



**NATIONAL ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR JULIUS
MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA
LEONE, ON ELECTIONS PREPAREDNESS. 20TH JUNE 2023**

FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,

1. In four days, our nation will embark on a significant milestone in our democratic journey — the 2023 Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Council Elections.
2. These elections are not merely a procedural formality; they embody our democratic ideals, where every citizen has the privilege to exercise their constitutional right to vote freely and without fear.

3. The power of each individual's vote is immense —it is our most potent non-violent tool in shaping the destiny of our great nation.
4. As the leader who willingly relinquished power to a democratically elected president, I hold the project of democracy dear to my heart. I understand the paramount importance of democracy, for without it, there is no country to cherish, no land to fulfil our dreams, and no legacy to pass on to our children.
5. As Sierra Leoneans, we cannot afford to be oblivious to the dangers that lurk when violence replaces the path of democracy and the rule of law. We have experienced firsthand the far-reaching effects of choosing war over dialogue.
6. We cannot subject our children or loved ones to a repetition of our darkest past. Therefore, we must recognise that there is simply no substitute for

democracy, even when its outcomes may feel inconvenient or leave us disheartened.

7. Dear fellow citizens, as we head to the polls to exercise our sovereign right to vote, we must remember that elections are not a mere formality but the cornerstone of our democracy.
8. As the President of our great Republic, I have been entrusted with the duty to uphold the democratic principles that guide our nation's progress. Free and fair elections are a legal requirement and a moral obligation.
9. Since assuming office in May 2018, my Government has made remarkable strides in fostering unity, freedom, and justice within our great nation. We have diligently established the necessary legal and regulatory framework to ensure peaceful and inclusive elections, setting the stage for the upcoming 2023 Multi-Tier Elections.

10. Allow me to expound upon a few of the concerted efforts we as a sovereign state have undertaken to guarantee truly free, fair, and credible elections, faithfully reflecting our esteemed citizens' will.

11. Over the past five years, we have made significant headway in cultivating national peace, unity and consolidating our democratic principles. One pivotal action my administration took was the convocation of a national convention on peace and national cohesion, commonly known as **Bintumani III**, in the first year of our governance (May 23rd, 2019).

12. This three-day conference brought together all stakeholders committed to our beloved country's peace and stability. Eminent participants included registered political parties, revered traditional leaders, esteemed civil society groups, influential religious leaders, engaged citizens, esteemed international development partners, and

distinguished representatives of reputable sub-regional organisations.

- 13.** Four years have elapsed since the historic Bintumani III; during this time, we have diligently implemented the key recommendations that emerged from the national dialogue. These include **(1)** the establishment of a permanent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion, **(2)** a resolute commitment to strengthening democracy and governance institutions such as the Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC) and deepening decentralisation, and **(3)** the enactment of legislation that fervently upholds the rights of women while intensifying our unwavering battle against sexual and gender-based violence.
- 14.** These endeavours constitute just a few examples of the comprehensive approach we have taken to bring about positive change, guided by the thoughtful recommendations put forth during

Bintumani III, and serve as a testament to our steadfast dedication to national progress, peace, and unity.

- 15.** Every citizen has the right to express their will through the power of the ballot box. Our duty and unyielding resolve are to conduct the upcoming elections in an environment of freedom, fairness, and credibility.
- 16.** We are committed to ensuring that every citizen can exercise their democratic rights with confidence, secure in the knowledge that their voice will be heard, and their choice will be respected. These have informed my Government's approach to elections and electoral reform throughout these five years.
- 17.** In March 2022, under the relevant provisions of the Public Elections Act 2012, I announced the date for the Parliamentary and Local Council Elections, while the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL)

announced the date for the Presidential Election. The announcement of elections more than a year in advance marked a historical departure from the past practice that often created constitutional breaches.

- 18.** Additionally, my Government established a National Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee on the 2023 Electoral Cycle to coordinate electoral financing and address emerging issues, including electoral security and justice. This Committee is jointly chaired by my Government's Chief Minister and the United Nations Resident Coordinator.

- 19.** The Steering Committee includes all our development partners and Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) supporting the electoral process, notably the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL), PPRC, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Since its inception, the Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee has convened nine (9) times and has

addressed all emerging issues in a collegial atmosphere.

- 20.** Unlike previous governments, our Government has introduced forward-looking reforms in the electoral processes by seriously and closely reviewing reports by several Elections Observer missions to our nation over the years, including the Commonwealth, ECOWAS, African Union Commission, and the European Union, and we have systematically implemented the key recommendations.

