



PRESIDENTIAL

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ADDRESS

BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR JULIUS MAADA BIO

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

CHAIR, ECOWAS AUTHORITY OF HEADS OF STATE

AND GOVERNMENT

ON THE OCCASION OF

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026

SUNDAY, MARCH 08, 2026

FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,

CITIZENS OF THE ECOWAS REGION,

1. Today, we join the global community in commemorating **International Women’s Day 2026** under the theme, **“Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls.”**
2. This year’s theme calls on governments, institutions, and communities to dismantle the barriers that continue to deny women and girls full equality, including discriminatory laws, weak legal protections, harmful

practices, and social norms that undermine dignity and opportunity.

- 3.** It reminds us that rights must not only be declared but defended, that justice must not only exist but be accessible, and that action must not only be promised but sustained.
- 4.** For Sierra Leone, this commitment is both national and personal.
- 5.** Across our country, women sustain families, power local economies, and strengthen our democracy.

- 6.** From the farmer cultivating her land in the regions to the trader in our markets in Freetown, from the teacher shaping young minds to the judge interpreting our laws, women remain central to our national progress.

- 7.** My own life was profoundly shaped by strong women. My late mother instilled in me discipline, compassion, and a deep respect for the dignity of others.

- 8.** My elder sister, of blessed memory, was a trailblazer who embodied resilience and quiet courage.

- 9.** Their unwavering strength of character and values continue to guide my leadership and my sense of duty.

- 10.** I also speak as a father to daughters. Being a girl dad strengthens my conviction that every girl must be protected by law, treated with fairness, and given equal opportunity to thrive.

11. She must grow up with the confidence to pursue her ambitions without limitation and without fear.

12. The country we build must secure the future of our daughters as fully as it secures the future of our sons.

FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,

13. As we mark this **International Women's Day**, we do so in the first year of our **National Remembrance Day**, a solemn moment to reflect on the cost of our past and the responsibility of our present.

14. We honour the women who lost their lives during our civil war. We remember those who stood alongside the men, those who endured violence, displacement, and unimaginable hardship, and those whose suffering too often went unspoken.

15. We pay tribute to the women who held families and communities together when institutions collapsed, and to those who courageously championed reconciliation, dialogue, and peace.

16. Their sacrifices and resilience laid the foundation for the stability we are determined to preserve and strengthen today.

17. In recognition of their history, and in fulfilment of our responsibility to build a more just society, Sierra Leone has taken decisive action.

18. The **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act of 2022** marked a historic milestone in our democratic journey.

19. By guaranteeing **a minimum of 30 percent representation for women in elective and appointive positions**, we moved inclusion from aspiration to obligation and anchored equality firmly in law.

20. Today, women's representation in Parliament and across public institutions stands at its highest level in our nation's history, reflecting measurable progress in inclusive governance.

21. The **GEWE ACT** also advances economic justice by promoting equal access to employment, finance, land, and public procurement, while reinforcing the principle of equal pay for equal work.

22. These reforms are deliberate and necessary steps to dismantle structural inequality and expand opportunity.

23. We have strengthened the enforcement of laws against sexual and gender based violence and expanded survivor-centred support systems to ensure greater access to justice.

24. Violence against women is not tradition. It is an injustice. It is a crime. And it must end now.

25. We must also confront harmful practices such as child marriage and discriminatory norms that prevent girls from completing their education, developing their talents, and fulfilling their full potential.

26. Through the **Free Quality Education Programme**, more girls are remaining in school and progressing to higher levels of learning, expanding their opportunities and strengthening our national future.

27. Education remains one of the most powerful instruments of justice and long-term equality.

28. But laws alone are not enough. Equality must be upheld in our homes, enforced in our institutions, supported by our traditional and religious leaders, and practised in our workplaces.

29. I call on the men and boys of Sierra Leone and across West Africa to continue standing firmly as **HeForShe champions**.

30. Gender equality requires partnership. Protecting the rights and dignity of women strengthens families, stabilises communities, and secures our collective future.

- 31. As Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government,** I extend solidarity and warm wishes to the women and girls across our region.
- 32.** There can be no lasting peace, no credible democracy, and no sustainable economic integration in West Africa without justice for women.
- 33.** The future of our region will be determined by how fully we protect their rights and unlock their immense potential.

- 34.** The young girls of today will become the mothers, legislators, entrepreneurs, judges, innovators, and leaders of tomorrow.
- 35.** Our responsibility is to remove every barrier that stands in their way and to create an environment where their aspirations can flourish.
- 36.** A just Sierra Leone and a just West Africa are built when every woman and girl stands equal before the law and equal in opportunity.

37. We owe this not only to the women of today, but to the generations yet unborn.

38. On this **International Women's Day**, let us recommit ourselves as a nation and as a region to ensuring that **rights are not merely proclaimed but protected**, that **justice is not delayed but delivered**, and that **action is not occasional but continuous for all women and girls.**

39. I wish a meaningful and empowering **International Women's Day to all the women and girls of the ECOWAS Region.**

40. May God bless you, and may God bless the
Republic of Sierra Leone and the ECOWAS
Region.