



PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY JULIUS MAADA BIO

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

ON THE TOPIC: SIERRA LEONE'S NEXT CHAPTER OF PEACE

AND NATIONAL UNITY

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

NATIONAL UNITY AND SOCIAL COHESION CONFERENCE

2026

COMMEMORATING THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION FOR PEACE AND NATIONAL

COHESION

CONFERENCE THEME: FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION:

REBUILDING TRUST, STRENGTHENING NATIONAL UNITY

AND ADVANCING SOCIAL COHESION

MONDAY, 26TH OCTOBER 2026

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE

I. SALUTATIONS

- **THE HONOURABLE VICE PRESIDENT,**
- **YOUR EXCELLENCY, THE FORMER PRESIDENT,**
- **HONOURABLE FORMER VICE PRESIDENTS,**
- **MADAM FIRST LADY,**
- **MADAM FORMER FIRST LADY,**
- **THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT,**
- **THE HONOURABLE CHIEF JUSTICE,**
- **MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT AND SENIOR PUBLIC OFFICIALS,**
- **HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT,**
- **YOUR WORSHIP, THE MAYOR OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF FREETOWN,**
- **LEADERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF OUR POLITICAL PARTIES,**
- **REPRESENTATIVES OF ECOWAS, THE AFRICAN UNION, THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE COMMONWEALTH,**
- **THE INTERNATIONAL MORAL GUARANTORS OF THE AGREEMENT FOR NATIONAL UNITY,**

- THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, DIRECTORS AND STAFF OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION FOR PEACE AND NATIONAL COHESION,
- MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND OUR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS,
- OUR REVERED PARAMOUNT CHIEFS, TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS,
- REPRESENTATIVES OF WAR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS,
- REPRESENTATIVES OF WOMEN, YOUNG PEOPLE, PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, CIVIL SOCIETY, THE MEDIA, THE SECURITY SERVICES, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND OUR DIASPORA,
- DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,
- MY FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,
- GOOD AFTERNOON. UNA KUSHE.

II. OPENING REMARKS: THE CHAPTER WE HAVE WRITTEN

- 1.** On **18th January 2002**, Sierra Leone declared the civil war over.
- 2.** That declaration could not bring back the lives we lost or rebuild the homes that had been destroyed.
- 3. What followed was harder: the daily work of living together again.**
- 4.** Families returned to villages where they had known violence.
- 5.** Farmers went back to their fields. Neighbours who had once feared one another learned again to share the same streets and markets.
- 6.** Nearly twenty-five years later, we can see what their courage made possible.

7. We also know what remains unfinished. Some survivors still carry their wounds.
8. Some are still waiting for the help and justice they were promised. Many still grieve for those who never came home.
9. Before we speak of the future, let us remember those who were denied the chance to see it.
10. **Please rise for a minute of silence in memory of all who lost their lives in the Civil War, and all who have died in service to our Republic.**

[ONE MINUTE OF SILENCE]

11. Thank you. May their souls rest in perfect peace. Please be seated.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

- 12.** I thank the **Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion**, its **Executive Secretary, Madam Hawa Sally Samai**, its **staff and partners**, for convening this conference on its fifth anniversary.
- 13.** I warmly welcome my predecessor, **His Excellency former President Ernest Bai Koroma**.
- 14.** We have both carried the responsibility of this nation's highest office. I am glad that we can meet here to consider the future of the country we both love.
- 15.** I also welcome our **International Guests** to a beautiful nation, especially the **International Moral Guarantors of the Agreement for National Unity**.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

- 16. We are here to consider Sierra Leone's next chapter for peace and national unity.**
- 17.** After the war ended on 8 January 2002, our first responsibility was keeping the guns silent.
- 18.** We disarmed fighters and began to confront the truth of what had happened.
- 19.** We held elections, and twice we transferred power peacefully.
- 20.** Successive governments, women's organisations, the Inter-Religious Council, civil society and local communities helped protect the peace in everyday life.
- 21.** Those of us who remember the war must now prepare the country for a generation that does not.

