



**“ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND AUTOMATION:
PRESERVING HUMAN AGENCY IN A WORLD OF
AUTOMATION,”**

**KEYNOTE STATEMENT ON THE ANNUAL CELEBRATION
OF EDUCATION WEEK (ACE WEEK) 2025**

BY

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

AT

MAKENI, SIERRA LEONE

FRIDAY, 24TH JANUARY 2025

Madam First Lady;

Ministers of Government;

Honorable Members of Parliament;

Revered Paramount Chiefs, local, and community
leaders;

His Lordship the Mayor of Makeni;

The esteemed leadership of educational institutions
and agencies;

Our hardworking educators and ever striving

Students;

Distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen;

Good afternoon.

1. As we celebrate the International Day of Education 2025, permit me to draw your attention to the anecdote that "**Destroying any nation does not require the use of atomic bombs or the use of long-range missiles. It only requires lowering the quality of education.**"

2. "The result is that: Patients die at the hands of doctors. Buildings collapse at the hands of engineers. Money is lost at the hands of economists and accountants."

3. "The collapse of education is the collapse of the nation."

4. It is in view of this cautionary tale and the compelling data on the correlation between improved education and poverty reduction that my government prioritised education.

5. So, we must collectively nurture, promote, strengthen, and safeguard education to drive our development.

6. We believe that every region bears equal responsibility and derives equal benefit when the next generation of Sierra Leoneans receives quality education.

7. We therefore believe that the Annual Education Week Celebration cannot be confined to a single location or region.

8. To foster nationwide participation, we believe the hosting of education week should be rotated across different regions of our beloved country.

9. Every district and community should feel like they are an integral part of our national education agenda.

10. This year, it is a real honour to be hosted in the heart of the Northern Province, at the foot of the beautiful Wusum Hills, Makeni.

11. This is a district renowned for its rich cultural heritage, its historical significance, and its tangible contributions to national development.

12. Makeni is also home to several distinguished academic institutions that have produced some of the best brains in our nation.

13. It is a dynamic and thriving landscape for progressive young people and academic excellence.

14. With this celebration being hosted here, we are clear that quality education must be and is accessible to all, regardless of geographic location and other disparities that are informed by the rhetoric of division.

15. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, my government's vision for education is clear.

16. Education is the catalyst for national transformation and the key to unlocking the full potential of our citizens.

17. It is essential for inclusive development and it will help bridge socio-economic gaps and foster sustainable growth in the 21st century.

18. Every Sierra Leonean, regardless of age, gender, or geographic location, must have equal access to high-quality and relevant education.

19. We should continue to facilitate transitions from foundational learning, basic and senior secondary education to technical training, vocational skills development, and higher education.

20. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education must strengthen collaboration to ensure that all learners advance through a well-structured and cohesive educational framework.

21. Our vision is to create an education system that empowers students with the tools they need to succeed in an ever-evolving world.

22. This means not only building schools and training teachers but also designing curricula that are aligned with the needs of the modern economy.

23. We must equip our students with skills that will make them competitive in the global workforce.
24. They must be equipped to balance ingenuity with critical thinking while moderating those with the values of integrity and social responsibility.
25. In this transformative era of education in our country, our priority is to empower people with the ethical use of machines.
26. We should work together to build a future where technology enhances human potential, fosters inclusive growth, and drives sustainable development for all Sierra Leoneans.

27. In addition to a revitalised focus on STEM education especially for girls, my government has established the Ministry of Communication, Technology, and Innovation alongside the Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation to lead the much-needed digital transformation of our nation.

28. Our strategic initiative is situated within a people-centred nexus that ensures that technological advancements are harnessed to empower citizens, enhance service delivery, and drive inclusive economic growth.

29. Additionally, my government has expanded digital infrastructure and promoted technological and digital literacy.

30. This has been prioritized in order to lay the foundation for a digital-future-ready Sierra Leone, where technology serves as a tool for progress and national development.
31. Our push in line with this year's theme is to ensure that development in artificial intelligence and automation serves as an enabler of growth rather than as a force that diminish human dignity, autonomy, and purpose.
32. The essence of our progress as a nation must be rooted in the empowerment of our people.
33. As machines evolve in intelligence, we, as human beings, must continue to shape our own destiny and drive the future of Sierra Leone.

34. Technology should not be viewed as a replacement for human ingenuity but as a catalyst for innovation, efficiency, and inclusive development.
35. AI and automation have the potential to enhance productivity, streamline services, and open new frontiers in education, healthcare, agriculture, and industry.
36. However, if not strategically integrated, they can also disrupt labour markets, widen inequalities, and erode the fundamental human agency that defines our society.

