



**OPENING STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY
DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE
SIERRA LEONE BOARDROOM SESSION AT
THE DAKAR 2 SUMMIT ON FEED AFRICA:
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND RESILIENCE,
THURSDAY - 26TH JANUARY 2023**

1. Thank you, Madam Halima Hashi, for facilitating the Sierra Leone Boardroom session. Friends, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, Good Morning (**Nan-Ga-Def**).

2. Let me start by thanking my dear elder brother President Macky Sall, our gracious host, for the warm welcome and excellent hospitality in beautiful Senegal – the Land of Teraanga (i.e. the Land of hospitality).

3. I also thank my dear friend and brother, Africa's dynamic champion for sustainable economic development and social progress, President Akinwumi Adesina, for co-hosting this crucial and timely Summit.

4. I also thank other partners, including development partners, the private sector, Multilateral Organisations, donor agencies, NGOs and researchers, for their continued partnership in promoting sustainable transformation in Africa.

5. Each year, African governments spend far too much on food imports, over \$35 billion. This is a fundamental paradox, given that Africa has 65% of the world's most arable, uncultivated Land, abundant freshwater supplies, and ample sunshine.

6. With the prevailing Russian-Ukraine war, the timing is apt for us to collectively and decisively move from policies to bold actions to harness the Continent's great potential to improve its agricultural productivity and for Africa to take its rightful position as the world's breadbasket.

7. My role here this morning is simple. As "Chief Diplomat" of our great nation, I am here to extend an open and intentional invitation to all credible investors and strategic development partners. Sierra Leone is open to growing agriculture as a business to become a wealth-creating sector, not one for solely managing poverty.

8. With well over 5.1 million hectares of arable Land, nearly three-quarters of the country's Land, diverse agro-ecological richness and sunshine, abundant rainfall and twelve main rivers, Sierra Leone is naturally endowed to grow enough food to feed its people and our neighbours.

9. Agriculture remains the predominant sector of our economy, accounting for an average of 51% of the GDP over the last decade and

employs approximately 65% of the labour force but mainly subsistence farming.

10. While our great nation possesses high agricultural potential, agriculture yields, and labour productivity remain extremely low – partly due to our huge infrastructure bottlenecks and financing gap. However, to feed our people and achieve Middle-Income status by 2035, we must urgently transition from being a net food importer to developing agro-allied industrial zones in our rural areas to become a net exporter of primary agricultural commodities.

11. Since assuming political leadership in May 2018, my government has prioritised innovative strategies to improve agriculture and food security in Sierra Leone. We have prioritised increasing productivity in the rice value chain and expanding our investment in mechanisation and agriculture financing for the private sector.

12. We have established a smart agricultural credit facility and launched an e-voucher system to efficiently deliver agriculture inputs in the country. This has proven to be more cost-effective and helps us reach more farmers.

13. These initiatives encourage more farmers to transition into rice cultivation (our staple food). As a result, we saw noticeable progress in our rice production, including a 22% jump between 2021 and 2022.

14. In the past four and a half years, my government has focused on Human Capital Development, with Free and Quality School Education (FQSE) as our flagship program. The Program delivers education access, quality and equity to 2 million children by removing financial barriers to school enrollment.

15. In the next five years, we will prioritise agricultural transformation for jobs and wealth creation in Sierra Leone. We see agribusiness as a key driver of growth for the country and a critical area of focus for investment.

16. We will invest heavily in climate-smart agriculture mechanisation and technologies and promote private sector involvement throughout the agriculture value chains.

17. Our Food and Agriculture Delivery Compact, to be presented by the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, is a **US\$649 million** initiative to improve agricultural productivity for food security in Sierra Leone.

18. Our dual objectives are to substitute imported food for food grown locally and export processed agriculture commodities while creating jobs for citizens, especially youth and women, in rural areas, essentially improving the quality of lives of our people.

19. We seek strategic partnerships, including the private sector, development partners, regional and international research institutions, and donor agencies, to develop our key agricultural production, processing, and marketing infrastructure sub-sectors.

20. With the right financial partners and technical expertise, we can accelerate investments in food production and food production technologies; critical infrastructure for storage, processing, markets, and logistics/transport; and re-orientate our policy reforms to target climate-resilient agricultural development and value chains.

21. To ensure the delivery of this Compact in the most efficient and accountable manner, my government will establish a Presidential Taskforce on Agriculture Development that I will Chair to provide strategic leadership for its successful implementation.

22. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Sierra Leone's strategy for the future is to think about agriculture differently. Our vision is to take advantage of our soil wealth, grow agriculture as a business in climate-smart ways, and leverage it as a fundamental source of national prosperity. This will inspire citizens, especially the youth, to see agriculture as a profitable and sustainable business.

23. I am hopeful that we will build from here effective, transformative partnerships central to the agricultural transformation we envision for Sierra Leone's sustainable economic transformation.

24. My government commits to strengthening the legal and regulatory frameworks to create the enabling environment for increased value addition for primary products in the agriculture sector and food security in the region.

25. I leave you with the quote from Thomas Jefferson, "**Agriculture is our wisest pursuit because it will, in the end, contribute most to real wealth, good morals, and happiness**".

26. I wish us all fruitful deliberations.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.