



KEYNOTE OPENING ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY

DR JULIUS MAADA BIO

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

AT THE

59TH JALSA SALANA SIERRA LEONE,

BO CITY, SIERRA LEONE

FEBRUARY 9TH, 2024

CONFERENCE THEME: ISLAM MEANS PEACE

**The Special Representative of the Respected
Maulana Azhar Haneef,**

The Amir, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at,

Learned Imams and Religious Leaders,

**Our Revered Paramount Chiefs and
Traditional Leaders,**

**The National Executive and Members of
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Sierra Leone,**

**Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and
Gentlemen**

1. **ASSALAMU ALAIKUM** and a warm welcome to the 59th Jalsa Salana in our great nation, Sierra Leone.

2. All praises and thanks be to **Allah, The Most Gracious and Most Merciful**, for allowing us to gather again this year to join the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in Sierra Leone for their Jalsa Salana (Annual Conference).

3. This important Muslim gathering has become a bastion for promoting spiritual growth, fostering community among members, and a platform for religious discourse.

4. The Jalsa Salana is a time of unity, spiritual reflection and renewal – a moment when we strengthen our faith and dedication to the teachings of the Ahmadiyya Mission.

5. The sense of togetherness within our community and spiritual awakening experienced at this annual gathering are much needed in our nation today.

6. The Jalsa Salana holds immense significance in fostering unity, understanding and peace in our country.

7. Our participation indicates our collective determination to seek spiritual and moral advancement, beneficial social interaction, and, most importantly, increase our personal relationship with God.

**MR CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

8. This year, as we come together, we reflect upon the theme, "**ISLAM MEANS PEACE**", which encapsulates the essence of Islam and resonates deeply with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

9. Islam means to achieve peace – peace with God, peace within oneself, and peace with the creations of God – through wholly submitting oneself to God and accepting His guidance.

10. The principles of Islam include peace, tolerance and compassion, promoting harmony among individuals and communities, irrespective of their backgrounds.

- 11.** Today, as we gather to reflect on this profound theme, let us take a moment to appreciate the significance of peace in our lives and Islam's role in fostering understanding and unity in our country.
- 12.** We are proud of our rich religious diversity in Sierra Leone, with Islam being a vital part of our cultural tapestry.
- 13.** Our Muslim brothers and sisters have contributed significantly to the development and progress of our nation, embodying the values of peace, justice and charity.

14. The teachings of Islam emphasise not only the importance of personal piety but also the responsibility to contribute positively to the well-being of society.

15. As we celebrate this Jalsa Salana, let us reflect on the values embedded in the teachings of Islam. Let us embrace the concept of peace not only in our personal lives but also in our interactions with one another and in our collective efforts to build a better Sierra Leone.

DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,

- 16.** According to a report by the Global Peace Index in 2023, Sierra Leone ranks among Africa's top 3 most peaceful countries (and ranked the most peaceful nation in the ECOWAS sub-region), thanks to our unique and agelong commitment to religious harmony.

- 17.** Our great nation is a confluence of two main religions (Islam and Christianity) with strong Government-backed freedom for religious practices.

- 18.** Our country protects the rights of all religions and preserves and respects all holy, spiritual, and historical sites in the country and worldwide.
- 19.** As a nation known for its religious diversity and tolerance, we must continue to foster an environment where individuals of different faiths can coexist harmoniously.
- 20.** The Ahmadiyya Community's commitment to promoting peace through education, healthcare and social development is an exemplary model for all Sierra Leoneans.

21. Three years ago, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission celebrated 100 years of its establishment in Sierra Leone with visible imprints of the Mission's many accomplishments.

22. My continuous participation in the Jalsa Salana (even as a devout Catholic) demonstrates my Government's deep appreciation of the tremendous contribution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission to our development and peace-building initiatives over the years.

23. I am informed that the Ahmadiyya Mission currently manages 309 schools assisted by our Government, which it perfectly combines with the management of 1400 mosques, including hospitals in remote locations in the country, such as Rokupr and Boajibu.

