



**NATIONAL ADDRESS**

**BY HIS EXCELLENCY JULIUS MAADA BIO,**

**PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA**

**LEONE**

**ON THE OCCASION OF**

**THE FIRST NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE**

**SUNDAY, 18<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2026**

**FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE**

1. My Fellow Sierra Leoneans, at home and across the world, today our nation stands still. We pause together to remember. We pause to honour. We pause to reflect.
2. For the first time in our history, we gather on a single day to remember our civil war and the heavy price our country paid for peace.
3. From this day forward, **January 18<sup>th</sup>** belongs to every Sierra Leonean. It is a day of national memory, moral reflection, and shared responsibility. It is a day that calls not only for emotion, but for commitment. **We declare, with one voice: Never Again.**
4. Peace is a choice. Remembrance is how we keep it alive across generations.

## MY FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,

5. After the war was officially declared over on **January 18, 2002**, Sierra Leone chose to confront its past with honesty. We established the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** to document what happened, to give voice to victims, and to guide us towards lasting peace.
6. In its final report, **the Commission recommended that 18 January, the day the civil war was formally declared over, be observed as a National Day of Reconciliation and Remembrance.**
7. It is true that this recommendation took time to be fulfilled. For twenty-four years, this day passed without formal national observance. What matters today is that we have chosen, as a nation, not to let it pass any longer. Today, we give meaning to that recommendation.
8. **From this moment forward, January 18 is established, recognised, and honoured as the Republic of Sierra Leone National Day of Remembrance.**

9. I speak to you as **your President**, and more importantly, as a fellow Sierra Leonean who lived through the war. I speak as a former soldier who served during those painful years, and as a son, brother, father, and friend who also lost loved ones to the violence.
10. Like many families across our country, members of my own family in my hometown in Bonthe District experienced the brutality of the civil war, and some lost their lives. They were not fighters. They were ordinary people, caught in a conflict that destroyed without discrimination.
11. Like thousands of families across our land, my family still carries that pain.

## MY FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,

12. The truth must be spoken with care, and it must be spoken fully. More than 50,000 Sierra Leoneans were killed during the conflict. Entire villages were burned. Communities were uprooted. Trust was shattered.
13. Tens of thousands of our citizens were abused physically, sexually, and otherwise. Their dignity was violated, and their lives were permanently altered.
14. Thousands suffered amputations inflicted deliberately to spread terror. Many survivors continue to live with psychological wounds that silently shape their lives.
15. Millions more were forced to flee their homes. Families were driven from their communities, separated from their land, their livelihoods, and their way of life.
16. Many lived for years as internally displaced persons, moving from place to place in search of safety. And when the war ended, some never returned home. Their villages were gone, their communities dispersed, and their lives could not be rebuilt as they once were.

17. When conflict comes, it does not ask who you voted for, where you come from, or what faith you profess. It takes from everyone. It breaks the weak, and it scars the strong.
18. **To the survivors listening today, including those who were displaced and uprooted, I speak directly to you.** We acknowledge your suffering. Your strength matters. Your dignity remains a responsibility of the nation.
19. We must also be honest with ourselves. As a nation, Sierra Leoneans hurt other Sierra Leoneans. Neighbours turned against neighbours.
20. It was not only weapons that broke our trust. Our trust was also broken by fear, silence, and division. Acknowledging this truth is not about blame. It is about healing. It is about prevention.
21. Healing requires forgiveness. Forgiveness for what was done to us, forgiveness for what we did to one another, and forgiveness that frees us from being forever imprisoned by the darkest days of our history.

- 22. On this first National Day of Remembrance, I ask for forgiveness on behalf of our nation, and on behalf of our leaders, past and present.** We cannot undo what was done, but we can face it with humility, honesty, and courage.
- 23. To every victim and every survivor,** I cannot ask you to forget. I ask only that, in your own time and in your own way, our nation may find the grace to heal fully, restore dignity, and move forward together.
- 24.** War does not begin with bullets. It begins when we stop seeing one another as fellow citizens, when personal ambition and politics turn into hatred, when lies replace truth, and when intimidation becomes normal.
- 25.** This is why our **National Remembrance Day** matters.

