



**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS
MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF SIERRA LEONE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE ID CARD
PRODUCTION AND ID VERIFICATION SYSTEM
AND PLATFORM IN SIERRA LEONE, STATE
HOUSE, FREETOWN - 30 JANUARY 2023**

The Honourable Vice President,
 The Honourable Speaker of Parliament,
 Madam First Lady,
 The Chief Justice,
 Ministers of Government,
 Honourable Members of Parliament,
 Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
 Development Partners,
 Representatives from ECOWAS,
 The Director General, Board, and Staff of the NCRA,
 Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
 Good morning.

1. Let me start by thanking our development partners, especially the European Union, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, Irish Aid, Plan International, the World Bank, and many others for their consistent support in strengthening our Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CVRS) systems.

2. Let me also thank the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) for their technical and other support in building the capacity of the NCRA, and promoting new technologies and international best practices.

3. As a government, we believe that comprehensive CVRS data is critical for development planning and policymaking, resource mobilisation, effective governance, public service delivery, and inclusive national development as a whole. I am pleased that the NCRA has grown over the last four years under the leadership of the current Director General, Board, and staff. With the support of partners, the leadership of the NCRA has demonstrated strong-willed diligence in making this day a reality. Thank you.

4. Previous speakers have given a broad historical overview of our journey to this point. At the overarching level, our endeavour is aligned with Sustainable Development Goals Target 16.9 which calls for universal legal identity including birth registration, the AU Agenda 2063, and ECOWAS declarations on the free movement of persons and migration.

5. At the national level, we believe that a biometric, chip-based, multipurpose ID card and ID verification serves a number of our imperatives

for transparent, effective, inclusive, and sustainable national development. That is why it is central to our Medium-Term National Plan; that is why my government invested resources, worked with partners and provided strong political will and support at the highest levels to achieve this objective today.

6. This ID card project is the product of a public-private partnership between the Government of Sierra Leone and Constrat Systems SL Ltd. The timely completion and delivery of the project is highly commendable.

7. In consultations leading up to this, I emphasised the importance of putting in place strong data protection and management measures. That is critical for preserving personal rights and liberties within our democracy and I am pleased that this has been well-considered. In addition, my government has been working with development partners, through cabinet, to deliver a comprehensive data protection bill to Parliament that meets the best international standards.

8. A few weeks ago, I signed the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment bill into law. I am elated that the law includes financial inclusion as a key gain.

9. I believe that financial inclusion is a cross-cutting goal that stimulates gender equality, provides more financial security for the unbanked, reduces poverty among women and other vulnerable populations, and grants citizens more access to financial and other services.

10. With the chip-based biometric ID, banks, forex bureaus, micro-finance institutions, mobile money and other financial service providers, and more, can now easily and effectively carry out the electronic Know-Your-Customer (eKYC) process to authenticate and verify their customers at far lower costs for trusted financial transactions across Sierra Leone. Essentially, more Sierra Leoneans will henceforth have access to a broader range of financial services and affordable banking. There are now real opportunities for us in Sierra Leone to expand financial inclusion and transition to a more digital economy. The benefits of a digital economy are immeasurable.

11. A digital economy helps eliminate cash hoarding. Money laundering, financial fraud, telecommunications fraud, identity fraud, and illicit financial

flows may be tracked better in a digital economic space. NIN numbers have helped us effectively administer payroll and eliminate ghost employees and other waste.

12. The introduction of this biometric ID card also provides Sierra Leone an opportunity to transition to a full biometric voter system that ensures that every citizen is granted his or her due right to vote and every vote cast is accounted for fully within the shortest possible time. Peer countries in the sub-region have successfully reduced voter fraud and other electoral errors with the introduction of full biometric voter systems.

13. Chip-based biometric IDs will help us get even better at tracking, monitoring, and accountability in governance and public service delivery including healthcare and education. I, therefore, urge the NCRA to expedite the assignment of NINs to pupils in order to control the real and persistent problem of bloated school rolls and examinations' malpractices.

14. Additionally, disaster recovery, social protection payments, and poverty alleviation schemes can be administered more effectively, accurately, and equitably within a digital space in which citizens have unique biometric digital IDs. All the foregoing are net gains from this project.

15. In conversations with the leadership of the NCRA, I had urged every Sierra Leonean wishing to have a biometric ID card to be able to do so no farther away than the district headquarter town in which each district. I am assured by the NCRA that every Sierra Leonean can now acquire a biometric ID card in under 72 hours at every district headquarter town. The burden and inconvenience of having to travel to Freetown for days in order to acquire a legacy paper ID card have finally been lifted.

16. Also, this biometric ID will significantly expand the volume, accuracy, and timeliness of verification and delivery of data. Because the data platform is interoperable, more institutions will have faster access to increased data types for various uses, users, and applications.

17. Public Institutions authorised by NCRA to access the ID Verification Platform can now access the digital Verification facility to verify the identities of their clients with ease thereby putting an end to identity fraud. The Card

has features for offline and online authentication and verifications. It is portable, cost-effective, and affordable, given all the benefits it grants.

18. I also urge the Ministry of Internal Affairs, NCRA, Ministry of Labour & Social Security, and the Immigration Department to work closely in order to ensure that our National Population Register fully accounts for all residents (foreign and citizens) in Sierra Leone. This serves labour, immigration, border control, national and transnational security, justice, and other governance interests, especially in our ever-changing world of transnational concerns and threats.

19. In close consultation with ECOWAS, I am informed, this biometric, chip-based, multipurpose ID Card has been designed from the ground up for compliance and harmonisation across the sub-region. Sierra Leone is one of the few member states that have met this threshold. The ID card can therefore be used to travel freely among ECOWAS states without let or hindrance. I want to personally thank ECOWAS officials for their close collaboration with the NCRA.

20. Let me close by thanking the Director General and Board for their leadership of a key state governance and accountability institution. With the launch of this internationally compliant, biometric, chip-based, multipurpose ID card today, we are truly on the cusp of a data revolution that will forever transform governance, accountability, service delivery, and financial inclusion, among others in Sierra Leone.

21. I thank you for your attention. With these few words, it is with distinct honour and great pleasure that I formally launch Sierra Leone's first biometric, chip-based IDs.