



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS
EXCELLENCY DR. JULIUS MAADA
BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE ANNUAL
PRESIDENTIAL MEDIA COCKTAIL,
COUNTRY LODGE HOTEL,
FREETOWN, WEDNESDAY
- 7TH DECEMBER 2022**

The Honourable Vice President
 Madam First Lady
 Ministers of Government
 The President, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists
 The Chairman, Independent Media Commission
 Newspaper Editors and Station Managers
 My Friends of the Fourth Estate

1. In December 2018, when we first hosted the Presidential Media Cocktail, it was the first time we met after my election as President. Five years on, tonight we are meeting for the last time before my re-election in June 2023.
2. If our relationship was a marriage, it would have been like a husband who has done everything the wife has asked for and now the husband has only one request to make of his wife.
3. Our journey has been truly remarkable. From the Kevin Lewis administration which ushered in my government to the present Ahmed Nasralla administration, we have fulfilled the promise of our generation: to secure a free, independent and pluralistic media.
4. For me, this is not a night of humour but rather it is a night of reflection and thanksgiving. As the Nigerian Writer, Chinua Achebe, states in his book, Things Fall Apart, **"The lizard that jumped from the high Iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did."** Tonight, permit me to release my media scorecard.
5. Friends, after decades of unfulfilled promises on the repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965, together we started a journey in 2018. Even though you walked through the valley of the shadow of apprehension, you feared nothing; for I was with you; my 2018 manifesto and promises comforted you. Together, we delivered the bravest legal reform in the media: the repeal of the criminal libel law in October 2020. And tonight, not one journalist is in jail for the practice of journalism. No journalist is in fear of death or imprisonment for the practice of journalism.

6. Distinguished guests, according to an article published by the International Journalists' Network in July this year titled: **"In Sierra Leone, a rare opening for Press Freedom"**, it states "Amid the spread of disinformation-fueled 'opinion media' in democratic societies, and government censorship and propaganda in autocracies, press freedom is declining globally. Sierra Leone, however, is moving in the other direction. The West African nation rose 29 places in Reporters Without Borders' 2022 press freedom rankings, to 46th globally — comparable to Uruguay, South Korea and the United States". In fact, in the 2022 Press Freedom rankings, Sierra Leone has performed better than Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Nigeria, Rwanda and many others. So, this is a night of thanksgiving.
7. In 2020, my Government enacted the Independent Media Commission Act. Now, there is more professionalism in the media, more opportunities for investment and better conditions of service for journalists. In five years, my Government has also supported more media institutions and journalists with capacity building through training and partnerships. Indeed, this is also a night of thanksgiving for media institutions and journalists.
8. In 2021, I signed the Global Pledge on Media Freedom and joined a partnership of countries not only to advocate for the safety of journalists and media workers but also to hold to account those who harm journalists and restrict them from performing their duties. Sierra Leone became the 5th country in Africa to join the Media Freedom Coalition because Journalism is what we need to make our democracy work. I am informed that Sierra Leone was displayed as the poster child for Press Freedom and frame-breaking reforms in the media sector during this year's Media Freedom Conference in Uruguay. I am further informed that the Media Freedom Coalition Secretariat is keen to provide more support for Sierra Leone and we look forward to such assistance.
9. Friends, in my media scorecard there is also another fulfilled pledge: the annual subvention to the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists. When I made that pledge as a campaign promise, some thought it was a political gimmick or publicity stunt. It reminded me of the words of Emma Goldman who once said: **"Politicians promise you heaven before the election and give you hell after."** As

your “Talk and Do” President, in five years, my Government has not only delivered on this promise but also increased SLAJ annual subvention from Le 250, 000, 000 (Two hundred and Fifty Million Old Leones) to Le500,000,000 (Five Hundred Million Old Leones). **Tonight, I am also pleased to announce that I have instructed the Ministry of Finance to increase the annual SLAJ subvention from Le500,000,000 (Five Hundred Million Old Leones) to Le700,000,000 (Seven Hundred Million Old Leones).** Mr. President of SLAJ, tonight must also be a night of thanksgiving for SLAJ.

10. Distinguished guests, another important indicator in my media scorecard has been investment in the media. While I note that attracting investment in the media has always been challenging, my Government remains fully committed to supporting and facilitating such investment. In April this year, we started a national conversation by organising the first-ever media viability and investment conference supported by BBC Media, SLAJ and other partners. I am informed by the Minister of Information and Communications that the progressive recommendations of that conference including setting up a multi-stakeholder steering committee, and a Technical working committee amongst others have been formed. This is expected to lay the groundwork for developing grant proposals and setting criteria for media eligibility for support to ensure fair and equitable access to grant funding by all media outlets. My Government is committed to supporting the independence of the established committees to ensure that they carry out a professional job.
11. As a further demonstration of my Government’s commitment to strengthen the media to address its viability and poverty in the media, my Government will give a matching grant for the International Fund for Public Interest Media’s first institutional grant. This has already been provided for in the 2023 budget.
12. Therefore, my Government welcomes Sierra Leone’s inclusion on the list of seventeen (17) countries eligible for grant submission under the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM). We are in discussions with the leadership of IFPIM and we look forward to celebrating the big announcement in the coming days.

13. In five years, my Government has done more than any Government to increase the participation of the media and civil society organisations in the governance of the state. The annual Media and Civil Society Organisation Engagement organised by the Ministry of Information and Communications has provided a platform for the media and civil society organisations to hold the Government publicly accountable for my Manifesto promises and our Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019 – 2023). This initiative has enhanced greater transparency, political accountability and inclusive governance. Two weeks ago, I wanted to attend the engagement in Kenema, but other pressing commitments stood in the way, so I delegated it to the Vice President, whom I am told did a fantastic job. The Minister of Information and Communications has advised that we make it quarterly in the new year. I have asked him to work out the details with the Ministry of Finance.
14. In five years, we have also done more than any Government to increase the right to access information as evident in the exponential increase in the Freedom of Information Requests, Annual Compliance Reports and Proactive Disclosure of Information Compliance.
15. Friends, as my Government continues to break the barriers to press freedom, I note that the objects of the Independent Media Commission must be translated into action especially in ensuring that every person has access to fair coverage in the print, broadcast and electronic media. I am informed that the Commission in partnership with the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the Media Reform Coordinating Group and other media stakeholders have reviewed the Media Code of Practice and the Electoral Regulations for the media. I look forward to seeing the reviewed documents.
16. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I have dedicated tonight to highlighting only our achievements in my media scorecard, but it would be difficult not to mention that passing a scorecard for this government is almost now a certainty. Just last month, Sierra Leone passed the Millennium Challenge Corporation scorecard for four consecutive years. For the first time, we also passed the Control of Corruption Indicator for five consecutive years. In the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) Validation Report

Scorecard, Sierra Leone achieved a remarkably high score. So, tonight we also have a thanksgiving for passing scorecards.

17. Friends, as we approach the June 24th 2023 multi-tier elections, your role as Journalists will be very critical. In any democratic state, elections are not just about voting. Elections also largely depend on the information available to voters, the public's knowledge of those seeking their votes and the programmes candidates or political parties are proposing. As journalists, your rights to freedom of expression and to provide information bring with them the duty to provide voters with objective, instructive and constructive information. In the months ahead and during the elections, I encourage you all to be professional by ensuring that your work is accurate, verified, balanced, neutral and respectful of human dignity. You must also avoid inflammatory reporting which may threaten the peace and stability of our nation. As citizens, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that the elections are not only fair and transparent but also reaffirm our faith in our nation's democratic consolidation.
18. Tonight, let me share with you these words from the "Handbook for Journalists During Elections" published by Reporters Without Borders: **"The powers of the 'fourth estate' do not exist to benefit a government, a political party or any individual. A journalist's only loyalty is to citizens, whom he is responsible for informing. They, for their part, exercise their right to free expression, through the work of journalists."**
19. As I conclude, let me state that as President I am proud of the many things we have achieved together but our journey is not over. There is still so much to be done including tackling gender imbalance in the media and enhancing a national policy on advertising.
20. For me, promoting free and pluralistic media, supporting media institutions to achieve efficiency and protecting journalists are not just mere words but rather they are the wheels that will move the second term of my Presidency.

- 21.** In five years, I have given you so much but tonight I ask for only one thing: **stay with me, stay the course and let us finish this journey together.**
22. I thank you and wish you all a joyous Christmas and prosperous 2023.