



**Address by His Excellency Julius Maada Bio,
President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, on
the Occasion of the 58th Independence
Anniversary – Freetown, 27 April 2019.**

Fellow citizens, on Thursday, April 27, 1961, our founding father, Sir Milton Margai, defined our mission as a nation. He urged his countrymen to “face up squarely to the problems which will confront” them.

He argued that the success of the Sierra Leone Government would “depend very greatly upon the active support and assistance of each” Sierra Leonean.

The ultimate aim then, as now, was to “make our country a land worth living in” and “a land worth serving” with “wholehearted service and hard work.”

In my maiden Independence Day address last year, I directed that in view of the dire economic challenges we

inherited as a government, the Ministry of Finance make no budgetary allocations to fund Independence Day celebrations until generated domestic revenue makes up 20% of our Gross Domestic Product. I highlighted the dire economic and financial challenges we inherited as a government and committed to working hard to achieve the 20% objective.

We have made very significant progress in domestic revenue mobilisation over the last one year and we are collectively determined as a nation to achieve that objective.

On this 58th anniversary of our independence, **I want us to each reflect deeply and ask ourselves as individuals and collectively as a nation what we**

have done to make our country a land worth living in.

Amidst the turmoil of our short history as a nation, some of our citizens have shown remarkable patriotism and selflessness in serving our great nation. I thank everyone of you who wakes up every day with the singular objective of working even harder to make Sierra Leone a better place.

But corruption, theft, fraud, waste, bad deals that have left us with huge debts, or connivance to sell off the country's mineral resources to predators, **have not added value to our determination to build a productive nation.**

Our failure to manage our environment and wildlife, protect our beaches and seas, and keep our living spaces clean and healthy at all times has not made our country a land worth living in.

Lawlessness, nepotism, discrimination, greed, crass opulence, mismanagement, and bad governance at all levels have not made our country a land worth living in.

Our disregard for our traditional values of deep faith and religiosity, respect, tolerance, justice, good neighbourliness and peaceful coexistence has not always made our country a land worth living in.

Our callous indifference to the situation of women and girls, children, the disabled, the aged, the poor, our

unemployed youth, and other vulnerable populations has not made our country a land worth living in.

“High,” we have not always exalted thee. “Great,” is not the love we have shown for thee at all times. “Firmly united,” we have not stood. “Singing your praises,” we have not.

On this day therefore, I ask Sierra Leoneans to make a solemn pledge or prayer to do all they can to make our country a land worth living in again. **Let us embrace those values and attitudes that make us patriotic Sierra Leoneans.**

We have certainly made some gains. We have enjoyed 18 years of peace. We have had five successive

democratic elections and three peaceful changes of government.

Some of our brightest young brains have taken on the challenge of leadership and are contributing to national development. Our women and girls are taking their rightful place in national dialogue, leadership, and development. We must and we will continue protecting them and opening up opportunities for them.

We have started salvaging the name and pride of our nation. Slowly, the world no longer sees us as the land of a cruel civil war, of corruption, of mudslides, and of Ebola.

We are being seen as a truly inspired nation and a land of opportunity and great promise.

From a steep downward plunge of our economy, empty coffers, and endemic corruption that saw our development partners disengage our last government, we are closing leakages for fraud and waste, and increasing domestic revenue intake.

We are continuing to clamp down on corruption because it is the right thing to do for the economy and for the reputation and future of our nation. We will also continue to live within our means.

Multilateral development partners have reaffirmed their confidence in our competent management of the economy by re-engaging and supporting us in even bigger ways than before now.

We have created an investor-friendly ecosystem by making processes, regulation, and incentives more favourable for win-win investments.

We have expanded investment opportunities in tourism, renewable energy, fisheries, agriculture, and other sectors. We desire more investment and trade. Credible investors around the world are taking a favourable look at our country.

Our medium-term national development plan lays out our national development priorities in easily understandable clusters.

We will continue to invest heavily in Human Capital Development through free quality education, quality healthcare, and food security initiatives.

We will seed and scale science, technology, and innovation in order to fast-track revenue generation, governance, service delivery, and for developing the private sector.

We believe that a skilled, educated, and healthy population is critical for expanding private sector growth and driving inclusive national development. Our goals remain capacity building and job creation.

We will continue institutional and governance reforms and relentlessly pursue national cohesion. As a

government, we also recognise that our national constitution must be reviewed to reflect the rights and aspirations of all our citizens.

We thank our development partners for their continuing assistance towards the development of our country. We have agreed a principle of mutual transparency and accountability and together, we will plan, implement, and also assess the impact of their interventions.

Cabinet has passed and will soon submit to parliament progressive legislations that will promote accountability, expand democratic spaces, and protect vulnerable populations.

I expect that parliament will soon vote to support my government's tougher anti-corruption laws, the amended Sexual Offences Act, and also strike the 54-year criminal libel laws. The Chief Justice has established Special Divisions of the High Court for corruption and sexual offences related cases.

Our investments in infrastructure will continue to be purposeful, beneficial for development and service delivery, cheaper, and not burden future generations with unreasonable debt.

Our foreign policy will be guided by the principle of mutual respect, economic diplomacy, and the peaceful pursuit of matters of mutual interest.

We will continue to meet all our regional and international obligations and provide continental leadership for the reform of the United Nations Security Council.

Fellow citizens of this our great republic, as we observe Sierra Leone's independence at 58, let us remind ourselves that we have a unique opportunity to get it right again as a nation.

For the seemingly intractable questions and tasks facing our nation, let us ask "why not" and be inspired to do the very best for our nation.

We all have an obligation to make Sierra Leone a peaceful, progressive, and pluralistic democracy.

May God bless us all and may God bless our great republic.

I thank you.