

# **OPENING STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AND CHAIRPERSON OF THE APR FORUM OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT, AT THE HIGH- LEVEL VALIDATION MEETING ON THE AFRICA GOVERNANCE REPORT 2023, FREETOWN - 7<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2023**

**Your Excellency Macky Sall, Chairperson of the African Union,**

- **Your Excellency Azali Assoumani, President of the Union of Comoros,**
- **Your Excellency Mahamat Idriss Deby, Interim President of the Republic of Chad,**
- **Your Excellency Mamadi Doumbouya, Interim President of the Republic of Guinea,**
- **Your Excellency Samuel Matekane, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho,**
- **Your Excellency William Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya,**
- **Your Excellency Ali Bongo, President of the Republic of Gabon,**
- **Your Excellency Hakainde Hichilema, President of the Republic of Zambia,**
- **Your Excellency Evariste Ndayishimiye, President of the Republic of Burundi,**
- **Your Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,**
- **Your Excellencies, APRM Focal Points,**
- **Your Excellency Bankole Adeoye, African Union Commission Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security,**
- **Honourable Dr Ali Abderrahmane Hagggar, Chairperson of the APR Panel of Eminent Persons,**
- **Honourable members of the APR Panel of Eminent Persons,**
- **Professor Eddy Maloka, CEO of the APRM Continental Secretariat,**
- **Ladies and gentlemen,**

1. At the outset, let me heartily welcome everyone to Freetown, particularly those of us who are physically present here. It is my hope that you are enjoying the delightful hospitality, beauty, and warmth of Sierra Leone.
2. The purpose of this high-level validation meeting is to engage with the findings of the Africa Governance Report (AGR) 2023 and endorse it before its official presentation at the 36<sup>th</sup> Summit of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa.
3. Five countries were evaluated as part of the development of the AGR 2023, namely the Kingdom of Lesotho, the Republic of Chad, the Union of Comoros, the Republic of Guinea, and the Republic of Sierra Leone.
4. I would like to sincerely thank the leaders of these countries for acceding to my request to participate in a targeted review on unconstitutional changes of Government and for facilitating the APRM Continental Secretariat's consultations with a wide array of stakeholders in the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors.
5. In spite of various challenges encountered during these reviews, their conduct and outcomes have been praised by most stakeholders who were approached for the production of the AGR 2023.
6. Let me thank the authorities who have opened up their countries and institutions to scrutiny. Let me also thank the APRM Continental Secretariat staff and experts who have all worked closely with target country stakeholders to make sure that, as with all targeted reviews, these targeted reviews are impartial, competent, and credible.
7. As leaders, these targeted reviews support governance by helping our collective countries focus on how to analyse, re-think, and re-orientate our policies and interventions. Findings from these targeted reviews have informed the AGR 2023 as case studies.
8. The Targeted Reviews reveal the full gamut of governance experiences in three of the five regions on the continent. They reviews have highlighted opportunities and strengths as well as challenges with which those countries contend.

**Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,**

9. This AGR 2023 is unique and ambitious in many ways. The reviews go beyond the regular thematic analysis and the original theme has also been re-focused to unconstitutional changes of government.
10. Additionally, the reviews have adopted a new methodology that includes a country case study approach that yields multiple datapoints and maps a clear correlation among the phenomena, the context, and the citizens.
11. This new approach also captured legislative reviews of normative frameworks; citizens' perception gathered from surveys and public platforms, and a roadmap designed from this multifaceted approach. Clearly, this AGR has given a more thorough account of the complexity of this theme and it is a seminal achievement. As chairman, I therefore thank you all, Excellencies, the Secretariat, experts, and the multiple stakeholders who have worked to make this happen.
12. At the 16<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary AU Summit in Malabo, May 2022, I addressed your Excellencies on tackling terrorism and unconstitutional changes of government.
13. I urged that in the production of the Africa Governance Report 2023, the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government should allow the APRM Continental Secretariat to delve deeper into the complex issue of unconstitutional changes of government.
14. I acknowledged the structural deficits that may lead to unconstitutional changes of government. I drew attention to our obligation to promote and protect inclusive democratic and human rights with an overarching goal of fostering peace, security, and stability on the continent. There is a cost to unconstitutional changes of government for the economy, social stability, human rights, democratic freedoms, governance, and the perception of our respective nations.

**Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,**

15. We are faced with engaging with our peers both to stem the seeming resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government that has disconcerted our Union, and also adhere to AU rules and values while supporting countries that seek to restore constitutionality.
16. These case studies have therefore been necessary in order to inform decision-makers of structural issues that lead to unconstitutional changes of government, the specific governance issues that must be addressed, and

possible strategies and solutions to adopt. It is from this deep and balanced perspective that we must unpack this theme because this has a direct bearing on the future of our continent.

17. As the multiple and deeply destabilising global turbulence of a devastating pandemic, global economic disruptions, rising inflationary pressures and costs of living further complicate and undermine state and governance structures in Africa, the AGR 2023 is particularly timely. I believe that we ought to use it to engage our development partners and multilateral institutions, target our efforts, monitor progress on implementing its recommendations, and thus expend resources wisely.

**Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,**

18. The AGR 2023 draws attention to additional conversations we should ponder. In reviewing international sanctions regimes, the authors of the AGR 2023 found out that Africa has been disproportionately targeted by sanctions which were first imposed by the United Nations Security Council in the 1960s.

19. Today, Sudan and Zimbabwe, for example, still endure sanctions which have made them more vulnerable to external shocks.

20. If Africa's stability matters to the international community, openness and constructive talks, rather than exclusion and sanctions, should be the preferred mode of engagement with our Union and its members.

21. With a projected youthful population of 4.3 billion people by 2100, Africa's share of the global population will stand at 40%. World peace and prosperity will rest, in large part, on translating Africa's aspirations and promise into reality.

22. An Africa that is better-governed and integrated should be our legacy to our children and our pledge to our continent's friends and partners. Such a vision, I have no doubt, is within reach. I believe that we can lay a solid foundation for that future in our lifetimes.

23. I now declare this high-level validation meeting on the AGR 2023 open.

I thank you for your kind attention.