



**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS
MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF SIERRA LEONE AT THE NATIONAL YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
FAIR, FREETOWN INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE CENTRE
-15TH NOVEMBER 2022**

The Honourable Vice President,
 Ministers of Government,
 Honourable Members of Parliament,
 Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
 Development partners,
 Our private sector partners,
 Our young people
 Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. A very good morning and a very hearty welcome again to this National Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Fair.
2. I am informed that about six hundred young people, nearly fifty companies, and over two hundred entrepreneurs are participating in this fair. This fair not only connects young people to opportunities but also provides a platform for engaging all stakeholders about designing a cohesive, integrated, and sustainable job-creation strategy.
3. Since 2018 to date, twenty-four manufacturing factories producing food, beverages, toiletries and more have hired thousands of young people. Word processing, furniture, plastics, and metal-work factories have hired yet thousands more. Water-processing and packaging factories have generated more jobs. Sierra Leone now exports vegetable oil, soap, and other essentials to the sub-regional market. There are more mining-sector jobs, agriculture-value chain jobs, fisheries-sector jobs, renewable-energy jobs, infrastructure-sector jobs, tourism and entertainment-related jobs, youth-empowerment-focused jobs, and more sports-related jobs, among others.
4. More businesses have been registered in the last four years than in any four year-period before. My Government has provided more soft SME loans including the MUNAFA loans to Sierra Leoneans right across the country to start up and invest in their businesses.
5. We have also made great improvements in economic infrastructure (including roads and bridges), energy access, improved digitalisation and fibre-optic coverage, and in business incentives that have made the investment ecosystem more conducive. We are open to more dialogue with

the private sector, financial institutions, business support organisations, and the Local Content Agency to further improve the business environment.

6. We are working to further upgrade policies that promote investment and make the industrial, agricultural, trade, and market spaces even more conducive for business and for creating more job opportunities. This is in tandem with favourable labour regulations and wage reforms that will be presented to Parliament soon.

7. On the supply side, our investments in basic education, technical and vocational education, upskilling and reskilling schemes, and lifelong learning have been globally acknowledged as germane for sustainable long-term national development. These investments by my Government and with the support of development partners are equipping our young people with the skill sets they need and require to be employable.

8. Furthermore, for the first time in this country's history, my Government has sent to Parliament a bill entitled "The Gender Empowerment Act." I urge parliament to pass that bill as soon as possible as it will transform our nation and our nation's economy forever. When passed, the Gender Empowerment law will support the building of a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive economy where barriers to the full participation of women in the economy will be eliminated.

9. As a country, we are also open to more green investments that directly employ young people. Climate action goes beyond mere adaptation activities and global pronouncements. It is also about how we harness the voices, energy, and vision of young people. We look forward to stronger partnerships and investments in that regard. Young people must have a role, through their participation in the economy, to create a safer, more liveable, and more sustainable world.

10. We have made all these reforms amidst very tough and turbulent global economic times. The global economy is hard. Economies all over the world are hurting and young people in particular are bearing the brunt of these hard times. But I am investing in young people because I believe that young people will build the future of prosperity that we desire. I believe that by creating more jobs and more opportunities right across the country for

young people, we can reduce cycles of poverty, drive sustainable development, and grow an inclusive and stable future for our country.

11. With all of these efforts at upgrading the business ecosystem, investing in education and skills development, expanding the productive sector, we will continue to create more jobs, increase tax revenues, and make our country even more competitive for foreign direct investment and business start-ups.

12. The National Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Fair therefore not only builds a bridge between our Human Capital Development investments and job creation, it also puts young people directly in touch with potential employers. It will create interaction and engagement. Potential employers will have an opportunity to listen to and take account of the voices and concerns of young people and also be able to support and advise them on navigating the job market. These interactions will help young people connect and build relationships that will enhance their employability.

13. I, therefore, encourage the young participants to make use of this opportunity and build the skills and networking that they need to not only get jobs but also start-up and own their own businesses.

14. Let me close by thanking entrepreneurs, businesses, and service providers who are here today and who have supported this initiative. As a Government, we are grateful for this initiative and look forward to working with the private sector to develop the business sector.

15. I want to personally thank the Vice President for collaborating with pertinent Ministries, Departments and Agencies in rolling out this maiden edition of a youth job fair.

16. I will visit the stands at this colourful event and I will interact with businesses, entrepreneurs, young people and talk to them from the heart about what we can do even better to create more jobs.

I thank you for your kind attention.