



**KEYNOTE REMARKS BY HIS
EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SIERRA LEONE, AT THE FORMAL
PLENARY OF THE 2022 NATIONAL
HEALTH SUMMIT, FREETOWN - 7TH
APRIL 2022**

The Honourable Vice President,
Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Our Development Partners,
Mayors of Municipalities and Revered Traditional Leaders,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning

1. I have listened to many stories of loss, fear, anxiety, and of joy. Today, I will focus on an indicative story of joy.
2. There is the story about a young mother at Moyamba Junction who beamed with pride as she held her newborn in her arms surrounded by skilled healthcare workers in a well-lit community health centre. This child had lived. It was the first time she had ever delivered a child at a community health centre. She had been brought to the hospital by an ambulance in the national ambulance fleet that serves her village just outside Moyamba Junction.
3. Three years from then, that child will attend an early learning centre at Moyamba Junction, adjacent to her mother's retail stall. Five years from then, that child will attend primary school tuition-free, be provided with teaching and learning materials, be fed with nutritious meals, and be taught by a highly-skilled school teacher.
4. She will live in Moyamba Junction, a town that, in the last four years has had a paved high-grade highway to Moyamba and all outlying towns and villages, a town that now has off-grid solar electricity, potable water, and much improved schools.
5. Exactly three years ago at TED in Vancouver, I told the world that "I wake up every day believing that our country should no longer be defined by the stigma of the past. The future offers more hope and opportunity for all. It matters more to me that young men and women all across the country can imagine for themselves that they too can be and are part of this story of our nation. I want to challenge them to build a country where 3-year-olds like my daughter, Amina, can grow up with good governance, quality

education, healthcare, and good infrastructure.” This is the challenge to which we should continue to rise. This is how we change the story of our nation.

6. This year’s theme, “Health Promotion for Well-being, Equity and Sustainable Development” resonates with goals my Government set in our manifesto commitments five years ago and outcomes we described and have been working towards in our Medium-Term National Development Plan. It also aligns with international commitments we have made to work toward Universal Health Coverage and Sustainable Development Goals.

7. So let me, therefore, start by thanking our development partners, friends, policymakers and leaders, and most especially, healthcare workers right across Sierra Leone for believing in, supporting, and working assiduously towards our collective vision of improving health outcomes and providing equitable access to affordable, quality healthcare.

8. I challenged again at TED that “The most audacious and nation-changing events or policies or even personal choices happen when we ask, “Why not,” then make bold choices, and ensure those bold choices happen.” We made a bold choice to improve human capital development.

9. We asked ourselves “why not” get an improved healthcare delivery system; set priorities that are sustainable, fair, and deliver health outcomes that close health disparities; reduce maternal and child mortality; provide malnourished children with nutritious meals; reduce the incidence of malaria and other disease burdens; increase vaccination and immunisation rates; recruit and train more health workers; raise their pay and provide healthcare workers with health insurance and improved service conditions; deliver improved mental healthcare and enhanced services to persons living with HIV, TB, and Leprosy; regularise the delivery of drugs through a new drugs supply agency; upgrade healthcare infrastructure and laboratories right across the country so one is available to every Sierra Leonean within a five mile radius; enhance and expand a national ambulance service; develop focused strategic plans and health sector policies; restructure our disease surveillance systems and successfully fight off epidemics and pandemics; operationalise an affordable health insurance scheme; introduce an innovative national health-on-wheels scheme; revamp the leadership and

rework the future of health care delivery in this country; and, work with the private sector on new infrastructure and other investments? All of these we have achieved and more.

10. These are irreversible and indelible gains that have saved lives and stand above trifling political rhetoric. These gains are about improving the lives of Sierra Leoneans. We asked ourselves, “why not” and we are delivering.

11. Let me acknowledge here that these gains have been achieved with technical advice, resource mobilisation, and the goodwill of our partners and friends. Permit me to single out Global Fund for their \$160M grant to support the fight against HIV, TB, Malaria, and Leprosy and for improving health management information systems through digitalisation. Also, I want to again thank the World Bank for their grant of \$60 million to strengthen health systems in some of the poorest, health-deprived areas of our country.

12. We also thank the Government and People of the People’s Republic of China for their support throughout COVID and for their recent donation of four fully equipped mobile health clinics that will expand health care coverage to more areas of our country.

13. To our implementing partners and every development partner that has built health clinics, helped train health workers, provided vaccines and health care equipment, promoted women’s health, and supported nourishment and feeding programmes at no cost to Government, thank you. To you, we owe a debt of gratitude.

14. We are doing our part. The government has increased the health care budget and will soon spend in excess of Le70 Billion in infrastructural upgrades of 100% of all major Government hospitals across the country irrespective of region.

15. We remain focused on WHO’s interpretation of Universal Health Coverage goals that “all people and communities [in Sierra Leone] can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship.”

16. In spite of our gains and our aspirations, we are mindful of persisting challenges that we will continue working hard to resolve. We believe we have the essential elements in place. Leadership and governance reforms in the health sector are ongoing. Our National Medical Supplies Agency continues its salutary work of distributing essential medical drugs and supplies in a timely and predictable manner. We are investing extensively in health workforce training and service delivery. We are experimenting with innovative health service delivery models.

17. We are optimistic that we will get there. We are eager to work with partners and friendly nations to install advanced diagnostic equipment and cutting-edge health care technologies. Integrated health management and information systems are critical for supporting our treatment and referral systems in our country. New private investments in pharmaceutical production are most welcome and we are ready to provide generous incentives to facilitate the establishment of those production sites in this country.

18. Let me close by challenging all of us to re-imagine the future of health care in this country. Let us imagine a future of accessible and affordable quality healthcare for every Sierra Leonean and plan and work on making that happen. As you dialogue during this health summit, let us believe that our shared goals are possible. We must therefore stay fully engaged and focused on improving health outcomes for every Sierra Leoneans.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you fruitful deliberations during this summit.