



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY DR JULIUS MAADA BIO,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH
OF THE NETWORK OF WOMEN MINISTERS AND
PARLIAMENTARIANS (NeWMaP)**

TUESDAY 21ST NOVEMBER 2023

**RADISSON BLU MAMMY YOKO HOTEL,
FREETOWN**

Honourable Vice President

Honourable Speaker of Parliament

Madam First Lady

Ministers of Government

Members of the Diplomatic Community

Honourable Members of Parliament

Our Formidable Women of Sierra Leone

Members of the Fourth Estate

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

1. It is with great pleasure that I address you on the launch of the **Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians in Sierra Leone, NeWMaP**, at the Radisson Blu Mammy Yoko Hotel.
2. This hotel was originally named after Mammy Yoko (Madam Yoko), who was the ruler of the vast Kpa Mende Confederacy and a leader of considerable influence with a great ability to build alliances.

- 3.** The NeWMaP seeks to build strong alliances among female Government-appointed Ministers and elected Parliamentarians to promote the representation of women and women's full and equal participation in political and parliamentary leadership.

- 4.** This momentous occasion not only marks a significant step forward for our nation but also symbolises our collective commitment to fostering gender equality, empowering women, and ensuring their active

participation in shaping the future of Sierra Leone.

5. Our women's equal participation and leadership in political and public life are essential to achieving our national development goals. However, data shows that women are under-represented at all levels of decision-making and that achieving gender parity in political life is lagging.

- 6. The women of Sierra Leone are a political force that can no longer be ignored.** For too long, women in Sierra Leone have been marginalised and under-represented in positions of power and decision-making. Their voices have been silenced, their contributions overlooked, and their potential untapped.

- 7.** This has not only hindered our nation's socio-economic progress but has also deprived us of the full and equal participation of 52% of our population.

- 8.** The re-establishment of this Network represents a powerful commitment to amplifying the voices of women, harnessing their expertise, and ensuring their rightful place in the corridors of power.
- 9.** I thank all the pioneers of this NeWMaP for promoting greater cooperation among women public servants and ensuring they work together to improve the lives and livelihood of women and girls in our country.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. My Government is fully aware of the fact that by investing in women, we create a better nation for all of us — a nation that is more equal, peaceful, and prosperous.

11. In my Government's first five-year mandate, promoting gender parity and empowering our girls and women was a key priority and is still a principal priority.

12. Sierra Leone under my leadership is making steady progress towards achieving the United Nations SDG 5 target on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

13. We have made significant strides in empowering 52% of our people through sound policies and legislation and ensuring that strong institutional and operational measures are put in place to support the implementation of these progressive policies and laws.

14. Our most notable achievement as a nation is the landmark **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Bill** that seeks to promote gender parity and the social and economic empowerment of our Women in Sierra Leone.

15. The GEWE Bill provides the women of Sierra Leone with the opportunity to gain empowerment by addressing the issues that are most affecting women in the country, such as under-employment in leadership roles, low levels of financial inclusion, high

rates of gender-based violence and child marriage rates.

- 16.** I am pleased to confirm that the minimum of 30% representation of women in elective and appointive positions as per the GEWE Bill has been adhered to by my Government and the people of Sierra Leone during our last election cycle.

17. I take this opportunity to congratulate once again all our elected female Parliamentarians and appointed Ministers and Deputy Ministers for being the trailblazers of the GEWE Bill.

18. Besides the GEWE Bill, my Government's approach to gender equality and women's empowerment has been holistic. As part of our mainstreaming efforts, we legislated several bills that will contribute to the empowerment of our women. These include the Public Elections Act 2022, Land Commission Act 2022, Customary Land Rights

Act 2022, Political Parties Regulations Commissions Act 2022 and the Mines and Mineral Development Act 2022.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. As the **Principal He-For-She Champion** in our Republic, my strong commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment is inspired by something greater than the quest for accolades and validation. It is about justice and fidelity to the things we hold sacred.

20. I am still the only male politician in Sierra Leone on record to have made the bold and progressive choice of choosing a female running mate back in 2012 – two years before the United Nations launched the He-For-She movement.

21. I wholeheartedly believe that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

22. I am confident that this Network will play a pivotal role in advancing the agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment in Sierra Leone.

23. By uniting women from across the political spectrum, I am optimistic that NeWMaP will provide a platform for collaboration, advocacy, and the exchange of ideas.

24. Let this journey transcend mere symbolism. I implore all members to commit themselves to concrete actions that will bring about positive change and help reshape the landscape of political governance in Sierra Leone.

25. This Network should aim to amplify the voices of women in decision-making processes, address gender-specific challenges, and work towards legislative reforms that promote gender equality.

26. As we launch this Network, let us also reflect on the gender disparities that still exist. It is our collective responsibility to dismantle the barriers that hinder the full and equal participation of women in political and public life.

27. Through NeWMaP, members must commit to championing policies that promote gender equity, ensuring that the talents and perspectives of women are fully integrated into the fabric of our governance structures.

To The NeWMaP Members,

28. Remember that there is NO “I” in Network.

This Network should not be used to promote individual agendas or EGOs or be the breeding ground for “Pull Her Down” (PHD) Syndrome.

29. Empowered women should empower,

support and encourage each other. There is enough space at the top, so we should rather encourage each other to make it to the top.

30. More importantly, **you must use this Network as a platform to inspire the next generation of female leaders and public servants.** By serving as role models, mentors, and advocates, you can create a legacy of empowered women who will carry the torch forward and contribute to a more inclusive and prosperous Sierra Leone.

31. Let me assure NeWMaP that as your **He-For-She President**, I will support you to succeed and deliver on your Terms of Reference. I implore you all to use this Network to change the narrative for women and ensure women and gender issues are mainstreamed in all policies, strategies, legislations and development frameworks.

32. Let me emphasise that the launch of this Network is not just an event; it is a transformative milestone in the history of our nation.

33. Together, we have the power to shape a future where the leadership of women is not only accepted but celebrated and where the dreams and aspirations of every Sierra Leonean, regardless of gender, are realised.

34. I therefore charge you to bring on board male allies in both Cabinet and Parliament to support your work.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

35. On this 21st day of November 2023, I officially launch the resuscitation of the Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians (NeWMaP) in Sierra Leone as a testament to our unwavering commitment to creating an environment where women can thrive, lead, and contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic and political fabric of our nation.

36. Together, we can achieve real development in our country with an empowered society that includes the full participation of both men and women.

37. I look forward to working with all stakeholders in building an inclusive country that works for all, irrespective of tongue, tribe, gender and political affiliation.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION.