



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO ON THE OCCASION OF
THE TURNING-OF-THE-SOD CEREMONY OF
THE AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
AT THE 34 MILITARY HOSPITAL ON MONDAY
- 15TH MAY 2023**

Madam First Lady
Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Government
Representative of the American International University
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps
The Leadership of the Security Sector
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

1. It was Martin Luther King, Jr, who once said: "I don't want to spend my life picking up people by the side of the road after they have been beaten up and robbed. I want to change the Jericho Road, so that everybody has an opportunity for a job, education, security, and health." Today, we are here because this project renews our commitment to change from the Road to Jericho to the New Direction Highway which offers access to job creation, quality education and affordable healthcare.
2. Therefore, let me commend the Leadership of the Maada and Fatima Bio Foundation, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the American International University for this breathtaking initiative to establish the American International University in Sierra Leone at the 34 Military Hospital. This initiative demonstrates the power of partnership and underpins my belief that where the private sector has the knowledge and resources to deliver quality education, we must create the enabling environment for it to succeed.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. This project combines two important components of our Human Capital Development Programme– Healthcare and Education. It is indisputable that healthcare and education are the pillars of a progressive society and a pathway for elevating poor and marginalized population to a thriving and sustainable future.
4. In April 1988, the first medical school – College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences – Was established by the Government of Sierra Leone to produce doctors, nurses, pharmacists, biomedical scientists and laboratory technicians to improve the healthcare delivery system in

Sierra Leone. For over three decades, Sierra Leone still has one medical school which produces 50 doctors per year.

5. The World Health Organisation's standard doctor to population ratio is 1:1,000. Sierra Leone needs to produce an estimated 5,000 doctors to meet the WHO standard doctor to population ratio. If Sierra Leone is producing 50 doctors per year, it will take about 100 years to produce 5,000 doctors at the proportion rate of 50 per year. This is a human capital challenge that must be addressed.
6. Generally, health training institutions in Sierra Leone are also challenged by underfunding, inadequate infrastructure and teaching materials and shortages of qualified educators.
7. Sadly, our country's capacity to deliver basic health services has been hampered by shortage of health workforce and inequitable distribution of the health workers.
8. In 2018, my Government inherited a health sector which was characterized by poor health infrastructure, poor governance and management of healthcare delivery, a weak human resource base, low healthcare financing and poor performance on key health indicators. In the last five years despite the twin global economic crises of Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine-Russian war, my Government has increased the annual budgetary allocation to healthcare from 6% in 2018 to 11.6% in 2021; constructed or rehabilitated 200 more health facilities nationwide; supported the specialists training of our doctors in-country; trained almost 1,500 midwives; reduced infant and maternal mortality rates below the West African average; reduced stunting rates among children under five below the African average and increased children's immunization rates among the highest in Africa. Despite these remarkable achievements in five short years, we are still determined to do more.
9. This is why, the American International University initiative provides a suitable opportunity not only to produce more health professionals and strengthen the existing health workforce but also to provide quality

education marked by academic excellence, research and innovation, global perspective and diversity and inclusion.

10. Today, this turning-of-the-sod ceremony will mark the construction of a world-class campus which will include teaching and training facility, state of the art audio visual classrooms, and laboratories incorporating new technologies for training, library and other student services.
11. I have been informed that as an international institution, the American International University is committed to providing a rigorous educational experience that prepares students to be global citizens who can engage effectively with diverse cultures and perspectives. No doubt, the importance of a global perspective in today's interconnected world and preparing students to be global citizens to engage in diverse cultures is of great importance.
12. Additionally, the American International University is expected to cater for 4,000 students who will include both local and international. It will offer various courses across the health profession and promote educational tourism to attract international students thereby serving the critical need for trained healthcare professionals in the subregion. The University is also expected to collaborate with other local and foreign academic institutions.
13. Therefore, I am pleased to note that so far there has been productive engagement among the American International University, the University of Sierra Leone and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education. You all have a collective responsibility to ensure we maintain the highest standard in teaching professional courses.
14. I am also optimistic about the potential partnership between the 34 Military Hospital and the American International University. Over the years, the 34 Military Hospital has been a premier tertiary hospital which has served as referral for thousands of citizens and the focal medical facility to address national health emergencies as demonstrated during Ebola Outbreak and COVID-19 Pandemic.

15. I have been informed that the partnership between 34 Military Hospital and the American International University will mark the transition of the 34 Military Hospital into a teaching hospital. This is expected to improve clinical services, laboratory services, diagnostic capacity and systems in the hospital. I am also informed that revenue generated by the University will be used to support operations of the 34 Military Hospital.
16. To the partners – Maada and Fatima Bio Foundation, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) and the American International University – always remember that partnerships are not dependent on a mere common goal but on a shared path of desire, determination and passion to accomplish the common goal.
17. I assure you all of my Government's support and my personal commitment as you embark on this construction phase.
18. Let me end by leaving you with these words that: "Every great building must show that its beauty and foundation stand the test of time." Therefore, I hope that the America International University will stand the test of time in Sierra Leone.
19. Thank you for your attention and look forward to turning the first sod.