



## **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY DR JULIUS MAADA BIO  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE**

**AT THE**

**PRESIDENTIAL MEDIA COCKTAIL**

**COUNTRY LODGE HOTEL, FREETOWN, REPUBLIC  
OF SIERRA LEONE**

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2024**

- **THE HONOURABLE VICE PRESIDENT**
- **THE FIRST LADY**
- **MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT**
- **THE CHAIRMAN, INDEPENDENT MEDIA COMMISSION**
- **THE PRESIDENT OF SIERRA LEONE ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS (SLAJ)**
- **EDITORS**
- **FRIENDS IN THE MEDIA FRATERNITY**
- **DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN**
- **GOOD EVENING**

1. It is great to once again host some of our country's finest voices and storytellers. In this gathering is the conscience of our nation.

- 2.** As Journalists, your responsibility transcends merely reporting events; it shapes narratives, holds power to account, and ensures that the voices of the marginalised and silenced are amplified.
- 3.** You are the architects of our national story, playing an integral role in our progress.
- 4.** I would like to commend you all for your tireless efforts to foster a more engaged and enlightened populace.

**5.** A well-informed society is better equipped to make decisions, advocate for justice, and demand good governance, and your work is instrumental in achieving this.

**6.** This year's theme, "**STRENGTHENING PRESS FREEDOM: A SHARED GOAL,**" underscores the crucial role that a free press plays in our society's democratic fabric.

- 7.** Press Freedom is not merely a constitutional right enshrined in our laws but a fundamental pillar of our democracy, an empowering force for citizens, a mechanism for transparency, and an instrument to hold those in power accountable.
  
- 8.** Today, we find ourselves standing at a pivotal juncture.
  
- 9.** We are witnessing a renaissance of media expression, with an increasing number of voices contributing to our national narrative.

- 10.** The rapid increase in digital platforms, community radios, and independent newspapers signifies a dynamic shift in how we consume and engage with information.
  
- 11.** In a country like ours, where collective solutions are needed, a free press is not just essential but a catalyst for fostering dialogue and understanding.
  
- 12.** Your role in promoting national unity is invaluable and should be acknowledged.

**13.** You are the ones who ensure a plurality of perspectives in our national narrative, opening windows for marginalised voices and providing a diverse and inclusive narrative.

## **DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

- 14.** The last time we met at the **Presidential Media Cocktail** was in December 2022. After two years apart, so much has transpired in governance.
  
- 15.** In June 2023, I secured a decisive victory for my second term five-year mandate.
  
- 16.** Today, we have long moved past politicking and electioneering and settled down to the critical phase of governance.



**17.** Shortly after our victory, the nation awoke to the ugly news of an attempted coup in November last year.

**18.** I sincerely thank each of you for your unwavering commitment to democratic values, as evidenced by your rejection of unconstitutional order, violence, and deliberate attempts to disrupt the peace and erode our democratic gains.

**19.** While judgments have been handed down in the **Treason Trial and Court Martial**, the fugitives from the coup attempt still threaten our national security, as clearly seen two weeks ago.

**20.** In fact, the **Forum Newspaper** described the event two weeks ago as ***“Shocking! Another coup attempt failed.”***

**21.** As your **Commander-In-Chief**, let me be absolutely clear: **there is no hiding place for fugitives or those who desperately seek to disturb our peace. We will pursue them**

**wherever they hide and bring them to justice.**

**DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,**

**22.** In August, I had the honour of presiding over the **United Nations Security Council** for the first time in 53 years and the second time in our nation's history.

**23.** Historic milestones were achieved as **Council Members** acknowledged the urgent need for Reform and emphasised Africa's untenable underrepresentation.

**24.** Thank you all for amplifying my Government's message and for your stellar coverage of Sierra Leone's August presidency.

**25.** The **Source Newspaper** heralded this moment on its front page: ***“Diplomatic history in the making....Bio sets to Reform UN Security Council.”***

**26.** As the **Irish Poet and Playwright** once said, ***“The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it.”***

**27.** Tonight, I implore each of you to sustain the advocacy for Reform through your respective media platforms and outlets so that together, we can rewrite the history of the **UN Security Council** with increased African representation.

## **LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

- 28.** At the end of September, I was proud to witness the signing of the monumental **US\$480 million Energy Compact between the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the Government of Sierra Leone** – the single largest per capita investment by **MCC** in the subregion.
- 29.** It is pertinent to note that in 2017, the highest score achieved on the **MCC Control of Corruption Indicator** was 49%.