24. The Mission also runs three medical facilities in the country while managing a hospital in Kenema and another in Calaba Town, with a dental clinic under construction. It also operates a maternity hospital to serve the needs of women and children in the country.

25. I commend the work of the Mission and reaffirm my Government's commitment to support the Mission in promoting its vision in Sierra Leone.

26. On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Sierra Leone, I once again thank the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission for its relentless contribution to national development for over one hundred years.

27. I use this auspicious gathering to encourage and call upon all Faith-Based Organisations to support the rollout and implementation of my Government's new **Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024-2030**, which seeks to attain an **Inclusive, Green and Middle-Income Society by 2039**.

28. Our over-arching objective is **to improve the quality of life of our people through our Big Five Game-Changer Priorities**, with **Agriculture as our flagship sector under the FEED SALONE Programme**.

**MR CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

29. Our ability as a nation to promote citizens' freedom to hold distinct religious views and practice religion freely has been largely responsible for our cohesion and peace as a nation.

30. Without any shadow of a doubt, religious tolerance is one of Sierra Leone's most-priced exports to the world. My Government remains firmly committed to sustaining this vital hallmark. We must, therefore, strive to build bridges of understanding and promote

dialogue among different faiths, fostering an environment where diversity is celebrated and unity is cherished.

31. To this end, I have directed the Minister of Social Welfare, Madam Melrose Kaminty, to review Faith-Based Organisations' registration and renewal criteria for improved service delivery to our people.

32. I would like to use this platform to encourage all Faith-Based Organisations to support the Ministry of Social Welfare in its task of

upgrading the registration process to align services with national priorities.

33. Sierra Leone has established institutions to foster and strengthen inter— and intra—faith dialogues among various faith-based organisations. One such Institution is **the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone.**

34. The role of **the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone** in strengthening religious coexistence, peacebuilding and addressing emergencies is not only commendable but also indispensable.

35. In the recent past, there has been an increase in the number of both inter— and intra—faith conflicts, resulting from the actions and inactions of detractors and enemies of our collective progress as a nation. However, our Government is working tirelessly to ensure that they do not succeed in truncating our most cherished peace and harmony.

36. Our Government remains committed to working with all Faith-Based Institutions and deploying their structures to promote a more peaceful and secure Sierra Leone.

MR CHAIRMAN,

37. Considering the tangible footprints of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in national development, my Government firmly stands with you.

38. We commit to the outcome of this Annual Conference, recognising the invaluable contributions of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in promoting the message of peace and tolerance.

39. The Mission's efforts in fostering inter-faith dialogue, education and humanitarian work are commendable and serve as a beacon of hope for a world in need of peace and unity.

**MR CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

40. As we come together during this Jalsa Salana, let us reaffirm our commitment to Islam's principles of peace, justice, and compassion.

- 41.** In a world that often witnesses conflicts and misunderstandings, we must exemplify the true spirit of Islam.
- 42.** We must build bridges of understanding and promote dialogue among different faiths, fostering an environment where diversity is celebrated, and unity is cherished.
- 43.** Together, let us strive to build a Sierra Leone and a World where every citizen can live in peace and harmony regardless of their background.

44. May this 59th Jalsa Salana inspire all of us and guide us towards a future filled with understanding, compassion, peace and prosperity.

45. In conclusion, I thank and congratulate the Ahmadiyya Mission in Sierra Leone for organising this significant gathering.

46. I commend the global Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's advocacy for universal human rights for all and its considerable investments in education and other socio-economic development programs.

47. On behalf of the great people of Sierra Leone, I welcome all attendees, especially our foreign guests, to our beautiful and peaceful country.

48. I wish all participants a spiritually enlightened Jalsa Salana 2024.

49. May Allah be with everyone participating in this year's Jalsa Salana.

**ASSALAMUALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAHI
WABARAKATUH!**