- 22. Peace must become part of our national culture.** It must be visible in the laws we uphold, the institutions people trust, and how we treat one another.
- 23.** The Conference theme, **From Commitment to Action, gives us three duties: rebuilding trust, strengthening national unity, and advancing social cohesion.**
- 24. By the end of this Conference, each commitment should have a responsible institution, a deadline and a way for citizens to judge progress.**

FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,

- 25.** We have an unfinished obligation to those who suffered.
- 26.** Our war grew from grievances neglected over many years: **exclusion, injustice, abuse of authority and the denial of a fair share in our country.**

- 27.** As a nation, we failed to prevent the suffering that followed. I do not stand here to judge any person, party or generation.
- 28. As President, I accept responsibility on behalf of the State for the protection our people were denied.**
- 29.** In March 2010, **former President Koroma** apologised to the women of our country for the wrongs they suffered during the war.
- 30. Today, I extend that apology to every Sierra Leonean.**
- 31. To the survivors, the families who lost loved ones, the children robbed of childhood, and all who lived through those years: on behalf of the State of Sierra Leone, I apologise for the suffering you endured and for the protection you did not receive. I AM SORRY.**

[PAUSE]

- 32.** Those words cannot return what was taken. I hope they offer some measure of healing.
- 33.** Our responsibility now is to honour the obligations that remain.
- 34.** I speak of amputees and the war-wounded, survivors of sexual violence, those forced to bear arms as children and families who lost the people they depended on.
- 35.** Many have waited far too long for this Republic to keep its word. Neither remembrance nor apology alone will meet their needs.
- 36. I therefore direct the National Commission for Social Action and the relevant institutions to review and strengthen the reparations programme recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.**

- 37.** It must cover livelihoods, healthcare, education and social protection, and Survivors' Associations must be full partners in deciding how assistance reaches them.
- 38.** I further direct that a public report on the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations be presented to the nation by 18th January 2027.
- 39.** The Ministry of Health, working with the Peace Commission and our faith communities, must also expand mental-health and psychosocial support wherever the wounds of war remain.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

- 40.** The Truth and Reconciliation Commission remind us that exclusion, injustice and the abuse of authority are what made the war possible.

- 41. Trust is won or lost in ordinary places: a classroom, a clinic, a police station, a courtroom.**
- 42. Citizens must be treated fairly and must be able to criticise their government without fear.**
- 43. Some Sierra Leoneans still doubt our institutions, and I take those doubts seriously. Confidence has to be earned.**
- 44. That is why my Government repealed the criminal libel law, abolished the death penalty and established this Peace Commission by law.**
- 45. Our work in education and in protecting the rights of women and children follows the same conviction.**
- 46. These reforms matter when they change how people are treated. Much remains to be done.**

III. STRENGTHENING NATIONAL UNITY

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

- 47. National unity must begin with national leadership.**
- 48.** Our people rebuilt their communities after terrible suffering.
- 49.** If they could do that, then we in political life can disagree and still serve the public good.
- 50. I faced that choice myself in 1996. As a soldier, I knew what military force could achieve, and I knew where it fell short.**
- 51.** Innocent civilians had been massacred in my home community. My sister and her husband had been taken captive.
- 52. When I became Head of State in January 1996, I publicly invited Foday Sankoh to talks and offered to meet anywhere, without preconditions.**

- 53.** I knew what had been done to my family and my community. Still, I believed negotiation was necessary to spare our people further suffering.
- 54. In the midst of the civil war, we held elections, and in March 1996, I handed power to an elected civilian government.**
- 55.** The **late President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah** carried the negotiations forward, with the support of many Sierra Leoneans and our international partners.
- 56.** I share this not to dwell on the past, but **because it taught me that leadership sometimes means setting aside personal grievance and personal power for the sake of the nation.**
- 57. In 2028, I will complete my constitutional mandate and hand over the Presidency peacefully to whomever Sierra Leoneans choose.**

58. Let me state this without qualification: I will not be a candidate in the 2028 Presidential Election.

[PAUSE]

59. My task now is to leave behind institutions that serve every citizen fairly and protect the peace under the next government.

60. That is why the Agreement for National Unity matters.

61. On 18 October 2023, following the disputed elections of June that year, **the Sierra Leone People's Party Government and the main opposition All People's Congress chose dialogue over division.**

62. Through the **Tripartite Committee**, both sides recommended reforms to strengthen our electoral system.

- 63.** Some of those recommendations have been implemented.
- 64.** The remaining work requires sustained attention before 2028.
- 65.** Resolution 6 of that Agreement calls for renewed relationships between serving and former leaders, and among the leadership of our major parties.
- 66.** So, to former President Koroma, to our former Vice Presidents, and to the leaders of every political party: we can disagree about the past and still speak responsibly about the future. My door remains open to you all.
- 67.** The 2028 elections will test how far we have come.
- 68.** Since the war, we have achieved two peaceful democratic transitions of power.
- 69.** A third must rest on institutions trusted by those who win and by those who lose.

