



PUBLIC LECTURE BY HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT

**DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON DC, USA,**

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**PUBLIC LECTURE: BUILDING A PROSPEROUS AND
SECURED FUTURE THROUGH HUMAN CAPITAL
DEVELOPMENT – THE SIERRA LEONE EXAMPLE**

The Board of Trustees;

President Sylvia Burwell;

Provost;

**Staff and Students of the great American
University;**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good Afternoon.**

1. Madam President, let me start by thanking you and the members of the Board and Faculty of the School of International Service (SIS) for putting together this lecture.

- 2.** I would also like to thank everyone who has come today to be part of this engagement. Your presence here is a testament to your commitment to international service, education, your dreams, and the incredible potential each of you holds.

- 3.** It is a riveting opportunity to address such a diverse and dynamic group of people from different backgrounds, fields and persuasions.

4. Standing before you in these hallowed halls, where thought leaders of past, present, and future converge, I am acutely aware of the transformative journey of learning that unfolds within these walls. This institution symbolises the relentless pursuit of knowledge, the endeavour to refine perspectives, and the audacity to challenge and enrich the worldviews we hold.

5. When we step into an institution like this, we pledge to view the world through refreshed and curious eyes. To welcome opposing views not as threats but as gateways to understanding. Indeed, I am sure that everyone here, but especially from the School Of International Service, would agree that there is no greater honour than dedicating oneself to the service of humanity.

6. As I stand before this August gathering, I'm transported to a time of rigorous intellectual pursuits and fervent aspirations that marked my years at this esteemed institution from 1997 to 2002. I cannot overstate the American University's impact on my post-military leadership journey.

7. Reconnecting with fellow alums and revisiting the rich academic tenets and principles that served as the bedrock of my education, I am reminded of the priceless value of an

education that seamlessly blends knowledge with pragmatic application.

8. **I learned here the intrinsic worth of being prepared to serve the global community, not just as a leader but as a harbinger of peace, a bridge-builder fostering understanding amidst the myriad complexities of our contemporary world.**

9. Reflecting upon my recent journey through the winding trails of Sierra Leone's election landscape, **the profundity of human capital is clear.**

10. Amidst the liveliness of towns, the tranquillity of villages, and the resilient spirit echoing in every corner of my nation, it is easy to see that **the most potent tool for sculpting a prosperous and secured future, the authentic heartbeat of innovation and the driving force behind every nation's progress is HUMAN CAPITAL.**

Madam President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

11. Every leader dreams of a legacy. **In my time as President of Sierra Leone, I have envisioned a legacy built on the foundation of HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT.** Such a focus is not

merely a reflection of personal experiences, though they are profound.

12. Rising from humble beginnings, **thanks to the determination of my mother, Yei Amie, of blessed memory, who, though not formally educated, instilled in me the TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF EDUCATION. I have seen how the power of education unchains minds and unleashes potential.**

Madam President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. Suffice it to say that I was as persuaded in 1997 when I entered this university as I am now that **Human Capital Development** is the most potent arsenal for **building a prosperous and secured future and finding relevance in the 21st Century**. This has been the paradigm shift of our national development agenda and is already manifesting transformative dividends.

- 14.** My lecture today is anchored on the strength of an empowered mind built on the bedrock of human capital development, the responsibilities that come with it, and the extraordinary possibilities that lie ahead.
- 15.** We live in an era of rapid changes, innovations and interconnectedness. Our inherited world vastly differs from the one our parents and grandparents knew.

- 16.** Technological advancements have reshaped how we communicate, work, and live. But with these changes come both challenges and opportunities.
- 17.** My Government understands the dynamics of today's prevailing world and has chosen to embrace its opportunities. For this reason, I made **Human Capital Development** the priority plank of my Government in my first five years as President.

- 18.** Sierra Leone is a nation with a tumultuous past. But we have moved beyond our history and made remarkable strides towards peace and stability, thanks to our commitments to Human Capital Development.
- 19.** Human Capital Development encompasses various initiatives to enhance individuals' skills, knowledge, and well-being, promoting socio-economic progress and ensuring long-lasting peace and security. My Government's priority focus on Human Capital Development is hinged on **Education, Gender Equality and**

Youth Empowerment, which I will briefly highlight.

Madam President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. In our collective pursuit of knowledge and development, we must also confront and navigate the unpredictabilities of leadership and life.

21. Who could have foreseen when my Government first came into office in 2018 that a global pandemic would greatly affect supply chains, economic stability and food

supply? Or that a war in Europe would cause immense turbulence far beyond its borders?

22. Despite this, we set out to beat the odds stacked against us by remaining undeterred in building a resilient economy through the New Direction national development agenda.

23. From the beginning, we emphasised the urgency of implementing wide-sweeping changes to put the country on a new positive trajectory, implementing various essential policy interventions.