## MY FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,

- 26.** Since the war ended in 2002, **a new generation of Sierra Leoneans has grown up.** Many did not witness the most brutal parts of that conflict. They did not see the country unravel or feel the fear that comes when law and order collapses.
- 27.** Today, many are adults, old enough to vote, to campaign, to speak publicly, and to shape the direction of our democracy.
- 28.** Those **who lived through the war** carry a different kind of knowledge. We know how quickly ordinary life can disappear.
- 29.** We know that violence does not arrive all at once. It comes in stages, through rumours presented as truth, through insults that become normal, through intimidation that is excused, and through leaders who forget that power is a duty.

30. That is why the generation that remembers must remain alert. We must recognise early warning signs, speak up, and refuse to be silent when the nation begins to drift.
31. We must also face a new reality. When the war began, we did not have social media capable of spreading dangerous rhetoric across the country in minutes.
32. Today, a message typed in a bedroom can reach the entire nation with one click. A lie can travel faster than a correction. Words that feel casual on a screen can become serious in the streets.
33. So, I ask all Sierra Leoneans, especially those active online, to weigh your words carefully. When you speak about your fellow citizens across political parties, ethnic groups, or religions, remember that they belong to this country as much as you do.

34. This is not a call for censorship. It is not a call for silence. A democracy needs criticism. Government must be held to account. But it also needs responsibility. We must check facts before we share. We must refuse incitement, even when it comes from people we support.
35. We must keep empathy in our politics, because without empathy, a nation cannot hold together. We can fight for democracy without fighting each other.
36. Responsibility does not rest only with those who remember. **To the generation that did not live through the war: you are not passive heirs of peace.**
37. You are inheriting a duty to raise standards, demand better leadership, and reject the politics of hatred and shortcuts. And as you demand better, also put in the work. Build businesses. Serve your communities.
38. Participate responsibly in public life. Strengthen the habits that keep democracy healthy: respect for the rule of law, respect for truth, and respect for those who disagree with you.

- 39.** In this way, **the two generations can keep each other in check**: one sounding the alarm when danger appears, the other pushing the nation forward by insisting on better governance.
- 40.** This is one of the purposes of this day. A **National Day of Remembrance** to bring together those who remember and those who do not. It honours those we lost. It acknowledges what we lost. And it calls on all of us to pledge that Sierra Leone will never again return to violent conflict.
- 41.** Our children bore some of the deepest scars. Many were pulled from classrooms into violence, forced to grow up too soon, and denied their childhoods. Today, many of them are adults still rebuilding lives interrupted by war.
- 42.** To **the young people of Sierra Leone**, I say this with respect: you are not inheriting peace as a gift that cannot be taken away. You are inheriting a duty. You are the custodians of a peace that others paid for with their lives.

- 43.** Let your energy be used to build, not to burn. Let your passion strengthen our nation, not be turned into a weapon against your own future.
- 44.** We remember because forgetting would be an injustice. Peace was not easily won. It required restraint and courage when anger and revenge felt close.
- 45.** Reconciliation demanded truth, accountability, and forgiveness. It did not deny what happened. It refused to be imprisoned by it. As a nation, we chose reconciliation over destruction, and dialogue over division. That choice saved Sierra Leone.
- 46.** We owe deep gratitude to the brave men and women who stood for peace and worked tirelessly to bring the war to an end.
- 47.** We honour the late President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, whose steady leadership guided our nation through the difficult path of peace negotiations.

- 48.** For me, this moment is deeply personal. I was among those who helped shape the **1996 Abidjan Peace Accord**, an early and courageous effort to silence the guns and restore democratic order.
- 49.** Today, standing as **President of a peaceful Sierra Leone**, I am reminded that the work of peace is never in vain, and that commitments made in times of conflict can, with perseverance, bear fruit for generations.

## **MY FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,**

- 50.** The same choice for peace must continue to guide how we speak, how we disagree, and how we govern. Words matter. Lies divide. Intolerance destroys.
- 51.** Peace and democracy are not promised to anyone. People work for democracy. People work to bring peace. And people must work to maintain it.
- 52.** There is no development, no prosperity, no progress without peace. This is a fact written into our history.

