



**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE
FORMAL COMMISSIONING OF THE NEW
FREETOWN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
TERMINAL AND FACILITIES, LUNGI - 3RD
MARCH 2023**

The Honourable Vice President,
The Honourable Speaker of Parliament,
Madam First Lady,
The Chief Minister and Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Our Revered Traditional and Municipal Leaders,
The Regional Manager and Representatives of the SUMMA Group of Companies,
Representatives from ICAO and IATA,
Chairman and Members of the Board of Airlines Representatives,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning,

1. Today is a great day. Today is a new day. I want to start by commending the SUMMA Group of companies for delivering on their commitment. They promised two years; in spite of COVID and the global economic headwinds and downturns, they worked hard; today, two years on, they have delivered. You have proved yet again that "talk and do" is not mere talk. It is a mindset; it is an attitude. It is about work ethic -- working hard and making good on promises, and delivering outstanding outcomes. Thank you for demonstrating the "talk and do" attitude.
2. Thank you also for demonstrating that Sierra Leone is a credible and conducive destination for foreign direct investments. The private sector in Turkey can be assured that Sierra Leone is open to more Turkish investments.
3. I want to also thank the Office of Presidential Infrastructure Initiatives; the Ministers of Transportation; the entire leadership, and all stakeholders in the transportation sector including the Sierra Leone Airport Authority and the Sierra Leone Civil Aviation Authority, for their dedication in ensuring that this day is happening. Thank you.
4. The International airport at Lungi that we inherited was a cramped-up, dome-like structure with unmaintained, barely-functional, and very uncomfortable facilities. The experiences at the arrival and departure

concourses, the luggage carousel, the airport foyers and exits were a far cry from what passengers would ever experience at modern airports all over the world. Passenger volumes hovered around a low 200,000. Runways, taxi ways, air aprons were in good condition but needed repairs. We were at 20% compliance with ICAO requirements. Our airport levies were about the highest in the subregion. That was the legacy of the APC Government.

5. We have since carried out repairs and increased the safety and compliance rating of the airport. We procured a new fire engine, navigational aids, runway lighting, and invested in emergency services. Safety and other international ratings of the airport improved dramatically over the last four and half years. The experience of flying into Lungi has been better and more comfortable for passenger. In spite of COVID-19, passengers volumes have climbed steadily. More air carriers have added Sierra Leone to their list of destinations. But that was not merely enough for us.
6. Our New Direction manifesto had established a clear view for working within a regional vision to develop "a sound and seamless regional air transport system that is safe, reliable, efficient, affordable, well connected within West Africa and integrated within the global network."
7. If our goal was to enhance our global civil aviation safety, improve Sierra Leone's air links within the global transportation network, improve passenger safety and comfort, and create an economically viable and ultramodern international airport that would become an economic growth node, then we had to take a new direction.
8. Kindly permit me to address my fellow citizens in Krio so everybody understands why we my Government decided to build this ultra-modern investment and why this matters.
9. Mamamah was a debt of \$350 million USD. That was debt with interest. International financial institutions and our partners had warned against such huge debt.

- a. Even before they dug a single hole at Mamamah, the APC had already spent millions of dollars
- b. on questionable land acquisition;
- c. it was going to involve forcible destroying a village and moving people;
- d. an environmental studies contract was awarded to one company that even the EPA did not have much input on the studies;
- e. only tentative meteorological studies were done. An international airport is not built on the basis of tentative meteorological studies;
- f. They were going to demolish an entire village and all its 23 houses. No firm plans were made for their suitable relocation and for over five years, nothing was done;
- g. roadworks and civil works to the site should have started to site – that was never even started;
- h. they started all these questionable negotiations way back in 2013. Five years later, they were still negotiating how many million dollars in debt they would leave Sierra Leone in.
- i. Mamamah is about 60Km from Freetown whilst lungi is about 15Km from Freetown by sea.
- j. The airspace of Lungi International airport and the new Mamamah airport is overlapping, the distance between the two airports is 42Km – that means that the airport would not have met the requirement of 20Km procedure control -- therefore there was going to be an airspace conflict – so Lungi had to be shut down.
- k. The international airport was going to move from Lungi. Lungi would have become a ghost town with great job losses for young people.
- l. There was no provision for radar control at Mamamah.
- m. Mamamah airport was going to be smaller.
- n. There would have been no jetways so people still had to walk or be bussed across the apron to the terminal building;
- o. Phase I work for Mamamah Airport was going to be completed in 4 years and that was not going to even include a VIP or Presidential terminal.

