



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY  
HIS EXCELLENCY BRIGADIER GENERAL  
(RTD) DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO,  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA  
LEONE, ON THE COMMEMORATION OF  
MAY DAY CELEBRATIONS AT THE FAMILY  
KINGDOM, ABERDEEN, FREETOWN,  
TUESDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> MAY 2022**

## MAY DAY CELEBRATIONS

The Honourable Vice President  
Madam First Lady  
Ministers and Deputy Ministers  
Honourable Members of Parliament  
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps  
Colleague workers  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

1. In 1889, an international federation of socialist groups and trade unions designated 1st of May as a day in support of workers in commemoration of the Haymarket Riot which occurred in Chicago in 1886.
2. For more than a century later, May Day or International Labour Day has become an annual event to demonstrate workers' solidarity, champion workers' rights and honour workers' contributions.
3. So let me whole-heartedly commend the leaderships of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Sierra Leone Labour Congress and the Sierra Leone Employers Federation, for organizing this all-important Workers' Day Celebration with the theme "**Fairness at the Workplace**".
4. I feel honoured to be part of this celebration simply because I am a worker too. Indeed, I am an employee of the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone (My Employer). I was employed on the 4th of April 2018 for a period of five years and eligible for another five years to steer the mantle of leadership of this great nation. Sadly, for me as a worker, I don't have anywhere to complain about salary increment or improved conditions of service and I cannot even go on strike.
5. Today, as we mark one hundred and thirty-three years of the historic struggles and gains made by workers and labour movements, the world of work has been severely affected by the current global economic crises. According to the internationally reputed, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), it states: "***The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered one of the***

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***worst jobs crises since the Great Depression. There is a real danger that the crisis will increase poverty and widen inequalities, with the impact felt for years to come.”***

6. As the Chairman of the Sierra Leone Employers Federation has also mentioned earlier, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has also exacerbated the devastating effects of Covid-19 pandemic with supply disruptions of petroleum products. I have noted some of the challenges he mentioned facing employers and businesses such as increased inflation; higher cost of foreign exchange for importations; the need to encourage commercial banks to provide bridging loans to support employers and businesses; the challenges with electricity and water supply; the supply chain challenges and increased freight charges.
7. As he has also acknowledged, Government has proactively supported employers and businesses to weather the storm through subsidies and tax incentives and the availability of foreign exchange for the importation of essential commodities. Let me re-assure the Sierra Leone Employers Federation that we will continue to cooperate with employers and businesses to address the challenges so we can lessen the global economic impact on ordinary people.
8. I have also listened to the Secretary General of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress and many of the concerns raised affecting workers are similar to the issues raised last week when I had a meeting with the leadership at State House. In that meeting we agreed on strengthening cooperation between Government and Labour Congress on national issues and I directed the Chief Minister to be holding quarterly engagement with the Congress.
9. However, on the issue of salaries and wages for workers, it is important to note that since 2018 to date my government has made 30% salary increment for teachers, 50% salary increment for Military, Police, Fire Force and Correctional Services; 50% salary increment for workers at ONS and CISU; 25% salary increment for workers at Audit Service, Anti-Corruption Commission and Statistics Sierra Leone; and 75% salary increment for university lecturers and workers. In 2019, my government also increased the minimum wage

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from Five Hundred Thousand Leones (Le500,000) to Six Hundred Thousand Leones (Le600,000). I know workers always want more salary increment but what we have done so far should give workers hope that this is a government that cares and a government that is fair. Let me also state that preparations for the establishment of a Wages and Compensation Commission are at an advanced stage.

10. Mr. Chairman, in the world of work, the foundation for ensuring fairness at the workplace is mainly based on the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and Recommendations. You would recall that Sierra Leone became a Member of the ILO during the era of the SLPP-led government immediately after independence. This lends credence to the high level of seriousness with which the government at that time, treated issues of workers. My government will continue to act likewise and possibly do more.
11. It is also a fact that my government upon assuming power in 2018 had taken steps to demonstrate our desire to promote not only the culture of equality of workers but also fairness at the workplace.
12. First, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and its social partners have conducted at least two reviews of some of the labour laws. Therefore, for the first time two significant bills have been drafted:
  - (i) **The Labour Bill, 2022:** This will be an Act to consolidate and repeal the Factories Act, 1974; General Law (Business Start-up) (Amendment) Act, 2007; Regulations of Wages and Industrial Relations Act, 1971; Employers and Employed Act Cap 212, 1956; Workman's Compensation Act Cap 219 and the Trade Union Act 1944;
  - (ii) **Overseas Employment and Migrants Bill, 2022:** This will be an Act to provide for the regulations of overseas employment, to provide for the establishment of a safe and fair system of migration, to provide for the protection of the rights and welfare of migrant workers and members of their families and to provide for other related matters.

