



**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AT THE
LAUNCH OF THE REDENOMINATION OF
THE LEONE AT THE CENTRAL BANK OF
SIERRA LEONE, SIAKA STEVENS STREET -
1ST JULY 2022**

The Honourable Vice President,
Madam First Lady,
Ministers of Government present,
Members of Parliament present,
Board of Governors, Bank of Sierra Leone,
The Bank Governor,
Deputy Bank Governors,
Chief Executive Officers and Managing Directors of Commercial banks and
other financial institutions,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Our revered traditional and religious leaders,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning.

1. Let me, from the outset, commend the Bank Governor, Deputy Governors, staff of the Bank of Sierra Leone, Ministry of Finance officials, our commercial banks, and numerous stakeholders who have all worked with great diligence to deliver this project.
2. To our friends in the private sector, I acknowledge that it takes quite a bit to be redenomination-ready. But investments now will make a lot of financial sense in a few months and years as you save on operational and technical costs associated with using smaller volumes of notes.
3. Our compatriots in the informal economy may struggle with transactions using the new notes. I encourage the bank to intensify its sensitisation campaigns in the transition period and beyond. Reach out to the ordinary citizen in the markets, places of worship, their communities, in the rural areas, in their villages and towns. Citizens must be informed fully about the new currency. It is only fair that citizens receive the correct exchange and transaction values for the old notes as we use them alongside the new Leones. This is also a civic duty on all of us to help our fellow citizens to get it right.
4. We also have a real opportunity to zero in on more innovation in the banking sector. I am informed that the National switch that supports digital financial services will soon be unveiled. The re-introduction of coins with real purchasing value will reduce the pressure on notes. But

we should institute new technologies to minimise volumes of cash transactions. Our citizens are already familiar with mobile cash systems. We can build on what they are familiar with to introduce other cashless payment systems with which they can be comfortable and can use with great ease across the economy.

5. Clearly, our politicians and self-righteous pundits will soon flood social media, radio, and TV programmes with all manner of negative noise about the new note and the intention behind introducing it. They will conjure conspiracy theories, doom and gloom stories, and some downright amusing explanations.
6. Some will dive into their wildest imagination and drag in explanations that will make the dead wake up in shock. Some will call it a political stunt. Some will say it is a feel-good move – that we simply want to take some zeroes off and people will think an economy gone bad now feels better.
7. Well, in the spirit of good governance, Sierra Leone now enjoys press freedom and freedom of expression more than ever before. No journalist is in prison, unlike in yesteryear. People, especially opposition politicians, are free to express their very wrong opinions as long as they do so within the confines of the law and do not incite or disrupt our national peace and stability.
8. Most Sierra Leoneans know that Sierra Leone does not exist in isolation. We are part of a global economy. Sierra Leone, like other African countries, the UK, US, Asian countries, are dealing with the very adverse economic effects of COVID-19 complicated by the current global crises in Ukraine. We are dealing with everything from rising interest rates, inflation, currency depreciation, fuel scarcity, and increased food prices. There are queues for fuel in other African countries as there have been queues for fuel in Asian, Americas, US, UK, and other countries around the world.
9. The Minister of Finance has just announced that we are providing foreign exchange to oil marketing companies and the private sector to bring in sufficient stock of fuel and food items on the market. As a

Government, we can only go so far as to support the private sector to bring these commodities in to the local market. We expect they would do their part by making goods freely available on the markets and not create artificial scarcities and extort huge profits.

