



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

BY

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

AT THE

**PRESENTATION OF THE AWARDS OF
AFRICAN HEFORSHE CHAMPION OF THE YEAR
AWARD 2024 AND THE PRESIDENTIAL AFRICAN
INTELLIGENCE AWARD 2024**

SATURDAY 22ND FEBRUARY 2025

STATE HOUSE, FREETOWN

SIERRA LEONE

- THE HONOURABLE VICE PRESIDENT,
- HER EXCELLENCY, FORMER PRESIDENT OF MALAWI, AND MY SISTER, DR JOYCE BANDA,
- MADAM FIRST LADY,
- RT. HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT,
- THE HONOURABLE CHIEF JUSTICE,
- MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT,
- THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON, NEKOTECH CENTER OF EXCELLENCE, HER EXCELLENCY DR PRINCESS ASIE KABUKI OCANSEY,
- THE DEAN OF THE DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR CORPS,
- THE UNITED NATIONS RESIDENT COORDINATOR,
- DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
- A VERY GOOD MORNING TO YOU ALL!

1. I am profoundly honoured to receive the **African HeForShe Champion of the Year Award—2024** and the First **Presidential African Intelligence Award—2024**.
2. Both awards recognise our work in promoting women's socio-economic empowerment and girl-child education, especially in STEM.

- 3.** These two awards are not just personal honours but a testament to the collective effort of our team and the citizens in advancing education, gender equality, and women's empowerment in Sierra Leone.
- 4.** The awards are also gratifying because they come from two distinguished women trailblazers whose work is well-documented and globally recognised in these areas.

5. **I accept these awards with immense gratitude and humility, fully aware that our job is unfinished.**

6. Sierra Leone's journey towards gender equality has been one of commitment and transformative action.

7. We have recognised that **gender equity is not merely a moral imperative but a fundamental driver of national development, social cohesion, and economic progress.**

8. When we empower women and girls, we empower entire communities and unlock our nation's full potential.
9. My Government has championed gender inclusion through deliberate policy interventions, legislative reforms, and grassroots engagement.
10. We have enacted progressive laws, such as the **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act**, which ensures increased women's representation in leadership and decision-making roles.

11. We have increased access to education for girls, enhanced support for women entrepreneurs, and strengthened measures to combat gender-based violence.

12. These are not just policies but pathways to a more just and equitable society.

13. However, while celebrating progress, **we recognise that the road ahead remains long and demanding.**

14. The call for gender equality is not a task for women alone. It requires THE UNWAVERING COMMITMENT OF MEN AND BOYS AS ALLIES IN THIS MOVEMENT.

15. HeForShe is more than a campaign — it is a clarion call for all of us to break barriers, challenge biases, and foster an environment where women and men stand together as equal partners in shaping our collective future.

16. Together, we can make a significant difference.

17. I dedicate this award to every girl who dares to dream beyond societal limitations, every woman who strives against the odds, and every man who believes in and advocates for gender equality.

18. This recognition fuels our determination to build a Sierra Leone where gender justice is not aspirational but a lived reality for all.

19. As I receive these prestigious continental honours today, I want to reiterate my unwavering support for the **HeForShe movement** and **Human Capital Development**.

20. I will continue to advocate for policies that uplift and empower women because when women succeed, nations thrive.

21. Let us collectively amplify women's voices, protect their rights, and create spaces for their leadership.

22. Sierra Leone and Africa's progress depends on our ability to harness the strengths of all our citizens, regardless of gender.

23. Your Excellency, Dr Joyce Banda, thank you so much for your tireless efforts towards telling the next generation of women that their dreams are valid and leading an intergenerational exchange of batons among women leaders.

24. Your Excellency, Princess Dr Ocansey,

thank you for your work in legal migration and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Your efforts to equip our young people for the jobs of the future are commendable.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**25. In the spirit of HeForShe and the ideals of**

Human Capital Development, I invite each one of you to join me in the laudable quest for universal access to education and gender equity in all spheres of life.

26. Let us walk hand-in-hand toward a future where gender equality is the norm, where every person has the opportunity to thrive, and where human capital is our most prized asset.

27. Your efforts are invaluable in our collective journey towards a more just and equitable society.

28. WHEN WOMEN WIN, WE ALL WIN; WHEN WOMEN ACHIEVE, EVERYONE BENEFITS.

29. Thank you once again for these Awards.

30. God bless you all, and thank you all for your presence today.