



AFRICAN OF THE YEAR AWARD 2022 ACCEPTANCE REMARKS

DELIVERED BY

HIS EXCELLENCY, BRIG (Rtd) DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, GCRSL,

President of The Republic of Sierra Leone

On the Occasion of

THE AFRICAN LEADERSHIP MAGAZINE'S PERSONS OF THE YEAR

AWARDS CEREMONY

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Your Excellency Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening

1. I am delighted and honoured to receive the African of the Year award. On behalf of the Government and people of Sierra Leone, I wish to thank all Africans from within and outside our great Continent who

voted for me to emerge as the winner of the African of the Year – 2022. I receive this honour with humility and a deep sense of duty to the people of Africa.

2. I may have the privilege of being an elected political leader of my great nation Sierra Leone, but allow me to begin with what we share in common in this room. **WE ARE AFRICAN.**

3. I am reminded of the Zulu philosophy of **UBUNTU** — **I AM BECAUSE WE ARE** — that we are human only through the humanity of others. We are bound together and can only achieve ourselves by sharing with others. The UBUNTU philosophy is present across most African cultures and has guided me in my life, especially my dealings with people in my profession in the army and politics, my family and friends and even my opponents.

4. The word leader is used increasingly loosely these days. Leadership training programs abound, and many people want to be called leaders. From a very young age, I have been trusted by my friends and colleagues to handle tasks that place me in leadership roles. This has enabled me to learn and understand what makes leadership work, especially in Africa.

5. As a young man finding his way in the world with my strong faith in God inculcated in me by my mother, this idea that we are only human through the humanity of others made me cherish teamwork over individualism and collective progress over self-aggrandisement.

6. Political leadership is about service — putting the needs of the people first and upholding the rule of law. At the core of democracy, we also find this idea

of humanity towards others. One of the foundational principles of democracy is that government draws its legitimacy through participation by the people.

7. I must say that democracy and the rule of law are not foreign concepts to Africa. These concepts are rooted in the experiences and struggles of our people. Therefore, as Africans, we must embrace these principles not because they are imposed upon us, but because they are part of who we are.

8. We must not be afraid of dissent or debate, but rather recognise that these are the hallmarks of a healthy society. This is why, under my leadership, we have worked to create a culture of openness and transparency in Sierra Leone. We have repealed sedition libel laws, removed barriers to freedom of expression, and allowed a free press – which is essential for good governance and creating an informed citizenry. I am proud that no journalist in our

country is jailed for practising journalism. We recognise that the freedom to speak one's mind, criticise the government and hold leaders accountable is not just a right but a vital part of any democracy. We have removed the shackles of repression and developed a culture of participation where all voices can be heard, and all people can contribute to nation-building.

9. As we build **the AFRICA WE WANT AND THE AFRICA OUR CHILDREN DESERVE**, we must remember the words of the great African leaders who came before us. Kwame Nkrumah once said, "**We face neither East nor West; we face Forward.**" This forward-looking mindset will guide us as we work towards a better future for our Continent.
10. When I assumed political leadership in May 2018, my vision in moving Sierra Leone forward was to develop its Human Capital. I firmly believe that Human Capital

Development is the panacea for a more equitable and prosperous Africa.

- 11.** A commitment to education is one of the most critical components of authentic African leadership. Education is the key to unlocking the potential of our people and our Continent. We must invest in education at all levels, from early childhood to higher education, and ensure that our people have the knowledge and skills to transform their communities and become globally competitive.

- 12.** My government has made significant strides towards improving access to quality education for all of our children in Sierra Leone. We believe education is a human right, not a luxury. My government's annual budgetary allocation to the education sector is 22% — one of the highest in the world. This investment in education is critical for our nation's future as it lays

the foundation for a skilled workforce and a vibrant economy.

- 13.** Our Free and Quality School Education programme has created greater access, quality and equity for over 2 million children by removing financial barriers to school enrolment and improving teaching and learning outcomes.

- 14.** We have also achieved gender parity at the basic education level, registered higher achievement and learning outcomes for girls in secondary schools, and guaranteed tuition-free education from primary school to university for all girls studying STEM disciplines. We know that educating girls has a multiplier effect – it benefits not only the girls but their families, communities, and nations. When girls are educated, they are more likely to have healthier families, become leaders and contribute more to their economies, which brings me to my next point.

- 15.** Women's empowerment and gender equity are essential to authentic African leadership. Empowering women and promoting gender equality is not just the right thing to do; it is also the smart thing to do. Women comprise more than half of our African population and are often excluded from decision-making processes. This is not only unjust, but it is also a missed opportunity.
- 16.** When women are empowered, they bring a unique perspective. They are more likely to prioritise issues that affect families and communities, such as education, health and agriculture. They are also more likely to build consensus and find solutions that benefit everyone. We saw this in Sierra Leone during the war and the post-war reconstruction efforts, with our women leading the charge for the return of peace to the country.

- 17.** As a leader, I am committed to ensuring that women and girls have equal rights and opportunities in all areas of life. We have made significant progress since May 2018, including enacting the 2021 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (The GEWE ACT). I am proud of this landmark legislation I signed into law on January 19 to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Sierra Leone. The GEWE ACT includes provisions to promote women's participation in politics and decision-making processes – at least 30% representation of women in elected and appointed positions in all spheres of our society. The GEWE ACT also ensures equal pay for equal work and addresses gender-based violence, amongst many other provisions.
- 18.** This law is a testament to our commitment to gender equality in Sierra Leone and Africa. It sends a powerful message that women and girls have a right to be treated with respect and dignity, and we must

all work together to ensure they can realise their full potential.