24. We have made numerous bold and new investments and rolled out strategic national development programmes, mostly connecting these priorities with our Human Capital Development Agenda.

A. EDUCATION

25. I agree with **Bill Gates** when he says: "**Your leading indicator of where you're going to be 20 years from now is how well you're doing in your education system.**"

26. Elevating the stature of our nation's human capital through education has been of utmost importance. Our Free Quality School Education (FQSE) Programme emerged as the flagship initiative during my administration's inaugural five-year tenure.

27. We have consistently directed substantial investments toward our dynamic youth, recognising that the true wealth of our nation is found in harnessing our human potential.

28. Our commitment to education has remained unwavering despite the economic challenges presented since 2020. This dedication is evident as our education budget increased from just below 15% in 2018 to 22% in subsequent years, supporting primary, secondary, higher, technical, and vocational educational sectors.

29. Our Free Quality School Education programme has created greater access, quality and equity for about 2 million children by removing financial barriers to school

enrolment and improving teaching and learning outcomes.

- 30.** Our pioneering approach to **Radical Inclusion in education – leaving NO ONE BEHIND** – be it expectant girls, adult learners, children from our most vulnerable communities, or those with disabilities – has garnered commendations from the international community.

- 31.** Sierra Leone's transformative education policy has been celebrated globally, affirming our role as stalwart advocates for educational advancement.
- 32.** This global recognition culminated in my unanimous appointment as co-chair of the UNESCO High-Level Steering Committee, dedicated to realising the **UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 — a commitment to ensuring inclusive, equitable quality education and fostering lifelong learning for all.**

33. As an ardent supporter of universal education access, I was privileged to co-chair the global Transforming Education Summit alongside UN Secretary-General António Guterres in 2022. Additionally, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) honoured me as one of the Global Champions for Foundational Learning for our 2022-2026 Partnership Compact.

34. In a relatively brief period, my Government mustered substantial backing from our partners, prudently augmenting our domestic educational resources. These efforts have attracted over US\$ 200 million in support for our education sector since 2018.

35. Under my administration, we have supported more than 80% of our schools through Government subsidies, enlisted approximately 12,000 new educators, and facilitated training for twice that number. We've welcomed 800,000 new students, and

our strategic investments have notably enhanced learning results.

B. GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

36. My Government particularly takes girls' education seriously, as we know that countries become stronger and more prosperous when girls are educated. So, investing in girls' education is a smart long-term investment for our nation.

37. We have worked to achieve gender parity in our schools. Girls have higher retention and pass rates in all national transition

examinations. More girls are now studying STEM disciplines; today, they have higher transition rates into tertiary and vocational institutions.

- 38.** In line with our long-term vision to train more women engineers, doctors, scientists and innovators, we have also implemented a policy that funds free education from primary school through university for all girls studying STEM disciplines.

- 39.** As **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** noted, **“Culture does not make people. People make culture.”** The culture we are consciously creating in Sierra Leone is one where education vastly improves the conditions for girls and women.
- 40.** Since 2018, we have witnessed a 37% increase in girls in school. Teenage pregnancy dropped by 33%, from 62,589 in 2019 to 41,943 in 2022. Early marriage figures have also dropped dramatically. Sierra Leone now has the highest rate of girls completing primary

education in the entire West Africa sub-region.

Madam President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

- 41.** True Human Capital Development cannot be achieved if any segment of society remains overshadowed. In the poignant words of the luminary writer **Arundhati Roy**, **“There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard.”**

42. One of my most cherished moments as Sierra Leone's President remains signing the progressive Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment bill into Law, ensuring women receive equal pay for equal work, and amplifying their voices in all societal domains, from the workplace to the political arena – a minimum 30% representation of women guaranteed by law.

43. In our unwavering commitment to dismantle the barriers of gender inequality, I declared a state of emergency on the heinous crimes of rape and sexual and gender-based violence.

44. Through robust measures, we are championing justice, especially for the marginalised and underprivileged, by the Amendment of the Sexual Offences Act, broadening the spectrum of legal aid and instituting a specialised court to expedite the adjudication of sexual offences.

45. In September 2021, at the United Nations, Sierra Leone, with the Federal Republic of Nigeria, successfully moved a United Nations Resolution titled; "**International Cooperation for Access to Justice, Remedies and Assistance for the Survivors of Sexual**

Violence", a historic Resolution for the survivors of sexual violence. It condemned all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and outlined a series of measures for Member States to take effective action in line with international law.

C. YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Madam President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

46. Empowering our youth means giving them a voice in the decision-making processes of our nation. This is why my Government has matched words with action by constituting

one of the youngest cabinets in the history of our country – with 10 of my Ministers under the age of 40 in my second term.

47. Over the last five years, beyond the human capital imperatives, my Government has invested in young people by creating opportunities for training, entrepreneurship, and job creation.

48. The Youth Employment Scheme for my second-term mandate promises the younger generation that their energy, passion, and ambition will find fertile ground in Sierra Leone.

We also intend to leverage the cutting-edge Technology and Infrastructure Programme to pave sustainable pathways of economic growth.

49. My Government has continued to rally our young people to move from passive observers of the country's problems. Our human capital development agenda equips our young people with the knowledge and skills to be informed and critical thinkers, and they must use that knowledge for the greater good.

50. I firmly believe that the best use of our lives is when it is lived "**For God and For Country**". Any life outside this principle is not worth living. It is also important to remember that **success is not measured solely by personal achievements but by our positive impact on others and the world around us.**

D. SECOND FIVE-YEAR MANDATE

Madam President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

51. The last five years have come with its share of challenges, but in the true Sierra Leonean spirit, we will never shirk in the face of

adversity. Challenges are an inevitable part of life and often the catalysts for the most significant change. Leadership exists to solve problems. We must remember that progress is not linear, and setbacks are opportunities to learn, adapt, and grow stronger.

52. As I embark on my second term, I reaffirm my unwavering commitment to **the five quintessential pillars that will shape our journey forward**, namely:

I. Achieving Food Security is intimately linked with aggressive investments in agriculture. Our vision extends beyond merely feeding our people. We aim to ignite job creation, catalyse economic momentum, and significantly diminish the burdens of poverty.

II. Human Capital Development: We will continue investing in Human Capital Development strategically to solve contemporary challenges and leverage opportunities, with an unwavering

emphasis on achieving gender parity in all domains.

III. Youth Employment Scheme (YES) is our solemn pledge to the vibrant youth of Sierra Leone that their dynamism, enthusiasm, and aspirations will be met with unparalleled opportunities in their homeland.

IV. The Technology and Infrastructure Programme is a forward-looking initiative designed to lay the bedrock for resilient and sustainable avenues of economic progress.

V. The Reformation of our Public Service

Architecture is a meticulous overhaul aimed at enhancing efficiency, instilling professionalism, and ensuring a service delivery mechanism befitting the aspirations of our people.

E. CONCLUSION

Madam President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

53. Today, I stand before you not just as a representative of my country but as a witness to the ebb and flow of global currents. These are indeed tough times for our world. The

strongest economies quiver, and continents like Africa stand at pivotal junctures.

54. We witness shifts in power, erosion of democratic institutions, an intensification of conflicts on a scale we hadn't imagined, and climate change's looming effects.

55. Leadership must evolve in this era, marked by crises at every turn. We can no longer stand idly by as our young workforce leaves our shores searching for greener pastures. We cannot ignore the displacement of our

people due to strife or the stifling of our children's futures.

56. It is not enough to be defenders of the status quo; we must become the disruptors.

Disruptors who strive to lift communities out of the depths of poverty, enabling our youth to rise to global challenges and ensure that every individual has the freedom to dream, choose, and lead a fulfilling life.

57. Every single one of us has a part to play.

Leadership is not a title; it is an action. I recall my time here in the US and this institution — a period of growth and learning. But the siren call of home was always present, a beacon that guided my intentions and actions.

58. Now, as I stand here, it feels like I have come full circle, and words can scarcely capture this feeling.

59. Our world is a mosaic of cultures, beliefs, and aspirations. It is up to us, especially those at the helm of affairs, to decide the legacy we wish to leave behind.

60. Do we envisage a world of unity, justice, and dignity? Or do we resign ourselves to divisions, disparities, and disenchantments? The intricate web of our global community means that the ripple effects of instability cannot be contained within borders. **Unity is not just our moral duty; it is a strategic imperative.**

61. As you chart your paths, disrupting and innovating, I urge you to always prioritise relationships and consensus. A world where differing opinions coexist is vibrant and robust. Democracy thrives on these differences. The journey to addressing global issues is indeed long, and as the adage goes, **“If you want to go fast, go alone; but if you want to go far, go together.”**

62. As we champion multilateralism on the global stage, it is paramount that we fiercely uphold political pluralism, freedom of expression, and fundamental human rights within our borders.

- 63.** As stewards of the future, let us all pledge to shine our collective light into every shadow. Let our voices rise in harmony, heralding the dawn of a brighter, limitless tomorrow.
- 64.** In closing, I want to leave you with a quote from **President John F. Kennedy**, who once said, "**The future does not belong to those who are content with today, apathetic toward common problems and their fellow man alike, timid and fearful in the face of new ideas and bold projects.**" I want to add the "**FUTURE BELONGS TO THOSE WHO CREATE IT.**"

65. In Sierra Leone, we are building the future — a new breed of young people who are neither content, apathetic, nor timid. We are building change-makers, our hope for a better tomorrow.

66. I therefore invite you all to join and support us on our journey to building a prosperous, middle-income country by 2035.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING.