



NATIONAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

HIS EXCELLENCY, BRIG (Rtd) DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, GCRSL,
President of The Republic and Commander-In-Chief
of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces

**On the Occasion of the Christmas Festive Season
– December 25, 2022**

Freetown, Sierra Leone

FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,

1. Christmas is upon us once again, and on behalf of my wife Fatima, my children and other members of my family, and on behalf of members of Government, I send best wishes to you from State House, the seat of our nation's presidency.

2. For me, and indeed, I believe for all Christians, Christmas is one of the most important dates on the Christian calendar, for it celebrates the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who came to give us love, hope and joy.

3. I want to express my profound gratitude to everyone – young and old, men and women, who have contributed in one way or another to our collective quests to build a strong and indivisible country.

4. My Government and I and our entire families have been touched by the love, cooperation, and support you have shown these past four and a half years. The sacrifices our families have made so that we can focus on serving this beautiful nation and its great people pales compared to the sacrifices every Sierra Leonean makes daily towards building this great country.

5. We are nothing without you, the people. Everything my Government has done and achieved in the past four and a half years rests on the shoulders of the men, women and young people who work tirelessly daily to take us closer to our dreams of becoming a prosperous nation.

6. I come to you today not just as a **LEADER - but as a SON, - a BROTHER, - an UNCLE, - a FATHER, - a FAMILY MEMBER - as SOMEONE WHOSE DESTINY IS UNDENIABLY TIED TO YOURS.**

7. Indeed, Christmas is a time of joy and giving around the world, and while there is much to celebrate in addition to the amazing gift of life, it is easy to forget where we have come from.

8. I am not ignorant of the prevailing challenges that we are facing as a nation and the challenges that many families, businesses and individuals face during this time of global turbulence. The worst of the global pandemic may be over, but the ripple effects are still with us. The war in

Ukraine has also affected the global economy, food prices, fuel and energy costs, and political stability.

9. At a time when even wealthy nations are struggling, I must acknowledge your patience, resilience, hard work, determination, honesty and resolve to build through thick and thin. Our resilience in the face of the challenging and turbulent times has yet again shown our mettle as a people.

10. It is not lost on me that a natural and even valid reaction is to express frustration at your Government. I will not pass the buck. When I accepted the mandate to be your leader, I did not accept to be a leader just in times of progress and prosperity; I also accepted to handle the challenges that may stand in the way of building a great nation.

11. As a Father, I see your struggles. As a Brother, I know your pain. As a Friend, I feel your frustrations. As a Leader, I am alive to my responsibility to you all. I want to reaffirm my commitment towards doing everything in my power and within my constitutional mandate to make life better for every citizen of this country.

12. As a nation, we have chosen democracy over dictatorship, freedom over tyranny. We have chosen hope over despair and peace over war. Never for once lose sight of what we have achieved.

13. Many nations worldwide struggle with conflicts, the onslaught of terrorism, or widespread civil unrest. That our country enjoys relative stability is not just due to the genius of any leader. It is because you, my dear Sierra Leoneans, have chosen this. You make this possible.

14. As we celebrate this Christmas, I know that many families are having challenges and may not be able to celebrate like they would want to. Fuel prices are still high, and this, in turn, affects food prices. As my Government does its best to mitigate the rising cost of living, I urge you to look out for each other, share when you can, and be kind to each other. We are known to be hospitable people. Let us extend this hospitality to our neighbours and strangers, especially now.

15. In my first address in 2018, after you elected me to this position of trust, I asked for God's guidance to lead our country in the paths of those three sacred words of our Coat of Arms: **UNITY, FREEDOM AND**

JUSTICE. I will say that God has been faithful. He has blessed me to lead people who cherish these sacred values and who make the important task of governance possible and rewarding.

16. Permit me to mention just some of the things we have been working tirelessly to do to cushion the effects of the global crises and inspire hope in our people for a better present and future. We are proud of these achievements; you should be too because you all made it possible.