- 19.** My government's massive investment in health, agriculture, mining, and infrastructure development also contributes towards reshaping the country's socio-economic development trajectory.
- 20.** We are also committed to combatting corruption and promoting transparency in government. An open and transparent government is essential for maintaining the people's trust and building a prosperous and peaceful nation.
- 21.** Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, as leaders, we must prioritise regional security in Africa. Our Continent has experienced too much conflict and violence, and we cannot build a better future without addressing this issue. We must work together to

promote peace and stability, resolve conflicts peacefully, and prevent the spread of violence.

22. But security alone is not enough. We must also invest in human capital development — like we are doing in Sierra Leone — to build strong and resilient societies. This means providing quality healthcare and food security, improving hard and soft infrastructure, mainstreaming climate change mitigation and adaptation measures and investing in our people — especially our youth.

23. Youth economic empowerment through gainful employment and entrepreneurship is a critical priority for me, as young people are the key to building a prosperous and sustainable future for our Continent.

24. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, we cannot achieve these development gains without Pan-Africanism. We must recognise that our fates are

intertwined, so we must work together to achieve our shared goals. We cannot leave any African country behind – from East, West, North, South or Central. We must promote economic, political and social justice and work together to quell internal conflicts. We must also show solidarity between nations, especially during global crises and economic downturns.

25. As Chairperson of the African Peer Review Forum, I believe in the power of the African Peer Review Mechanism to hold African governments accountable and promote qualitative leadership in Africa. We must all be accountable to our people and each other.

26. Indeed, true solidarity among African leaders goes beyond mere lip service or the uncritical support of one another. It involves a shared commitment to upholding values essential to our great Continent's

development — including respect for democracy, the rule of law, and rejecting all forms of oppression, discrimination, violence, tribalism, nepotism, and corruption. These fundamental principles must be upheld to create a just, equitable, and prosperous society that works for all Africans.

27. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, as African leaders, we must recognise that our successes are inextricably linked to the success of our fellow Africans across the Continent. Therefore, we must be willing to offer help, support, and expertise to one another in the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity. This is not a time for competition but rather for cooperation and mutual support.

28. I believe that by working together and supporting one another, we can build a new Africa that is prosperous, stable, and democratic. As the African proverb says, **"If you want to go fast, go alone. If**

you want to go far, go together." Let us go far together to build a new Africa grounded in Pan-Africanism and servant leadership.

29. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, as a leader, I know that leadership is tested not merely during times of peace and plenty, but also during turmoil and instability. Authentic African leadership is not just about addressing challenges but also about seizing opportunities. We must embrace the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation and invest in developing our human capital. We must create an environment where businesses can thrive, and our people have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in today's global economy.

30. To become globally competitive as a Continent, we must collectively boost intra-Africa trade. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is one of the most significant opportunities we have as a

Continent. This landmark agreement has the potential to create a single market of over a billion people with a combined GDP of over \$3 trillion. It will allow us to leverage our collective strength and create new opportunities for trade and investment across the Continent.

31. The famous Arnold Glasow proverb states, "**a good leader takes a little more than his share of the blame, a little less than his share of the credit.**"

We must always remember that our role as leaders in our respective communities and nations is not to seek personal glory or recognition but to serve the people and create a better future for them.

32. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, receiving awards and accolades may be pleasing to the ego, but it is not the ultimate measure of our success. The late and great Pan-African leader Nelson Mandela once said, "**What counts in life is not the mere fact**

that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead." Our success should be measured by our positive impact on people's lives.

33. In my closing remarks, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, **I AM THE AFRICAN OF THE YEAR BECAUSE WE ARE.** I am because of those who have come before me. I am because of leaders on whose shoulders I stand, leaders whose own example I am thankful for, and whose light of leadership guides the way in a world full of shadows cast by internal and external turbulences. I am because of the leaders before me, whom this African Leadership Magazine award and other notable awards have recognised.

34. I am because of my family, that has supported me every step of the way and endured long periods of

absence as a sacrifice for the good of our nation and Africa. I am because of the women (like my beloved late mother, Yei Amie Bio), our equal partners in development, politics and society, without whom we would be nothing.

35. I am because of the young people of my great nation, Sierra Leone and Africa, whose vibrancy energises us, whose brilliance dazzles us, and whose passion fills us with the zeal to leave behind a better world.

36. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, **GOOD LEADERS LEAD WELL. GREAT LEADERS CREATE OTHER LEADERS.** Great Leaders inspire people to think the best of themselves and reach heights they only dreamed of. **GREAT LEADERS DO NOT SIT ABOVE THE PEOPLE. THEY ARE ONE WITH THE PEOPLE. THEY ARE BECAUSE THE PEOPLE ARE.**

37. Thanks again, African Leadership Organisation, for this great honour. I pledge to redouble my commitment to carry on this vision for transformational economic development and social progress in the Republic of Sierra Leone and Africa.

38. If there is one thing, I want to be said about me when I finish my race on Earth, it is for the people of Sierra Leone and Africa to say – **JULIUS MAADA BIO LISTENED, HE LEARNED, HE SERVED, AND HE LED. HE PLANTED TREES THE SHADE OF WHICH HE WAS NOT GOING TO ENJOY. HE WAS BECAUSE WE WERE.**

39. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, a greater Africa is possible in our lifetime. It is my dream, and I trust it is yours. Together, we can make our dreams of a more prosperous Africa a reality.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION.