



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

ON RECEIVING

THE FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION MEDAL

AT THE

WORLD LEADERSHIP FORUM DINNER

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NEW YORK

**DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE FOREIGN POLICY
ASSOCIATION,**

**ESTEEMED LEADERS, HONOURED GUESTS AND
FRIENDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD,**

- 1.** I am deeply humbled to receive the **Foreign Policy Association (FPA) Medal**, an honour bestowed not just upon me but also upon the resilient people of Sierra Leone.
- 2.** I am thankful for this recognition and for the FPA's enduring commitment to fostering a more interconnected and informed world.

- 3. I am also delighted to be here as a steward of Sierra Leone's progress** — progress born from our collective dedication to building a democratic, just, and pluralistic society.

- 4.** This unwavering commitment to democracy frames the very essence of my leadership and the role of custodianship that I, like many others here, carry.

- 5.** As a leader, I often reflect on the nature of our duty as custodians of democracy.

6. We are, in essence, **guardians of the social contract — the sacred agreement between the governed and those who govern.**

7. I have the distinct privilege of serving a nation that has endured great challenges but has never wavered in its belief in democracy.

8. **As a leader, I have stood at many crossroads.**

As a young military officer leading Sierra Leone for a brief period in 1996, I was acutely aware of the temptation to hold onto power.

9. I stepped aside, allowing the democratic process to flourish because for me, the principles of the rule of law and popular sovereignty are sacrosanct.

10. I knew then, as I know now, that true power comes not from force, but from the will of the people.

11. I remain committed to the belief that democracy, though imperfect, is the most humane and just form of governance.

12. The ultimate purpose of leadership is service.

13.Our greatest challenge as leaders is building trust, bridging the gulf between people and institutions, and renewing faith in the idea that governance can be and must exist for the common good.

14. In Sierra Leone, this has meant upholding the principles of free speech and a free press.
Under my leadership, no journalist has been imprisoned for seeking the truth.

15.The press must be free to hold power accountable, for without accountability, democracy withers.

16. The pursuit of liberty must also go hand in hand with unwavering commitment to equity.

17. No society can thrive when half its population is marginalised or denied the rights that others enjoy.

18. I speak here not just as a leader, but as a man shaped by the strength and resilience of women.

19. I was raised by strong women — my late mother, who instilled in me the values I hold dear, and my older sister (of blessed memory), whose support and determination helped me receive the education that shaped my life.

20. I know firsthand that **investing in women is not just a moral imperative — it is smart politics, and it works.**

21. This belief is reflected in my administration's commitment to gender equality.

22. Last year, I proudly signed into law the **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act**, ensuring that women in Sierra Leone are guaranteed equal pay for equal work and are no longer excluded from full participation in our national life.

23.Our **National Development Plan** ensures that **women are mainstreamed across all policy areas, from education to employment.**

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

24.In our pursuit of national development, we also remain deeply aware of our place in the global community.

25.Sierra Leone is a small country that stands tall, making meaningful contributions to international peace and security as an elected member of the UN Security Council.

26. As a country, we are working diligently to strengthen our international partnerships and cooperation. We maintain friendly and fruitful relations with nations across Africa, Europe, the Americas, and beyond.

27. In this spirit of internationalism, I return to the idea of leaders as guardians and custodians.

28. Leaders must remember that we hold power in trust for the people we serve. **Leadership's true value lies in its ability to uplift, to unite, and to advance the cause of justice.**

29.I believe history will judge us not by the offices we held, but **by the difference we made in the lives of our people.**

30.We can only build a world worthy of the next generation by keeping these values at the forefront of our minds.

31.Let me close by once again thank the **Foreign Policy Association** for this distinguished honour.

32.I accept it not for myself but **on behalf of the people of Sierra Leone, who have entrusted me with the great responsibility of leadership.**

**33.I continue this work for them and dedicate this
award to them.**

THANK YOU.