17. Since assuming political leadership four and a half years ago, rather than solely mining our natural resources – like diamonds – that our country is renowned for, my Government's New Direction Agenda focuses on nurturing the potential of our children and then mining their talents to become productive citizens.

18. I am proud to say that despite the global economic challenges, our investment in education increased from 11% to 22% of our annual budgetary allocation to support primary, secondary, higher, technical and vocational education and training. My Government's flagship Free Quality School Education program caters to 2 million pupils nationwide.

19. When I came into office in 2018, only 16% of Sierra Leoneans had access to electricity. We have taken that number up to 31% as well as increased peak load electricity consumption in many parts of the country, and all of this despite the increasing cost of generating electricity occasioned by an increase in fuel costs, costs which my Government significantly subsidises. More parts of the country than ever before now enjoy a regular supply of electricity.

20. NOR TO PAN HYPE, PAOPA SIERRA LEONE GO BETTER!

21. In no uncertain terms, we are making progress. You will remember the sharp contraction of our economy in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this year, as projected, we grew by up to 5%, higher than the Sub-Saharan African projected growth rate of 3.8 % for 2022.

22. We continue supporting post-COVID recovery in key productive sectors, especially mining, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and tourism. We constructed healthcare facilities across the country and continue to equip them with diagnostic laboratories, and sufficient beds, among other things.

23. I am proud of our commitment to women's empowerment and our dedication to achieving a fair and equitable society. On November 15, 2022, our Parliament enacted the Bill entitled "**The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022**" (**GEWE ACT**), which will address the gender imbalance in Sierra Leone.

24. The GEWE ACT seeks to secure a minimum of 30% representation of women in elective and appointed positions; gender equality and women's empowerment mainstreaming in employment and training; and women's access to finance, among other things. I applaud Parliament for their support and thank the GEWE ACT Task Force for working tirelessly to bring the landmark GEWE ACT to fruition.

25. No bird flies with one wing. We must support women everywhere to thrive. As they do, our society will thrive and prosper. We must expand economic opportunities for women. We must end gender-based violence and all forms of sexual harassment of women.

26. However, as apparent as our achievements are, I acknowledge that for the family for whom food prices are beyond reach, those who now pay more for fuel, and those who struggle economically, this list of achievements may sound hollow.

27. To those who do not yet feel the impact of our hard work, I say, I see you, and I empathise. I encourage you to find solace in the fact that the current discomforts are only birth pangs for a future of irreversible socio-economic progress. For as long as a single Sierra Leonean is experiencing any discomfort, it will be a cause for concern for me.

28. As a Government, we have put in place some mitigating measures to help soften the impact. We have removed taxes on essential commodities to keep prices low - for fuel, rice, flour, etc. We provide cash transfers and roll out social safety net initiatives to improve the quality of lives of vulnerable families and individuals.

29. Many of the solutions we have put in place to tackle problems, some of which we inherited from the previous Government and some of which have arisen during our term in office, are yielding immediate effect. Still, some other solutions will take some time to manifest in the lives of

citizens. This is why I ask for more of your patience and trust so that our vision and path to success may become more evident.

30. As I ask for your patience, I also extend mine. I recognise the legitimate right of citizens to express displeasure through constitutional and legal means. It is your right to keep us on our toes. This is what **DEMOCRACY** is: **THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN GOVERNANCE**.

31. Participating in governance goes beyond merely casting a vote, something many of you will do on Saturday, June 24, 2023. It includes being alive to one's duties and responsibilities as a citizen. It includes giving feedback. It includes using all legal and legitimate means to hold the Government accountable.

32. We must never take for granted the privilege we have to live in a stable democracy. A relatively free society is not something that comes by chance. It is hard won and even harder to maintain. If there is anything we learn from history, humanity has gone through several cycles of tyranny. Even now, we see, on our continent and beyond, how the gains of democracy can be lost to unconstitutional incursions by non-democratic forces. In some countries, there is outright war. We have experienced this in our nation, and I am sure you will agree that no one wants to revert to those dark days.

33. Democracy is not a spectator sport. It is a full-contact sport, and its survival depends upon civic participation using legal means to engage with ways of improving society. As with every democracy, family, or even relationship, we are not required to have the exact same thoughts to succeed. Sometimes we will disagree, even bitterly. However, our engagement must be premised upon the same fundamental principles of democracy. Without this, stability is threatened, the stability of democracy and our nation.

34. My Government is resolute in the belief that democracy is sacrosanct. We will engage with critique and affirm the constitutional right of citizens to express their thoughts or even displeasure with the Government. And we will, with the same firmness, defend democracy against all those who seek to undermine it.

35. To the dear youth of our nation, I say I cherish you. I do not have a regressive viewpoint that you are leaders of tomorrow. Your time is not

in the future, but right now. All across the world, young people are participating in changing the world around them, becoming leaders in business, politics, sports, science and technology, as well as culture and entertainment.

36. Any leader who takes young people for granted or dismisses their role in nation-building in whatever capacity they choose is only undermining the present and destroying the future. I celebrate you all and encourage those who haven't already done so to take a more active interest in education, agriculture, politics, governance, science and technology. My Government will keep supporting all the legitimate dreams and aspirations of young Sierra Leoneans.

37. For those who have found themselves in the dangerous cycle of drug abuse and addiction, as we have seen with some of the horrific illicit drugs reaching our streets (especially the deadly Kush and Tramadol), it is never too late to seek help. I pledge to keep supporting the agencies that help those who need assistance.

38. We know that drug abuse, apart from being a social challenge, is also a health issue, and I am committed to ensuring a healthy, vibrant population. My Government will continue to intensify our anti-drug education and train and equip staff and community advocates for the fight against substance abuse and illicit drug trafficking in Sierra Leone.

39. Some of you (our JCs) have returned from abroad and will enjoy communion with your families here in Sierra Leone. We thank you for all you do wherever you are in the world as great ambassadors of this beautiful nation. We urge you to take advantage of opportunities to participate in nation-building, partner with those of us here at home and invest in our country. Wherever we go, we have just one home. Let us build it together.

40. In turbulent times, as in times of festivities, it is easy to forget those whose faces aren't prominent but who contribute in no small measure to the progress and development of our nation. Our doctors, nurses, caregivers and other medical personnel who work tirelessly for our vulnerable and sick; our senior citizens upon whose shoulders we stand; our Educators – our everyday heroes who help shape the lives of future leaders; the public servants without whom the work of politicians like us would be impossible; our security forces serving and retired who keep the

peace internally and make sure our borders are secure and lay their lives so that we can all sleep more easily at night.

41. To those whose jobs may be deemed menial (our domestic staff, market traders, bike and kekeh riders) but whose work we cherish as much as that of our skilled workers and professionals. I see you all. I appreciate your work. Thank you for your contribution to nation-building.

42. I also thank our local and foreign investors for keeping faith in us and showing confidence in our economy and people. My Government remains committed to keeping Sierra Leone open for business and the destination of choice for sustainable investments.

43. As we spend time with family, friends and loved ones, I urge all to do so responsibly, avoid excess and show consideration to fellow citizens with whom we share public or even private spaces.

44. Spare a moment for those working to keep essential services running during the holidays, from healthcare to security to market trading. On behalf of a grateful nation, I thank you!

45. I want to end on a note of joy. It is easy to lose joy in times of crises, to lose hope. In the face of difficult realities, we may succumb to cynicism and hopelessness. Our race is not a 100-meter dash. It is a marathon, and we are in it together. There will always be work to make our nation more prosperous, and I renew my pledge to keep doing the work.

46. As we hold on to the values that make us resilient, let us not forget to be joyful. To be thankful for the gift of life, to be grateful for family, for loved ones, for the resources we have been blessed with - human and material.

47. I pledge my life to this race, to be whatever you need me to be on our journey to a prosperous nation. I join my faith to yours in the belief that we can do this together. I join my hope to yours that you will work with me to achieve this.

48. I wish you joy, peace and the blessings of the Lord Almighty during these holidays.

49. MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR.