**30.** Under this **SLPP Government** and my leadership, **for seven consecutive years — 2018 to 2024** — we have passed the **MCC Control of Corruption Indicator above 70% and as high as 83%.**

**31.** I was delighted to see overwhelming praise in the newspapers for the signing of the **MCC Compact**, with the **Watch Newspaper** proclaiming on its front page that it was a ***“Historic win for Sierra Leoneans.”***

## **DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,**

**32.** This year, we also commemorated the first anniversary of my flagship programme — **FEED SALONE** — with remarkable progress.

**33.** In just 12 months, we have successfully mobilised over **US\$1 billion** in resources, secured key partnerships, invested in critical infrastructure, expanded rice cultivation to over 600,000 hectares, introduced 4,800 hectares of new cacao varieties, introduced US\$28 million in agriculture financing, completed our first national soil



survey in 40 years and reduced the import bill for rice, onions, eggs and chicken, saving over US\$20 million in foreign exchange.

**34.** The **FEED SALONE** initiative is not a quick fix. It is a comprehensive long-term program designed to stimulate economic growth, create job opportunities, and ensure food security for everyone.

**35.** I am optimistic that in the coming years, we will transform these statistics and reshape the narrative within the agriculture sector.

**36. FRIENDS**, throughout this year, numerous issues have caught the media's attention, dominating various front pages.

**37.** One prominent topic has been the recent **Budget and Economic Policy Statement** for the **Financial Year 2025**, which outlines our fiscal strategy and key economic initiatives for the year.

**38.** This year, we have made significant progress in prudent economic management, instilling confidence in citizens about our country's financial stability.

**39.** We have expanded the economy, massively reduced inflation, improved the trade balance, increased total merchandise exports, and stabilised the exchange rate.

## **DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,**

**40.** Six years on, our friends in the media continue to be very interested in my official international travels.

**41.** Let it go on the record that my official missions are not for pleasure. I do not enjoy travelling overseas. I would rather be at my farm in my village, Tihun.

**42.** However, my trips are always fruitful and have resulted in record resource mobilisation and strategic partnerships for our nation. **(Abeg duya make “We Yone Newspaper” or “Cocorioko.Net” publish this breaking news headlines tomorrow)**

**43.** Notably, this year, I secured a **new IMF Economic and Financial Programme under the Extended Credit Facility worth approximately US\$253 million.**

**44.** This new programme will pave the way for another **IMF Programme** under the **Resilience and Sustainability Facility**, ranging from **US\$207 million to US\$415 million**.

**45.** Additionally, I signed the landmark **US\$480 Million MCC Energy Compact**.

**46.** I mobilised **US\$800 million** pledges from Development Partners to support the **FEED SALONE PROGRAMME** and energy transition, along with a **US\$100 million** pledge from the

**African Development Bank** to support the development of rice clusters.

**47. Mr SLAJ President, please “Iverify” my resource mobilisation efforts from my travelling before I proceed.**

## **DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

**48.** Under my leadership, we have achieved significant advancements through progressive legal reforms that enhance, rather than hinder journalistic work, ensuring that journalists can operate without the fear of reprisal or censorship.

**49.** Our achievements have been reflected in our high scores in press freedom rankings and governance scorecards.



**50.** For instance, Sierra Leone **scored 91% for freedom of information in the MCC scorecard FY25** and made significant progress in press freedom, moving up from the 74<sup>th</sup> position in 2023 to the 64<sup>th</sup> spot out of 180 countries in 2024.

**51.** My second-term agenda for the media is centred around media development and development communication.

**52.** My Government, through the **Ministry of Information and Civic Education**, will roll out media-related programmes focusing on **four intertwined areas: effectiveness, sustainability, innovation and funding.**

**53.** The foundation for this was laid in 2022 with the first-ever **Media Viability And Investment Conference** held in Africa and the subregion.

**54.** This effort greatly benefited the media landscape in Sierra Leone, where seven recommendations were made.

**55.** My Government is at an advanced stage of fulfilling its commitment to **Recommendation One**, which states that ***“The Government of Sierra Leone should continue to show the political will necessary to drive media market reforms.”***

**56.** Tonight, I am pleased to announce that the **National Media Policy** has been validated and is awaiting **Cabinet** approval, and the consultant for the **Digital Migration** broadcasting has been contracted to proceed with the **Migration Roadmap Plan.**

**57.** Furthermore, **Recommendation Six** states, ***“Government and Development Partners should commit to a National Fund For Public Interest Media (NaFPIM-SL)”***.