- 70. The proposed constitutional and electoral reforms have prompted serious disagreement, and the constitutional questions are now before the Supreme Court.**
- 71.** We must respect the independence of the Court and the integrity of the legal process.
- 72.** Whatever the outcome, **every Sierra Leonean must be able to trust in the protection our Constitution affords.**
- 73.** I expect the **Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone** to work with full transparency, professionalism and independence.
- 74.** I call on **our security forces** to remain loyal to the Republic alone.
- 75.** And I ask **every political leader** to compete on ideas, and to reject violence, intimidation and appeals to ethnic or religious hostility.

- 76.** When the votes are counted, those who celebrate and those who are disappointed must remain equal citizens of one Sierra Leone.
- 77.** But national unity is not built by leaders alone. It must also be practised in our communities, where the daily work of social cohesion takes place.

III. ADVANCING SOCIAL COHESION

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

- 78.** In many ways, our people are already ahead of our politics. I am proud of that.
- 79.** We marry across ethnic and religious lines. Muslim and Christian families celebrate together and mourn together.
- 80.** Our children grow up hearing different languages at family gatherings and in the market.

81. In many homes, family members support different parties and argue about government, then sit down to share a meal or care for an elderly parent together.

82. Prejudice has not disappeared, but this is the Sierra Leone our people live in every day.

83. No election should ever tear a family apart.

[PAUSE]

84. That same sense of belonging must extend to the State.

85. A child in Makeni has the same claim to a good school as a child in Bo. A family in Sinkunia needs a clinic as urgently as a family in Freetown.

86. No community should lose services because of how it voted.

- 87. Hardship can deepen mistrust.** Our investments in education, agriculture, energy, infrastructure and skills must therefore make a visible difference in people's lives.
- 88. National Cohesion is also threatened far from the headlines: in chieftaincy and land disputes; in mining communities that see too little benefit from their resources; and in neighbourhoods where kush and other drugs are destroying young lives.**
- 89.** These tensions need trusted mediators who can step in before disagreement turns to violence.
- 90. Since its establishment, the Peace Commission has helped settle disputes across our districts and supported local dialogue.**
- 91.** A dispute settled early can spare a family the loss of its home, and a community the cost of violence.
- 92. Peace cannot be imposed by Government.**

- 93. Sierra Leoneans must nurture it themselves: women and young people, religious and traditional leaders, civil society, and community mediators who sustain the work long after an agreement is reached.**
- 94.** We have strengthened the laws on land rights and mining benefits, and introduced measures to confront drug abuse.
- 95.** These protections must now work in every chiefdom.
- 96.** I therefore direct the **relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies** to work with the **Peace Commission** to strengthen capacity in every district and to intervene earlier, with women, young people and persons with disabilities fully involved.
- 97. TRUST. UNITY. COHESION. These are our COMMITMENTS.**
- 98. Let me now turn to how we will put them into ACTION.**

IV. FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION: OUR NATIONAL PEACE AGENDA

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

99. I place before this Conference six proposals, two for each of our three commitments.

100.To REBUILD TRUST: First, a National Peace and Cohesion Action Framework, to be published within ninety days.

101.It will set out the outstanding commitments under the **Agreement for National Unity**, the institutions responsible, the deadlines, and how progress will be measured.

102.Second, a Peace Basket Fund to support community peacebuilding and remembrance.

103.It will be open to our partners, the private sector, and Sierra Leoneans at home and abroad, with independent oversight and public reporting.

104.The Government will lead with an initial contribution of **25 million Leones in the 2027 national budget.**

105.To STRENGTHEN NATIONAL UNITY: Third, a stronger Inter-Party Dialogue Committee, established as a dependable standing forum and supported by the Political Parties Regulation Commission and the Peace Commission.

106.Our parties must talk regularly, before disagreements become crises.

107.Fourth, a Code of Conduct for Peaceful Elections, which I call on every registered political party to sign before 2028.

