



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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

AT THE

**INAUGURAL JULIUS MAADA BIO LEADERSHIP
COLLOQUIUM**

MAY 12, 2025

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE

**THEME: FROM VISION TO IMPACT – THE PEOPLE-
CENTRED LEADERSHIP MODEL**

- THE HONOURABLE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, DR MOHAMMED
JULDEH JALLOH,
- YOUR EXCELLENCY, FORMER VICE PRESIDENT
OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA,
PROFESSOR YEMI OSINBAJO,
- THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT,
- THE CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF AND MEMBERS
OF THE ARMED FORCES,
- YOUR EXCELLENCIES AMBASSADORS, AND
MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC AND
CONSULAR CORPS,

- **MADAM FIRST LADY,**
- **GOVERNMENT MINISTERS AND THEIR DEPUTIES,**
- **OUR REVERED PARAMOUNT CHIEFS,**
TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS,
- **MEMBERS OF THE PRESS,**
- **INVITED GUESTS,**
- **MY FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS,**
- **DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN**
- **A VERY GOOD MORNING TO YOU ALL!**

I. OPENING REMARKS

- 1.** Esteemed Guests, Thought Leaders, and Fellow Citizens of Sierra Leone, **I welcome you to our first Leadership Colloquium with deep gratitude.**

- 2.** As we gather today to explore the principles of effective leadership and governance, I am also conscious that this date — **May 12, 2025 — marks my sixty-first year of life.**

3. In the relentless service of our nation, personal milestones can pass almost unnoticed.

4. However, I have come to view birthdays not just as markers of time, but as sacred moments in life's continuous journey; **moments when we pause, reflect on lessons learned, and look forward to new horizons.**

5. Today, I want to reflect on the formative experiences that have shaped my beliefs, the strong connections of duty and hope that motivate our work, and the call to service that encourages each of us to turn our vision into a lasting impact for the people we serve.

II. FROM SOLDIER TO STATESMAN: A JOURNEY SHAPED BY THE PEOPLE

6. **LADIES AND GENTLEMEN**, my path to public office was fully shaped by the people.

7. As a young soldier answering the call to duty during one of the darkest chapters in our nation's history, **I learned that leadership might begin in crisis, but it must endure beyond it.**

8. Every negotiation with political and military leaders, and every conversation with concerned civilians, taught me one immutable truth: **leadership is not conferred by rank or title, but by the bond of trust between those who lead and those they serve.**

9. My encounters with farmers in the provinces, market women in Freetown's bustling stalls, and teachers in remote classrooms shaped my understanding of governance as a profound responsibility toward human dignity.

III. THE FAMILY AS THE CRADLE OF LEADERSHIP

10. However, before any uniform or office, my first lessons in leadership were learned at home.

11. The family is the foundation in which our earliest ideals are formed.

12. There is no single definition of family, nor is leadership tethered to age, gender, or social status.

**13. Leadership, I discovered, is everywhere
leaders choose to serve.**

**14. My mother, of blessed memory, was resilient,
God-fearing, and unyielding in her values.**

15. She steered our household through hardships
after my father's early passing.

16. Through her example of honesty, hard work,
and unshakeable faith, **she taught me that
true authority grows from sacrifice and trust.**

17. My late elder sister Agnes also exemplified leadership; her sacrifice of personal comfort to ensure my education remains one of my greatest privileges.

18. From them, I learned that the foundations of leadership do not rest in public office but in the quiet acts of love and courage that uphold families and communities.

19. They taught me how leadership flourishes outside traditional corridors of power.

20. In classrooms and fields, in marketplaces and hospital wards, **women across Sierra Leone have risen as architects of progress, often without recognition or reward.**

21. Their resilience reminds us that **nation-building demands the inclusion of women's wisdom, their visions, and their voices.**

IV. LEADERSHIP AS A CRUCIBLE: TRIALS, PREPARATION, AND INNOVATION

22. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, in my sixty-one years of life, I have come to realise that leaders are not born fully developed.

23. Leaders are shaped by trials that test their resolve, by preparation that sharpens their purpose, and by innovation that expands their vision.

24. From the military barracks to the State House,

I have witnessed leadership transformation through adversity, the rigours of training, the crucible of conflict, and the demands of governance.

25. At every stage, I relied on two key principles:

(1) the importance of foresight in anticipating both the immediate challenges and those that lie ahead, and **(2)** the courage to embrace innovation, even when it disrupts the familiar.

V. WHAT LEADERSHIP MEANS: A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION

26. Leadership is, among other things, **the art of awakening in others the desire to serve their fellow human.**

27. Leadership is a personal journey of self-discovery that finds its fullest expression in acts of compassion, justice, and courage.

28. True leadership transcends the confines of the title or station.

29. It stands as a living testament to our shared humanity, a bond of trust that unites hearts and minds in the pursuit of the common good.

30. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I would like to dwell briefly on **FOUR IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF LEADERSHIP THAT I HAVE LEARNT:**

I. THE FIRST IS “SERVICE WITHOUT TITLE”

31. Leadership begins in humble places: in the midnight vigil of a nurse tending the sick, in the steady hands of a miner delving into the earth’s depths, in the tireless journeys of a motorcyclist linking remote villages, in the patient guidance of a mother who gathers

her children to read beneath a fading lamp light.

- 32. Service without the need for a title or recognition is the truest measure of influence — quiet, steadfast, and radiant with compassion.**

II.THE SECOND IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF LEADERSHIP IS “EDUCATION”

- 33. Education is the key that unlocks the mind’s horizon.**

34. It kindles curiosity, empowers innovation, and forges the intellectual tools with which we build our collective future.

35. By nourishing the mind, we cultivate the seeds of discovery and resilience that no storm can uproot.

III. THE THIRD ELEMENTS ARE FAITH, HUMILITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY AS FOUNDATIONS OF SERVICE

- 36.** At the heart of my philosophy lies a profound conviction: **ALL THAT I AM — AND ALL THAT I ACHIEVE — IS A GIFT FROM GOD.**
- 37.** As our **Distinguished Guest of Honour, Professor Yemi Osinbajo**, reminded us in 2017, **“There is no wisdom of man that can change men or change nations; it is the power and wisdom of God that can.”**

38. Yet **FAITH** alone does not work miracles. It is the bedrock upon which we build our labour, the compass that guides us through moral uncertainty.

39. **HUMILITY** tempers our ambition, reminding us of our limitations.

40. **ACCOUNTABILITY** binds us to the promise that we serve not ourselves but the people who place their trust in us.

- 41.** My daily reflection on my roles as father, former soldier, teacher, business man and now as President keeps me mindful that **leadership is, above all, an act of stewardship.**

**IV. THE FOURTH AND FINAL LEADERSHIP
ELEMENT IS TRUST AND COLLECTIVE
POTENTIAL**

- 42.** Human progress is born of shared purpose.

43. Trust is the invisible fabric that knits individuals into a community, transforming different dreams into a unified vision.

44. When we place confidence in one another's goodness and capability, we unleash a collective energy far greater than any solitary ambition.

45. In that unity of hearts and minds, a nation finds its deepest strength.

VI. BUILDING A NATION: VISION FOR SIERRA

LEONE'S FUTURE

46. As the first democratically elected Head of State born after our independence, I carry the weighty responsibility of charting a course for a nation still in its adolescence.

47. Nation-building is neither abstract nor immediate; it requires the patient labour of system-builders who think beyond the five-year horizon of election cycles.

48. Our future must be anchored in core African values: **reverence for the wisdom of our elders paired with the courage to innovate for tomorrow.**

49. From the hands that till our fields to the miners deep underground; from teachers shaping young minds to civil servants quietly keeping our institutions functional, every Sierra Leonean contributes to our collective destiny.

VII. PEOPLE AS PILLARS

50. Leadership means service, and true service often goes unseen.

51. I recall a young female professional asking me during one of my early political campaigns whether I truly needed the presidency to make a difference in Sierra Leone.

52. That question has haunted and inspired me ever since. **SERVICE REQUIRES NO TITLE.**

53. Our doctors, nurses, security forces, bin collectors, motor riders, farmers, and market women are the silent heroes whose dedication sustains our daily lives.

54. They teach us that **leadership is measured not by fame or authority but by the impact we have on others.**

55. If we, as a nation, learn to honour every act of service, no matter how small, we lay the groundwork for enduring unity and shared purpose.

56. Service without title demands humility and compassion.

57. We must remember that the loudest voices are seldom the sole custodians of wisdom or power.

58. The quiet dedication and work of countless nameless men and women is the true engine of social cohesion and national progress.

VIII. EDUCATION: NOURISHING MINDS FOR ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

59. Education is the clearest path to empowerment.

60. Whether acquired in schools, in workshops, or in the marketplaces of life, education broadens our horizons and equips us to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

61. From my First Term's Free Quality School

Education program — allocating twenty-two percent of our national budget to learning — to the revitalisation of technical and vocational training, **our administration has invested in human capital development because no weapon is as potent against poverty and ignorance as knowledge.**

62. A nation that feeds its people but starves its intellect betrays its own potential; we must nourish minds as purposefully as we cultivate crops.

**IX. TRUST AND COLLECTIVE POTENTIAL: FORGING
UNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY**

63. Leadership rests upon trust both in the integrity of institutions and especially in the collective potential of our people.

64. Trust is born when citizens believe their grievances will be heard, their rights protected, and their aspirations supported.

65. Sierra Leone's past has shown us the tragic cost of silenced voices and unspoken truths.

66. Healing these divisions requires more than grand gestures; it demands robust mechanisms for dialogue, reconciliation, and justice.