- 21.** For instance, in 2012, the European Union (EU) made over 100 recommendations to improve the conduct of our democratic elections. The previous All People's Congress (APC) Government ignored almost all those recommendations. The EU mission made additional recommendations following the conduct of the 2018 elections.

- 22.** Since assuming office, I have directed that the recommendations be considered, and practical action was taken for their rollout and implementation. To demonstrate our commitment to electoral transparency and to consolidate our democratic gains, more than 70 of the recommendations by the European Union have been implemented.
- 23.** Fellow Sierra Leoneans, it is worth noting that my Government has undertaken a major part of financing the 2023 electoral cycle from resources in the Consolidated Revenue Fund.
- 24.** In support of our proactive stance and commitment, our development partners have contributed some funds, with a huge proportion going to national and international CSOs working on the 2023 electoral cycle. This is the first time in our country's recent history for any Government to provide the largest share in supporting the conduct of General Elections and to

undertake all critical expenditures on election financing.

- 25.** My administration has subjected crucial decisions regarding the elections to the impartial scrutiny of our esteemed judiciary, including the legitimacy of the Proportional Representation system.
- 26.** The Supreme Court of Sierra Leone, in a display of transparency and accountability, delivered its judgment in an open court proceeding, disseminated across all multimedia platforms. We firmly believe that matters about electoral justice should be entrusted to our competent courts within Sierra Leone in strict accordance with the provisions enshrined in our national Constitution.
- 27.** Our dynamic security forces have comprehensively addressed all aspects concerning the security surrounding these elections with utmost transparency and public involvement. Through a series of

stakeholder engagements and dialogues, the security agencies have meticulously negotiated and finalised all security matters and protocols.

- 28.** Stakeholders such as EMBs, CSOs, journalists, international partners, and observers have been thoroughly briefed on all security arrangements and agreements about these elections. The security agencies have consistently emphasised the importance of adherence to these measures.
- 29.** Our esteemed development partners, election observers, and countless well-wishers of Sierra Leone share our unwavering objective and vision to conduct elections that are peaceful, inclusive, free, fair, transparent, and credible, fully reflecting the genuine will of our people.
- 30.** While we have taken proactive measures to foster an environment of inclusivity and equal participation by encouraging open dialogue and constructive

engagement, it is imperative to underscore that our Government will not waver in fulfilling its duty to decisively address any instances of violence, incitement or disruption to the hard-earned peace that prevails in our nation.

- 31.** Sierra Leone is a sovereign state governed by laws and principles, and we shall not tolerate any threats to our beloved country's peace, tranquility and security.
- 32.** To those who seek to undermine our cherished democracy, let me remind you that our democracy is etched with the indelible blood of patriots who fought alongside me to protect our fellow citizens and this great nation. Many have sacrificed their lives or bear the scars of those battles.
- 33.** Millions of Sierra Leoneans, in unison and driven by an unwavering determination, stood with me in pursuit of peace when I initiated the peace process with the

leadership of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), successfully conducted our nation's first democratic elections after enduring a generation of repressive and autocratic APC rule, and peacefully transferred power to an elected government.

- 34.** Since then, we have toiled tirelessly to consolidate our democracy, institute reforms that enhance the well-being of our nation, establish a stable and harmonious Sierra Leone, and set our country on the trajectory of progress and sustainable development.

- 35.** Unfounded allegations, divisive rhetoric, and vehement hate speech, along with the threats of violence directed at the police, electoral commissioners, the justice sector, and political opponents, do not augur well for peaceful elections and must be unequivocally condemned by all well-intentioned Sierra Leoneans, international partners, and other custodians of moral rectitude.

- 36.** Let me reiterate in no uncertain terms that the multi-party elections **will proceed as scheduled on June 24th, 2023. There shall be no postponement or cancellation.**
- 37.** We must also wholeheartedly accept the people's verdict, to whom our Constitution confers sovereignty. The forthcoming elections shall serve as a litmus test for our democratic values and unwavering commitment to progress. Let us seize this opportunity to fortify our democracy, safeguard our institutions, and forge a stronger Sierra Leone that embraces the aspirations of all its citizens.
- 38.** Including myself, I implore all fellow Presidential Candidates and the leadership of Political Parties to publicly denounce and dissociate themselves from all forms of hate speech, incitement to violence, tribal bigotry, regionalism, and any other actions that jeopardise the peace, unity, and stability of our nation.