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13. Second, as a country, we have also ratified various ILO Conventions and Protocols which have attracted international recognition and admiration for Sierra Leone.
14. On the 4<sup>th</sup> December 2018 and 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019 respectively, my government through the Ministry of Labour and Social Security facilitated the ratification of **ten (10) Conventions, and one (1) Protocol** by the House of Parliament.
15. On the 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020, my government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation deposited **nine (9) instruments (8 Conventions and 1 Protocol)** with the Director General of the ILO. And in January 2022, **two (2) instruments** were further submitted to the ILO.
16. In his remarks, the ILO Director-General, Mr Guy Ryder, thanked my government for the very hard work in ratifying such a high number of ratifications and stated:  
*"...it is not every day that I receive the ratification by a member state of no less than nine instruments. Eight Conventions and One Protocol. Indeed, it is unique in my experience, and I know that this has never happened before from any country from the continent of Africa. These ratifications come at a very good moment in terms of the relationship between Sierra Leona and the ILO".*
17. Third, it is also important to note that ensuring fairness at the workplace must include the assurance that workers' pensions are managed prudently and judiciously by the National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT). Therefore, I am pleased to announce that my office is in receipt of the Executive Summary of the Valuation of NASSIT's investments and review of related policies conducted by **PriceWaterhouseCoopers**. This is in fulfilment of a manifesto commitment I made 2018 to conduct a comprehensive audit of NASSIT and make it more effective and efficient. I hope the Minister of Labour and Social Security will prepare highlights of the report and fully brief Cabinet in the immediate future. As a government, we are also mindful that the review of the NASSIT Act must be done to

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enhance compliance with best practice in the administration of pension funds for the long-term sustainability of the Scheme.

18. Fourth, fairness at the workplace should be discussed in the context of the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration). This Declaration provides guidance to governments, workers and employers' organizations and Multinational Enterprises in areas such as employment, training, conditions of work, life, and industrial relations. The Declaration makes provision for the appointment of National Focal Points.
19. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, and the Sierra Leone Employers Federation appointed and confirmed their National Focal Points in July 2019 and they were trained through the sponsorship of the ILO, in Turin, Italy in the same year.
20. The National Focal Points promote inclusive, responsible, and sustainable workplace practices to give effect to the principles of the MNE Declaration. This will result in a systematic decrease in industrial disputes and by extension a decrease in strikes with the passage of time; a situation that is congenial for increased productivity and economic growth.
21. Fifth, ensuring fairness at the workplace must also include providing legal avenues for addressing grievances. Notwithstanding the fact that the Regulation of Wages and Industrial Relations Act, 1971 and its related Collective Bargaining Agreements make provisions for grievance redress mechanisms, my government has taken additional measure for workers to seek redress. The Industrial and Social Security Division of the High Court has been established to hear and determine the following matters: labour, industrial relations and social security; industrial disputes; employer and employee relationships among others.
22. Mr. Chairman, as a responsible government that is keen to maintain and promote workers' rights and thus ensure equity among

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workers at workplaces, we have never interfered in the activities of Trade Unions. Workers must enjoy the right to form associations and bargain collectively. This is why we have given Trade Unions the space to perform their functions because they are the bulwarks of their members and must protect the rights of their members without political compromise.

23. Equally important, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has also been supportive to the Government of Sierra Leone in several areas with a view to promoting labour administration generally and specifically to promote fairness at the workplace.

24. In 2021, the ILO hired a Consultant to conduct a diagnostic study in order to prepare the second phase of the **Decent Work Country Programme for Sierra Leone**. The Decent Work Agenda of the ILO has the following four strategic objectives:

- (i) Set and promote standards and fundamental principles and rights at work;
- (ii) Create greater opportunities for women and men to decent employment and income;
- (iii) Enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all and;
- (iv) Strengthen tripartism and social dialogue.

25. Therefore, developing and ultimately implementing the Decent Work Country Programme Phase Two for Sierra Leone will invariably contribute to promoting fairness at the workplace in especially the sectors that would be covered.

26. Distinguished guests, ILO is one of Sierra Leone's most trusted international partners. Despite the challenges in paying our subscriptions as a country, the ILO has continued to stand by us. ***This is why I have instructed the Ministry of Finance to ensure that the arrears of Sierra Leone's Membership Contribution to the ILO be paid immediately.***

27. Mr. Chairman, the ILO is implementing an EU funded Project titled EU "Jobs for Growth" Programme in Sierra Leone. This project

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is otherwise referred to as the “Opportunity Salone Programme”. It was launched in November 2021 and it is expected to last for the period 2021 to 2025.

28. The programme aims to stimulate the creation of between 2000 and 40000 decent jobs in the short term by improving the climate of investment. It is envisaged that this will be achieved through enhanced access to finance and human capital development among others. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security will be very instrumental in ensuring that the jobs are decent and there is equity in the treatment of workers at workplaces covered by the programme.

29. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let me end by saying that the theme for this year’s International Labour Day has created a tripartite platform for government, employers and workers to reflect on fairness as a moral value. Labour is not a commodity to be traded in the way as goods, services or commodity. As the former Director-General of the International Labour Organisation, Mr Juan Somavia once said: ***“Labour markets are about people. And people have a right to be treated with dignity and respect.”***

**Viva Sierra Leone Labour Congress  
Viva Sierra Leone Employers Federation  
And God Bless the Workers of Sierra Leone.**