements and drivers of sustainable development in our country.
4. So, Sierra Leone's commitment to achieving Universal Health Coverage has been evident in our international commitments, our partnerships with various nations and multilateral institutions, and our efforts to restructure our national health sector.
5. Our efforts in the sector have been guided by the dimension of universal healthcare – more and better service, more equitable coverage, and more access – both physical access and affordability.

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6. We are one of the few countries in West Africa to invest over 12% of our budget into health care. My Government has allocated over 75 billion Leones to refurbishing, improving, or rebuilding healthcare infrastructure right across the country. For the first time in fifteen years, I repeat, for the first time in fifteen years, my Government has undertaken to rehabilitate Makeni Government Hospital, Magburaka Government Hospital, Port Loko Government Hospital, Kabala Government Hospital and other regional hospitals.

7. This is in addition to recruiting more nurses and midwives, improved working conditions for nurses and healthcare workers, more laboratories, more ambulances, and more Community Health Clinics that have taken healthcare to within a 5-mile distance of every Sierra Leonean.

8. The impacts of these investments are significant by any measure and stand above politics. Since 2018, maternal mortality has been reduced from 1165 to 720 per 100,000 people. Far fewer mothers are dying in childbirth. Far fewer infants and children under five are dying. There has been a 100% increase in the number of people living with HIV receiving lifesaving treatment from just over 23,000 in 2017 to over 46,000. Malaria-related deaths have also been reduced by 47% - far fewer people are dying of malaria. Add these to our much-lauded fight against successive waves of COVID-19 and you will see that, in just 4 years, we have made great progress as a nation.

9. So, our actions and interventions in the area of human capital development, be it education or healthcare, have been intentional, inclusive, and innovative.

10. They are Intentional because they have been well-thought-out and planned and we have engaged our development partners and made a clear case, where necessary.

11. They are inclusive because we have looked very closely at the barriers that citizens in hard-to-reach and far-to-reach areas face in accessing healthcare and education as the case may be. We have also considered the special needs of those populations. We believe that equal access to available

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services and resources and meaningful inclusion in the full scope of services are a must.

12. They are innovative because we are open to and we are willing to implement new and creative ways of providing resources and services to our citizens.

13. So, let me once again thank the Government and people of the People's Republic of China for supporting this "Health-on-Wheels" programme. As I indicated earlier, it is intentional, innovative, and inclusive.

14. It is in fulfillment of the fourth target of our national development plan that seeks to increase modern diagnostic and specialist treatment in the country and improve secondary healthcare systems.

15. It brings inclusive quality and equitable health services to the doorsteps of Sierra Leoneans in some of the most deprived areas of the country -- citizens who have limited access to health services.

16. It is an innovative initiative that brings healthcare to the doorsteps of Sierra Leoneans with a full complement of health staff – a doctor, dentist, ophthalmologist, pharmacist, nurses, midwives, community health officer, and data entry officer.

17. These dedicated officers will provide specialised health outreach services to the remotest part of the country where their services are most needed. They will provide the diagnostics, treatment, and referral services as needed.

18. I expect staff to be courteous, polite, compassionate and avoid all sorts of negative conduct that will imperil the success of this initiative. Charging underhand payments, illegally selling healthcare supplies and medication, siphoning fuel will not make you rich. It simply deprives regular, sick Sierra Leoneans of healthcare. Your actions may lead to a pregnant woman, an infant, or an elderly person dying needlessly. It is your duty to maintain the programme and safeguard the equipment.

19. I have requested the Minister for Health and Sanitation to ensure that over the next four months, each of the 193 Chiefdoms should be visited by

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the health bus providing services to more than one million people including children, school children, young people, pregnant women, and particularly the elderly.

20. I also request that the Ministry of Health undertake a baseline study and continuously monitor and assess the impact of this initiative on the health outcomes of our citizens.

21. In addition to diagnosing and providing treatment of diseases, these buses will also support the national COVID-19 vaccination Programme in various parts of the country.

22. Let me emphasise that the health-on-wheels initiative will complement NOT REPLACE routine health services in the country. As stated earlier, our investments will continue as planned in all areas of healthcare.

23. In the areas of education, we also have a National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools that seeks to ensure that schools throughout Sierra Leone are accessible to, and inclusive of, all children especially those who are otherwise marginalised or excluded.

24. The policy caters specifically for children with disabilities, children from low-income families, children in rural and underserved areas; and, girls - especially girls who are currently pregnant and in school or are parent learners.

25. For the first time in the history of this country, my Government procured 50 buses for students that were distributed across the country to transport children to and from learning institutions.

26. But some student populations have special needs and the general buses were not easily accessible to all pupils. For that reason, my Government has acquired 5 Mini Buses to be distributed to the following Special Needs schools:

1. Milton Margai School for the Blind in Freetown;
2. Koidu School for the Blind in Kono;
3. Bombali School for the Blind in Makeni;
4. Kabala School for the Blind in Kabala; and

5. National School for the Deaf in Freetown

27. It is necessary for these Special Needs Institutions and the others to have their own means of transportation to take them to their respective schools/learning facilities and also on social and recreational activities.

28. Let me close today by re-stating that our human capital development priority has always been intentional, inclusive, and seeks to be innovative. We are eager to work with development partners and the private sector to further these objectives of expanding access to resources and services in the fields of education and especially for healthcare.

29. As with education, we must all commit ourselves to making universal health coverage a reality for all people in Sierra Leone. Together we will make Sierra Leone better for all of us.

I thank you for your attention.