



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ON THE
OBSERVANCE OF WORLD FOOD DAY 2022
AND THE LAUNCH OF THE AGRICULTURE
INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE (IVR)
AND CALL CENTRE SYSTEMS. KABALA
TOWN, 16TH OCTOBER 2022**

The Honourable Vice President,
Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Our Revered Paramount Chiefs and Community Leaders,
Development Partners and Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Fellow Farmers,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am delighted to be here this morning because WE (the Government, our farmers, community leaders, citizens, and our development partners) are all here in this same place.
2. We meet in the lingering but ominous shadow of an ongoing global crisis. The combined impact of COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine have had adverse effects on supply chains for fuel, food commodities, fertilisers, and other agricultural input. Food and food production now cost far more now than they did two years ago. Food prices have increased across the globe hitting hardest the poorest and the most food-deprived nations of the sub-Saharan region.
3. But that is what makes this meeting on World Food Day so important. These kinds of meetings do not happen very often. So, we will use this day and this moment, not only to observe World Food Day, but to also commend our partners, celebrate our successes, reflect on common challenges, and more importantly, propose solutions as we make progress.
4. It is also a fitting time to renew our commitments to our shared purpose which is aptly captured in this year's theme "Leave No One Behind: Better Production, Better Nutrition, Better Environment and Better Life for All."
5. So, let me start off by thanking and commending our development partners for supporting our human capital development priorities of education, healthcare, and food security. The Minister, in his statement, mentioned the various partner-supported programmes including the World Bank-funded Smallholder Commercialisation Agribusiness Development Project (SCADeP), the European Union-

funded Boosting Agriculture and Food Security (BAFS), the FAO-supported Mechanisation Policy, and the FAO-supported Irrigation Master Plan, among others.

6. We are determined to use our country's fertile land to produce more food. The Minister has outlined what we have done as a Government to support farmers and farming in Sierra Leone and to enhance the whole agricultural value chain. We are optimistic that our comprehensive approach to food production will boost local food security and significantly lower the cost of food importation over the next couple of years.
7. The indicators for rice self-sufficiency, as announced by the Minister, indicate positive growth. There is a general uptick in overall food production, cash crop production, and livestock production. We are eager to support more private sector participation in agriculture at all scales.
8. The Minister has also identified prospects for a three-sided opportunity to convene with partners and the private sector at a roundtable to discuss possible and future areas of cooperation and partnership. I am eager to participate at such a roundtable. My Government has made its intentions clear: we are open to more technical and other support to promote food security in this country.
9. We believe that the only pathway to food self-sufficiency is to put more high-yielding seeds and seedlings into the soil, minimise post-harvest losses, enhance agriculture value-chains, develop aquaculture across the country, and raise more livestock and more poultry.
10. An inclusive approach boosts food productivity. District agricultural workers and extension workers posted to border areas now have an opportunity to boost agricultural production in unprecedented ways. For farmers, our mechanisation policy now means that the drudgery of hoe and the cutlass are no longer impediments to cultivating larger fields. More land is now under cultivation, and the quantity and quality of the yields have increased in Koinadugu, Falaba, and elsewhere in the country.

11. Locally produced food boosts our school feeding programme. More children, especially girls, are now in school and persisting in school because they are assured of a warm nutritious meal. Learning outcomes and transition exams scores are improving across both districts and throughout Sierra Leone.
12. Beyond mechanisation, we are also, happy to announce today that we are deploying technology to launch an agricultural Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system and a call centre to provide agriculture advisory services to farmers.
13. By pressing 899, farmers are now assured of sound farming advice by calling toll-free on any mobile phone – smart or button-push – and on any telephone network. Additionally, farmers can receive these customised messages in their own local languages.
14. I think we can enhance the interactive functionalities of this service. We can deploy more real voices at the other end of the system. We can make the local contacts of extension workers available.
15. The value of this IVR and enhanced agricultural extension services will strengthen the capacity of our rural small-scale and subsistence farmers by introducing them to invaluable farming advice and new technology.
16. All of this aligns with our commitments at last year's COP26 to boost agricultural productivity, strengthen food systems, and sustainably manage food production and key ecosystems that are "under growing stress from climate change." Additionally, we believe that such a process must be inclusive, fair, provide alternative livelihoods for rural farmers.
17. We are therefore eager as a Government to fully participate in global initiatives that support the Just Rural Transition for agriculture because it addresses the key challenges of enhancing the capacity of our rural farmers, increasing agricultural productivity, and sustainably managing land use and food production ecosystems.

18. I am therefore very pleased to join you here today to launch the IVR, renew our commitments to improving food production and food security, and plan future engagements that will support the development of climate-friendly and sustainable agriculture.

I thank you for your kind attention.