**58.** I am informed that the Fund received its initial support from the **International Fund for Public Interest Media**, which was **US\$99,000** last year.

**59.** Additionally, **US\$50,000** has been committed to support the **Public Interest Media** initiatives in Sierra Leone through the Fund.

**60.** Let me reaffirm my Government's commitment to disbursing the matching grant to enhance the **National Fund for Public Interest Media in Sierra Leone.**

**61.** My Government will continue to engage with Development Partners to secure complementary support for the Fund and to

help coordinate the efforts of international actors.

**62. FRIENDS**, I also recognise that advertising remains a significant hurdle for the media.

**63.** Therefore, consistent with **Recommendation Five**, the **Independent Media Commission**, through the **Ministry of Information and Civic Education**, has drafted a **National Policy on Advertising**, which is awaiting Cabinet consideration.

## **DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,**

**64.** Over the past six years, I have faithfully fulfilled my promise not only on the annual subvention to the **Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ)** but have also significantly increased this support.

**65.** In **2020**, we allocated **Le 200 million old leones**, which was raised to **Le 500 million old leones** in **2021** and further to **Le 700 million old leones** in **2022**.

**66.** For **2023** and **2024**, my administration provided **SLAJ** with a total of **1.5 billion old leones in subventions.**

**67.** Therefore, in line with my commitment from the **2023 Manifesto** to sustain support for **SLAJ**, I am pleased to announce that for **the financial year 2025, the annual SLAJ subvention will increase to Le 2.5 billion old leones.**



## **LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

**68.** A robust media landscape cannot be built in isolation.

**69.** This shared goal, in which we all play a crucial part, requires a concerted and collaborative effort among all stakeholders, including **the Government, Media Professionals, Civil Society Organisations, and the General Public.**

**70.** We must continue to foster constructive partnerships because your insights, expertise and perspectives are invaluable.

**71.** Tonight, I urge you all to forge networks of collaboration, fostering synergies that will strengthen the profession.

**72.** By standing together, supporting each other, and promoting responsible journalism, we can collectively navigate the challenges we face in this age of information overload and misinformation.

**73.** In this digital era, where information is abundant and often misleading, your role as a journalist in verifying and disseminating accurate information is more important than ever.

**74.** As you navigate these complexities, several guiding principles should steer you as professional journalists:

**I. RESPONSIBILITY:** You must be responsible stewards of public trust.

**II. ETHICS:** Journalists' ethical conduct has never been more important. Upholding integrity, fairness, and respect in reporting will ensure the media remains a respected voice in society.

**III. TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING:**

Continuous professional development must remain a priority.

**IV. SUPPORT FOR INVESTIGATIVE**

**JOURNALISM:** Independent investigative journalism is crucial to uncovering truths

that may be inconvenient for some but necessary for the public good.

As a Government, we will work to create an environment that protects investigative journalists and ensures they can conduct their work without fear of retaliation.

**75. Tonight, let me also take a moment to celebrate the incredible contributions of many of you who have dedicated your lives to the noble profession of journalism.**

**76. Thank you to the REPORTERS who have covered critical issues, the EDITORS who painstakingly ensure quality journalism, and the BROADCASTERS who convey the pulse of the nation.**

**77.** Your efforts are immensely significant and resonate deeply with our citizens' challenges and triumphs.

**78.** As we gather tonight, let us commit to strengthening press freedom as a shared goal, understanding that a free press is not

only a privilege but also a responsibility we carry together.

**79. Press freedom is not merely a destination; it is an ongoing journey.** It demands our constant attention, reflection, and commitment.

**80.** This is because tomorrow's press landscape will be shaped by the decisions we make today.

## CONCLUSION

**81.** In closing, **DISTINGUISHED GUESTS**, let me extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for being here tonight.

**82.** Let us remember that together, we are stronger.

**83.** Together, we can contribute to a vibrant media landscape that uplifts our society, fosters democracy, and enriches the lives of all Sierra Leoneans.



**84.** I wish you all a wonderful evening.

**85.** Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year  
in advance.

**86.** Let us toast to our Unity, Freedom and  
Justice!

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!**