108.To ADVANCE SOCIAL COHESION: Fifth, peace and civic education in our schools, so that every child learns the history of the war and the habits of peaceful citizenship.

109.Sixth, remembrance with a purpose. A National Peace Week will culminate on 18th January 2027, marking twenty-five years of peace in every district, and work will begin on a National Peace Memorial.

110.The Peace Commission will coordinate this agenda, publish a progress report every six months, and submit an annual report to Parliament, so that the people's representatives can hold us to account.

111.However, Government cannot deliver this Agenda alone.

112.I thank ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the International Moral Guarantors of the Agreement for National Unity and all our partners.

113.International assistance helped Sierra Leone restore peace.

114.We have since carried that experience back to the world, through our peacekeepers and through our term on the United Nations Security Council.

115.We value that friendship. **But the responsibility for living together remains ours.**

116.As we say in Krio: Wan han nor de tai bondul. One hand cannot tie a bundle.

117.**To our political leaders:** show restraint in victory and dignity in disagreement.

- 118.To our Paramount Chiefs, Traditional Authorities and Religious Leaders:** remain voices of wisdom and reconciliation. Your influence reaches beyond political authority.
- 119.To our Media and Civil Society:** hold those of us in power accountable, guided by accuracy and fairness.
- 120.To everyone who shares messages online:** a rumour can travel across the country in minutes. Before passing one on, ask yourself: Is it true? Is it fair? Does it serve our peace?
- 121.To the women of Sierra Leone, who sustained families through war and recovery:** your experience must carry authority in decisions about our peace.
- 122.The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act** has opened more space for our women in public life. Use that space wisely.

123.And to young people: demand work, education and a fair chance. It is your right to do so.

124.Do not let anyone turn those demands into violence for a political cause that offers you no future.

125.Your participation must help shape the next chapter.

V. SIERRA LEONE'S NEXT CHAPTER OF PEACE AND NATIONAL UNITY

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

126.When **Freetown's Cotton Tree fell in May 2023**, Sierra Leoneans mourned the loss of a landmark that had watched over generations.

127.Its loss reminds us to think about what we will leave to those who come after us.

128.The generation born after the war is now reaching adulthood.

129.These young people should be choosing where to study, how to earn a living, whom to love and what families to build.

130.They should never have to fear the violence their parents survived.

131.For them, our next chapter must bring three changes.

132.First, disputes over land, chieftaincy and resources must be resolved before they turn violent.

133.Second, our courts, electoral institutions and public services must remain fair through every change of government.

134.The memory of war helped one generation protect the peace. **Dependable institutions must now protect those who have no memory of it.**

135.Third, we must learn to remain one country through political competition.

136.Every election produces winners and losers. It must leave everyone with the same rights and the same place in the Republic.

137.My generation's task was to end a war. Our task now is to make ordinary life secure.

138.Too many Sierra Leoneans still lack enough food, decent work, reliable electricity or clean water.

139.Peace must deliver a better life.

140.For as long as I remain in office, I will work for a Sierra Leone where families can put food on the table, children can learn, clinics can care for the sick, and young people can find meaningful work.

141.I ask those who will lead after us to carry this work further.

142.We will see that future in a survivor who finally receives the assistance promised; in a child who learns about the war as history, without fearing its return; and in a young woman who casts her vote, knowing the result cannot take away her place in this country.

143.When we next meet, let us be ready to show what has changed, where we have fallen short, and what we will do next.

144.We already make room for one another in our homes. Now let us make room for one another in our Republic.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

MY FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,

145.On **18th January 2002**, we closed the chapter of war.

146.As we approach twenty-five years of peace, let us open the chapter of lasting peace and national unity, and let history remember this generation as the one that wrote it.

147.This nation belongs to all of us. Not to one party, not to one region, not to one generation. To all of us.

148.So please join me in affirming that truth: **Salone na wi ol yon!**

[AUDIENCE RESPONDS]

149.Once more, with one voice: **Salone na wi ol yone.**

[AUDIENCE RESPONDS]

EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

**150.It is now my honour and privilege to declare the
National Unity and Social Cohesion Conference
2026 officially open.**

**151.May God bless the people of Sierra Leone, and may
God bless our beloved Republic, the Land That We
Love, Sierra Leone.**

I THANK YOU.