67. These mechanisms persist beyond the term of any individual President.

68. Only when we build bridges of understanding across ethnic, religious, and regional lines can we claim the unity that undergirds sustainable peace.

X. ACKNOWLEDGING FAULTS: THE ROLE OF HUMILITY IN LEADERSHIP

69. Leadership, like faith, requires forgiveness:

recognising missteps without allowing regret, anger, or a desire for revenge.

70. As God extends grace to us, so must we extend it to one another.

71. I engage in daily introspection: How can I be a better man, a more attentive father, a more compassionate friend, and a more servant-hearted president?

72. This humble pursuit of improvement, I believe, is a true measure of character.

XI. INCLUSIVE INSTITUTION-BUILDING AND **DEMOCRATIC DEEPENING**

73. Nations prosper not by the whims of rulers, but by the strength of institutions that outlast them.

74. Democracy is not merely the casting of ballots; it is a living system of checks and balances, of civic spaces where citizens speak and are heard with dignity.

75. From an independent judiciary to a credible electoral commission, from decentralisation that empowers local councils to anti-corruption bodies that hold the powerful to account, our administration has sought to fortify the frameworks that safeguard liberty.

76. We have welcomed criticism, protected freedom of expression, and broadened participation for the marginalised, knowing that the true test of leadership is the resilience of our institutions under pressure.

XII. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: UNLEASHING HALF THE NATION'S POTENTIAL

77. A country cannot flourish when half its people are constrained by outdated norms.

78. Women's leadership is not a concession to be granted — it is a right to be affirmed.

79. Through legislative reforms tackling gender-based violence, financial windows dedicated to women entrepreneurs, and targeted scholarships for girls in STEM, we

have sought to tear down barriers that have long dimmed the potential of our women.

80. When women rise, families stabilise, communities prosper, and nations advance.

81. As we forge our country's future, **we must ensure that every woman stands not at the margins but at the very centre of our collective endeavour.**

XIII. HEALING SCARS AND DIVISIONS

82. Sierra Leone has borne the weight of deep divisions — political, social, regional, and cultural.

83. I know that, in my own journey to this office, I have at times stumbled and offended.

84. Yet true leadership neither shrinks from error nor is shackled by it.

85. Healing starts with sincere dialogue and the bravery to reconcile, creating connections instead of walls of protection.

86. When we focus on our differences instead of building connections that go beyond them, we often pay a steep price.

87. However, achieving unity is neither quick nor easy; it requires durable and thoughtful solutions that ensure every citizen has just recourse in times of conflict.

88. Our progress is a work in motion.

89. We have come far — **from colonial subjugation through civil strife to the hard-won triumphs of democracy** — but miles remain before we can claim true healing as a nation.

90. We must honour those who sacrificed for our freedoms, recognise the tireless efforts of soldiers and civilians alike, and commit anew to rooting out injustice wherever it survives.

XIV. NATIONALISM AND LEGACY:

CULTIVATING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP

91. True patriotism transcends flags and anthems.

92. It finds expression in every act of civic responsibility.

93. An army and police force may protect our borders, but trust in institutions and in each other strengthens our social compact.

94. I honour the veterans who sacrificed for our democracy, the civil society champions who guard its freedoms, and the everyday citizens who fulfil their duties with integrity.

95. My hope is that **future generations of Sierra Leoneans continue to regard their citizenship as a solemn trust to build, to serve, and to preserve our heritage.**

XV. CULTIVATING FUTURE LEADERS: MENTORSHIP
AND THE LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION PRIZE

96. I think of this Colloquium as a living laboratory for leadership.

97. My birthday wish is to celebrate, each year, the emergence of new leaders: mentors and mentees bound by shared purpose, pioneers forging uncharted paths, thinkers whose ideas will carry our nation forward.

98. Through the **Julius Maada Bio Leadership and Innovation Prize**, we will honour those whose service exemplifies the pillars of leadership.

99. My hope is that their examples kindle aspirations in the heart of every Sierra Leonean.

XVI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

100. DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I am not one for grand celebrations of myself.

101. On this day of personal reflection, **I challenge all Sierra Leoneans to embrace leadership in their respective spheres of life, whether in the household or boardroom, classroom or clinic, field or factory.**

102. Let us recommit to unity forged in diversity, to institutions built on trust, and to service offered without expectation of reward.

103. May our people-centred leadership light the path toward a future radiant with promise for generations yet unborn, for a resilient nation and for our shared humanity.

104. I appreciate everyone for taking the time to celebrate with me today at the first JULIUS MAADA BIO LEADERSHIP COLLOQUIUM.

105. May God bless you all. May God bless our beloved nation, and may God bless the people of Sierra Leone.

106. I wish every Sierra Leonean born on May 12 a Happy Birthday.

107. Thank you all for your kind attention.