37. This is why my government remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering an education system that prioritises not just technical knowledge, but also adaptability, creativity, and critical thinking.
38. These are skills that will enable our youth to harness the opportunities presented by AI while mitigating its risks.
39. As a nation, we must invest in digital literacy, ethical AI frameworks, and policies that promote responsible innovation.
40. Our education system must equip students not just to use technology, but to create, manage, and govern it in ways that align with our national values and development goals.

41. By embedding AI literacy into our curricula and promoting interdisciplinary learning, we will ensure that the next generation is prepared to lead in an increasingly automated world.
42. However, human agency must remain at the core of technological progress.
43. Artificial intelligence is no longer a concept of the future—it is here, shaping industries, economies and societies.
44. We must harness the power of AI and automation to improve our education sector rather than fear their impact.
45. AI has the potential to revolutionize the way we teach and learn by personalizing education to meet the unique needs of every student.

46. It can help educators identify learning gaps, offer tailored support and optimize lesson plans to enhance the overall learning experience.
47. Moreover, AI-driven automation can reduce administrative burdens on educators, allowing them to focus on what they do best—teaching and mentoring our students.
48. By integrating technology into our learning environment, we can ensure that our teachers have the support they need to provide high-quality education.
49. This will allow our teachers to foster a more interactive and engaging learning environment for students.

50. However, we must also recognize that AI and automation are merely tools— that should be used to amplify human potential, not replace it.

51. The true power of education lies in human ingenuity, creativity, and critical thinking.

52. Our mission is to ensure that technology serves humanity, rather than diminishing its role in shaping our society.

53. My government also recognizes the importance of inclusivity in education, ensuring that no learner is left behind, including those with disabilities.

54. To this end, we are committed to integrating assistive technologies into our education system, providing students with special needs the tools they require to thrive.
55. From screen readers and speech-to-text software to adaptive learning devices and digital braille tools, these innovations will enable all learners to access tailored quality education.
56. By embracing assistive technologies, we reaffirm our dedication to an inclusive education system.
57. We also know that it will empower every child to reach their full potential and actively contribute to society.

58. At the core of our education system are our dedicated educators – our teachers, lecturers and administrative staff.
59. They are the unsung heroes who shape the minds of our future leaders, innovators and change-makers.
60. Their impact goes far beyond the classroom—it is they who ignite curiosity, inspire ambition and cultivate the values that define our society.
61. While AI and automation are reshaping education, we must not lose sight of the human element—our educators.
62. They are the cornerstone of knowledge transfer and mentorship.

63. My government remains steadfast in its commitment to the professional development of teachers, with a particular focus on those serving in rural and hard-to-reach areas.

64. We recognize that the strength of our education system lies in the hands of our educators, and as such, we will continue to prioritize their training and capacity-building.

65. Through targeted teacher training programs, we will equip them with the tools to seamlessly integrate technology into their classrooms and create a dynamic and inclusive learning environments.

66. By investing in our educators, we are investing in the future of Sierra Leone.

67. Every child, regardless of their geographic location or socioeconomic background, deserves access to high-quality education.

68. Strengthening teacher capacity ensures that no student is left behind.

69. The past few years have demonstrated the need for adaptability in our education system.

70. The COVID-19 pandemic tested our capacity to adapt, but we emerged stronger, more innovative, and more committed than ever before.

71. Moving forward, we must establish a robust, flexible, and future-proof education system—one that can withstand shocks from global disruptions, economic shifts and technological changes.
72. Sustainability must also be at the heart of our educational reforms.
73. We must integrate environmentally sustainable practices into our education policies.
74. Our youth should be equipped with knowledge and skills that align with the evolving global economy.
75. This includes providing training in critical areas such as digital literacy, data analytics, and emerging technologies to prepare our students for the jobs of the future.

76. We must remember that only our collective effort can create an education system that is inclusive, innovative, adaptive, and impactful.
77. There is strength in unity, and together, we must ensure that no child is left behind in this rapidly evolving technological era.
78. Education remains the most powerful tool for empowerment, progress, and social transformation.
79. My government has made education a top priority, demonstrating this commitment through substantial investments in the sector.
80. However, investment alone is not enough.

81. We must protect and sustain these efforts, ensuring they translate into meaningful outcomes for our people.

82. By strengthening accountability, enhancing quality, and fostering innovation, we can maximize the impact of our investments.

83. Education is not merely an expenditure—it is the foundation for a prosperous, equitable, and resilient future.

84. Let us unite in our commitment to innovation and collective progress.

85. As we navigate this new era of automation and artificial intelligence, let us work relentlessly to preserve human agency.

86. Let us continue to invest in our people, nurture their talents, and create an environment where every Sierra Leonean can rise to their fullest potential.

87. The future of our nation depends on the choices we make today—let us choose education, innovation and collective progress.

Thank you for your kind attention