10. Private sector players that create artificial scarcities in order to force prices up and make life more difficult for ordinary Sierra Leoneans should ask themselves whether they feel good making life harder for their fellow Sierra Leoneans. They know that inordinately high prices make life tougher for other Sierra Leoneans, especially our poorer and more vulnerable compatriots. As I have always admonished, we should be better and we should do better.
11. Let me, however, thank our development partners for helping us provide social safety nets to thousands of poor and vulnerable Sierra Leoneans at such a time. They have kept the faith with us even through hard times. Thank you.
12. As the Finance Minister has indicated, our macro-economic fundamentals are strong; our fiscal management highly disciplined; and our economic policies are nimble, agile, and responsive to these global headwinds. The IMF has acknowledged this fact in its recent review, and they have approved budgetary support to soften the impact of the current global crisis.
13. Our development partners and friends have continued to believe in our competent management of the economy and they have, therefore, stood with us.
14. Private investment dollars in infrastructure, small-scale manufacturing, value-added production, agriculture, renewable energy, and mining have continued to come into Sierra Leone. On my recent visit to Qatar, there was a huge expression of interest in the agriculture and mining sector. They are attracted to our huge natural resources, but they are even happier about the investment ecosystem we continue to open up and improve on.

15. We will continue to make our peaceful, stable, and resource-rich country a prime destination for investment. There is cause for optimism once we ride out this economic turbulence that is clearly outside our control and not of our own making.
16. So, how many more new things can one say about this new money beyond what the technical people have said? I still say, many more things.
17. The technical experts have made a strong case. There will be a simplification of accounting records and a significant reduction in cash volumes needed for transactions. The inconveniences and inefficiencies of using the old notes will be a thing of the past. We have removed three zeroes, but the money yesterday is of the same value as the money today.
18. Detractors will attempt to spread falsehoods about the value of the new note. Five Leones of new notes will buy you the same goods and services that Five Thousand Leones of old notes yesterday bought you. As the Bank of Sierra Leone people have said, it is "New Money Same Value. New Notes; Same Value." The value of your pension, your debts, your rent, and your salary remains the same.
19. Our task at hand in the coming years is to sustain our currency's value and reputation. My Government's focus is on continuing to manage the economy responsibly and to increase the value of the new currency. As a Government, we will continue to implement the right policies on overall economic management and government spending. I am sure the Bank will do its part to ensure financial stability in accordance with its mandate.
20. New foreign direct investments, as I have indicated earlier, and increased domestic productivity will have the required impact of expanding and growing our economy. We need to expand the productive sectors of our economy. The more we produce; the more we can export. The higher our GDP; the better the value of our currency.

21. Talking about economic productivity, let me briefly engage our banking sector since this event looks like a marquee gathering of a who's who in banking in Sierra Leone. To my mind, economic growth especially the growth of the private sector in Sierra Leone has been constrained because huge sections of our population have not had and do not have access to credit.
22. These include women (young and old) who we know can transform small amounts into big profits; young entrepreneurs with exciting ideas who can both tackle global issues in innovative ways and make money; citizens in rural areas where we can create new growth nodes and economic opportunity; and, our medium, small, and micro-enterprises. This is central to our national financial inclusion strategy. More access for more people to low-interest credit will lead to inclusive and sustainable economic growth.
23. So, I appeal to the bankers in the room to lower the barriers to credit. Let us make the unbanked in Sierra Leone banked. Let us serve our unserved or underserved medium, small, and micro-enterprises with innovative financial products and services. Let us work together to reduce the cost of providing credit to those who need just a little more help. Let us use the power of innovation and technology to give more citizens access to banks and financial services and low interest credit that only banks can offer.
24. To the private sector in the room, my Government has created a National Investment Board. We are excited at the prospects of working with the private sector to ease the business ecosystem; to create more opportunities for businesses, and to create more jobs for Sierra Leoneans.
25. To my fellow citizens, this is your money. It is legal tender. It is meant for use by all Sierra Leoneans. It is a visible symbol of our nation. Let us demonstrate a heightened sense of responsibility and patriotism in handling our new currency. For the next 90 days, it will be used alongside the old Leone at the same value. Even after then, for 45 days, people can still exchange the old Leone for the new Leone at the Bank of Sierra Leone at the same value.

26. I am honoured, therefore, at this time, to officially launch the New Leone, our new currency and legal tender in Sierra Leone.

I thank you for your kind attention