



**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.  
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA  
LEONE ON INTERNATIONAL  
MENSTRUAL HYGIENE DAY.  
FREETOWN, 1<sup>ST</sup> JUNE 2022**

## INTERNATIONAL MENSTRUAL HYGIENE DAY 2

The Honourable Vice President,  
Madam First Lady  
Ministers of Government,  
Members of Parliament,  
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,  
Our Development Partners,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Good morning.

1. I am truly pleased to be here today to join the First Lady, our development partners, and fellow Sierra Leoneans, to commemorate this all-important International Menstrual Hygiene Day. This is another historic opportunity to reflect on our successes thus far and make firm commitments to this campaign we started together some years ago.
2. Together, we made a commitment to continue to advocate and engage our communities in breaking taboos and removing stigma and other negative cultural views on menstruation. The First Lady has indicated that she has travelled extensively throughout this country to speak to girls in person and assure them that periods are natural and not to be ashamed or afraid of. Because they are natural like all other body processes, they can be managed safely and hygienically.
3. We have also worked together to tackle the lack of hygiene products to support young girls to manage their periods. Development partners and friends have helped provide welfare and hygiene kits for girls, particularly in senior secondary schools. My Government also made a pledge to include the provision of welfare kits as a budget line item. We have seen that pledge through. We have also developed manuals for the distribution and use of those welfare kits. Teachers have been given orientation sessions on how to have conversations with girls around their periods and on the use of hygiene and welfare kits.
4. Clearly, we need more action on menstrual health. We should intensify public education on menstrual hygiene at schools and at the community levels. The objective is to change misinformation and negative attitudes toward periods. As previous speakers have

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indicated, fear, stigma, and shame associated with periods should not stop girls from going to school, from engaging in vocational education, from engaging in sports, and participating fully in public spaces and social activities.

5. It also helps to look at menstrual hygiene as part of efforts to improve the health of girls and women within the overarching context of our human capital development programme. My Government is eager to work with development partners to continue making hygiene kits available for free to schoolgirls and affordable to women. Safe and hygienic use and disposal of those products should also be connected to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, especially for girls in school. We are also eager to work with development partners to provide safe and exclusive WASH facilities at schools that will serve girls so that they are assured that even away from home, they can take care of themselves as well.
6. But we also think that safe and hygienic menstruation helps enhance the social confidence of young girls. Girls are able to fully participate in academic and social activities without the fear and shame associated with menstruation. Young men should also be socialised into knowing that periods are normal and should not be cause for casting aspersion on girls.
7. At the national level, we are continuing to remove barriers to the education of girls and we have made remarkable progress over the last four years. We have achieved gender parity through free access to Free quality School Education. More girls are enrolled in, stay in school, attempt and pass transition examinations at all levels. The performance of girls in public transition examinations has continued to improve. School retention and completion for girls have improved, thanks in part to The First lady's national campaign against early marriage and other interventions (including school feeding, free teaching and learning materials) supported by our generous partners. For the first time, girls in STEM education are also assured of years of Government supported education.

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8. We have lifted the ban on pregnant girls in school because we believe that every girl, poor, pregnant, rural, or living with a disability has an inalienable right to learn and be all that she can be. Equally so, we have introduced comprehensive sexuality education in schools so that girls learn about and know their bodies as they should.
9. But we are already laying the ground for the future success and parity of success of girls. Civic education is now part of our school curriculum and teaches all learners the invaluable role of girls and women in inclusive national development. Our Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment law will significantly increase representation and improve opportunities for girls and women. Girls will now grow up looking forward to a future they choose and a future they want, not one that is dictated by their circumstances. We are also thinking ahead to access to higher education and workforce preparation, placement, and development. We believe that we can thus address gender imbalances and improve women's economic empowerment.
10. Even as we have come so far, we are looking ahead to more possibilities for girl child education. Last month, my Government, United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP)- UNESCO and UNICEF in Sierra Leone hosted education leaders from 13 different African countries. At a three-day conference, they discussed gender-transformative policies and pondered girls' education in their own countries.
11. These African Ministers and education leaders have now drafted what is now called "The Freetown Manifesto for Gender-Transformative Leadership in and through Education" that is now being finalised and will be presented at the June Paris Pre-Summit. That will be a precursor to the UN Secretary General's Transforming Education Summit at the UN General Assembly in September.
12. Last week, I met with Vicky Ford, the UK's Minister for Africa. We discussed the UK's support in critical areas including girls' education, safety, health, and reducing maternal and child mortality. This week, during a state visit to Kenya, I discussed with President Kenyatta what it means to unlock the great potential of girls and

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women through the power of education. Keeping them in school by supporting comprehensive menstruation hygiene is a step in that direction.

13. Let me, therefore, conclude by thanking development partners, The First Lady, civil society, community leaders, and stakeholders who continue to support this initiative. Let us make every girl comfortable with her body, her period, her education, her health, and, therefore, make her secure about her place in society and about her future.

I thank you for your kind attention