- 39.** I also call upon individuals of prominence and conscience to publicly distance themselves from those who seek to drag our nation back into the dark abyss of crisis and insecurity.
- 40.** On May 25th 2023, all Presidential Candidates and Political Party Leaders solemnly affixed their signatures to the National Election Peace Pledge. I publicly call upon my esteemed brother and compatriot, Dr Samura Matthew Wilson Kamara of the APC Party, to remain wholeheartedly committed, just as my SLPP Party and I are, to uphold that pledge's spirit.
- 41.** Fellow Sierra Leoneans, from every corner of our great nation, your voices as citizens reverberate, and the choice before us is clear: hope over fear, love over hate, peace over violence, and decency over vitriol.

- 42.** As devoted citizens, let us remain resolute in leaving behind the tragic and violent past that plagued our beloved nation. Let us forge ahead with our peaceful and democratic national development agenda, ensuring a brighter future for both present and future generations.
- 43.** We find ourselves amidst an alarming surge in the propagation of "**fake news, propaganda, and alternative facts**," a phenomenon amplified through the reckless exploitation of social media.
- 44.** These tools are immensely capable of shaping public opinion and occasionally influencing political outcomes. Yet, regrettably, they have transformed into breeding grounds for misinformation and the dissemination of falsehoods, particularly during electoral seasons.

- 45.** The very essence of our democratic processes is jeopardised when false information spreads at an alarming rate across social media platforms. Such distortions of truth have the power to manipulate public sentiment and undermine the foundations upon which our democracy stands.
- 46.** Therefore, it falls upon each of us to collectively endeavour to harness the potential of social media as a conduit for truth and transparency throughout these crucial elections. Let us fully comprehend the magnitude of our influence when sharing information online and wield this power judiciously.
- 47.** Especially during these sensitive times, we must not allow ourselves to be used as agents of discord or unwittingly become instruments of violence by those who seek to exploit our differences or revert to the dark days of violence.

- 48.** Before succumbing to the allure of that retweet button or the impulse to share a post, photo, or video, let us pause and reflect. Do we truly know the verifiable source of the information? Is this source reputable? Is the information deliberately engineered to provoke outrage? If so, my dear fellow citizens, I implore you not to perpetuate the distribution of such content.
- 49.** My Fellow Citizens, the responsibility to safeguard the integrity of our democracy and preserve the cherished peace and harmony we hold dear rests with every one of us.
- 50.** Together, we have the power to exemplify the true strength of our democracy, thus ensuring a brighter future for ourselves and the generations that will follow. May our nation continue to flourish as a beacon of freedom, justice, and democracy.

- 51.** As we approach the polls on Saturday, let us remember that our diversity is the wellspring of our strength. Through the collective power of our voices, we possess the capacity to shape the future of our nation.
- 52.** Your vote is not only your voice but also how we elect a President who embodies your aspirations, a Parliament that embraces progressive ideals, and Local Councils that attentively listen to your concerns and cater to the unique needs of your local communities.
- 53.** As I end, let me leave you with a public education message from the Electoral Commission on "**Saful 2023 Elections**", and I quote:

**"Vote Saful,
Go Home Saful,
Wait for the Result Saful,
Celebrate if you win Saful,
And if you lose Sidom Saful.**

Mek we all join han for bil the Country Saful."

- 54.** In the realm where democracy thrives, we all flourish, united in the boundless prosperity it bestows upon us. Conversely, where violence finds fertile ground, its pernicious consequences permeate our collective existence, sparing none from its bitter aftermath.
- 55.** In this pivotal moment, as we stand on the cusp of the forthcoming elections, let us rally together, bound by an unyielding determination to safeguard the hallowed principles enshrined in our Constitution and the essence of our democratic ethos.
- 56.** Again, I emphasise: Let it be known that we shall firmly reject any temptation to circumvent the sacred mantle of the rule of law, for it is our solemn duty to rise unwaveringly in defence of democracy's noble ideals.

- 57.** As proud citizens of this great nation, we collectively anticipate the advent of an all-inclusive, liberating, crystal-clear, and serenely conducted electoral process that shall grace our land on Saturday, June 24th, 2023.
- 58.** Together, let us forge ahead with unwavering resolve, for it is through the triumph of democracy that we shall secure a brighter future for generations to come.
- 59.** God bless Sierra Leone, and may God bless us all.