- p. Electricity was to be supplied by dirty diesel generators costing millions of dollars and the grid expansion to the proposed airport was not even funded.
10. I know it is political season but let us compare Mamamah with what we have done here.
 11. First, we are not moving the airport from Lungi to Mamamah. We did not move the airport to the southeast as some bad politicians would let you believe. We believe that Lungi and Port Loko deserve to still be the international gateway of Sierra Leone.
 12. We do not believe that Sierra Leone should be indebted with hundreds of millions of dollars of debt with interest just to build an airport.
 13. This airport is bigger and more modern and it has been built with zero cents in debt. It is Build Operate and Transfer. The Turkish people have used their own money to build this brand new terminal and new facilities. We owe them nothing. After operating the airport for some years, they will give us the airport for free.
 14. Even in the midst of COVID-19, Sierra Leone is the only country in the entire West Africa that one company invested such a huge sum of money in an infrastructural project and complete it in record time.
 15. This funding model – BOT – is one way in which even countries like the UK, US, Germany, France etc build large infrastructural projects.
 16. Since 1967 when the Lungi international airport runway was expanded, this is the first time in the history of this country that a completely new international airport terminal has been constructed. No Government has ever done such massive infrastructural development in this sector.
 17. We have undertaken this investment because we believe that it promotes job creation, boosts new sectors of growth (tourism),

supports international trade, and attracts new investment streams in other sectors.

18. So, what have we built?
 - a. a new Passenger Terminal;
 - b. a new Presidential and VIP terminal;
 - c. a new Air Traffic Control Tower with ultramodern equipment, ICT infrastructure, radio telephony;
 - d. a new parallel taxiway that connects to the existing runway, with connecting bridges;
 - e. a new apron area that accommodates at least 8 large aircraft;
 - f. a new search and rescue, and new firefighting facility;
 - g. the resurfacing and refurbishment of the existing runway and the installation of new navigational aids and ground aids.
 - h. A 1.5 MW solar farm that supplies green energy to the new airport facility. This is unique in the region.
19. The features of the new airport have been described by several speakers but I am “do-look-and talk” – I have done the work; feel free to look at the work I have done and tell other Sierra Leoneans whether you have ever seen such an airport in Sierra Leone. It is simply one of the best and the most modern in the entire sub-region.
20. Additional investments in international standard hotels, convention centres, and more are being considered for this general airport area and this can only make this airport even more attractive to new carriers, tourists, and businesses.
21. I expect that our friends, the SUMMA Group of companies will keenly consider our local content laws in employing and training locals as well as giving opportunities to local businesses.
22. We still believe and will work towards constructing the Lungi bridge. But in the meantime, we have reconstructed and modernised Tagrin Ferry terminal and brought in ferries.
23. The Resident Minister, Northwest has told everyone what we have done in Port Loko District. We have done more in all areas of infrastructure, education, healthcare, agriculture, and created more jobs in mining, the service industry, construction here in Port Loko than

any Government has ever done. I challenge those bad politicians to present their own records here in Port Loko.

24. So let me conclude by briefly discussing the impact of all these investments. We have an ultramodern airport terminal that is three times larger than the existing terminal and has brand new facilities that will accommodate up to a million passengers a year.
25. More carriers, it is hoped, can take advantage of Sierra Leone's strategic location to make it a major Transit hub in the sub region particularly, for air passenger traffic to South America and Europe. We now have on offer a safer, modern, and very comfortable airport.
26. I am therefore very proud to commission the new Freetown International Airport – a sustainable and modern airport that will generate economic growth and national development.