- 53. On this Remembrance Day, we honour all those who fought, in different ways, for our freedom and our return to democracy.**
- 54. We honour the sacrifices of our Armed Forces who defended the Republic at its weakest hour.**
- 55. We honour the soldiers from Guinea, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Ghana, Kenya, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Britain, and other nations who stood with us so that Sierra Leone could know peace.**
- 56. We remember the Civil Defence Forces who protected their communities when order collapsed.**
- 57. We honour the courage of our women who held families and communities together in the midst of chaos.**
- 58. We honour the journalists and civil society actors who spoke truth when silence was safer and refused to allow injustice to go unseen.**

- 59. We honour Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora** who carried our story beyond our borders and kept the world informed about the suffering and resilience of our people when voices at home were under threat.
- 60. We remember those whose leadership and service sustained life and hope at the community level** when the state itself was under strain, including **our traditional and religious leaders** who mediated conflict, protected the vulnerable, and preserved the moral fabric of society.
- 61. We also remember the health workers and caregivers** who treated the wounded, delivered children, and tended to trauma in conditions of great danger.
- 62. We honour the teachers** who continued to educate despite displacement and fear, safeguarding the future in the darkest of times.
- 63. We recognise those who laid down their weapons and chose disarmament and reintegration**, helping to turn violence into peace.

- 64. We also acknowledge the African and regional leaders and institutions whose mediation and solidarity helped bring our long conflict to an end.**
- 65. We remember the civilians and international workers, including charity and aid workers, who stood with Sierra Leone during our darkest hours, often risking their lives to protect the vulnerable, deliver humanitarian assistance, and uphold human dignity.**
- 66. Their solidarity mattered. It will never be forgotten.**

## MY FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,

- 67.** Remembrance is not about reopening wounds. It is about safeguarding the future. It is about understanding the true cost of war and choosing, every day, a different path.
- 68.** From this year forward, **Sierra Leone will observe National Remembrance Day every January 18 with solemnity and purpose.**
- 69.** This observance will be accompanied by a **Week of Remembrance** devoted to civic education, reflection, interfaith prayer, storytelling, and peacebuilding.
- 70.** We will teach this history not to keep pain alive, but to strengthen citizenship. We will remember, not to divide, but to bind ourselves together. This is our national promise.
- 71.** I ask families across our nation to speak honestly with their children. Remember those who were lost. Honour the survivors. Protect their dignity.

72. As we move forward, let us resolve disagreements through dialogue, not violence. Let us reject messages that divide us by tribe, region, religion, or politics.
73. Let us refuse the language that dehumanises. Let us refuse intimidation. Let us choose responsibility over rage. In a democracy, opponents are not enemies. Elections are not war. Politics does not authorise anyone to divide the nation.
74. At this moment, I ask the nation to observe a minute of silence in honour of those we lost and in commitment to the peace we must protect.

### **[ MINUTE OF SILENCE ]**

75. At this solemn moment, we turn our hearts to the Almighty God. We pray for peace for the souls of those we lost, healing for the wounded, and comfort for every family that still carries grief.
76. Grant our nation the wisdom to protect the peace we now enjoy, the humility to choose dialogue over division, and the strength to live together in justice and compassion.

77. Make us a people who protect peace in what we say and do. May Sierra Leone remain united, reconciled, and at peace. AMEN.

**MY FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,**

78. As your **President**, I pledge to continue protecting that peace, upholding reconciliation, and ensuring that the institutions of our state never again fail the people they exist to serve.

79. Peace is not something we inherited. It is something we earned through suffering and sacrifice. It is now our duty to defend it through our conduct, our institutions, and our choices.

80. We remember so that those who died did not die in vain.

81. We remember so that our children can walk to school without fear, farmers can work their land in safety, and families can sleep through the night in peace.

82. We remember so that Sierra Leone will continue to move forward as a united, democratic, and hopeful nation.
83. Our peace was a choice, not an imposition. It was nurtured from within our nation by millions of men, women, and children.
84. Our **National Day of Remembrance** honours that choice and helps sustain our peace.
85. May the souls of all who were lost rest in peace. May the survivors find healing.
86. And may God continue to bless and protect the Republic of Sierra Leone.
87. Thank you.