



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS  
MAADA BIO, AT THE CEREMONY FOR GRANTING  
CITIZENSHIPS AND THE PRESENTATION OF  
PASSPORTS TO AFRICAN AMERICANS  
RETURNING HOME, FREETOWN, STATE HOUSE -  
5 JANUARY 2021**

Ministers of Government,

The Secretary to the President,

The Chief Immigration Officer,

Our sisters and brothers,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

1. Let me once again welcome each of you to this beautiful Sierra Leone that you will forever share with us.
2. I trust that since your arrival, you have experienced various individual epiphanies. Reflecting on the last ten days, I am sure you would agree that this journey has not just been about feeling good. It is not just about sightseeing or just experiencing another culture for culture's sake. It is not just about fulfilling a curiosity or satisfying some long-held dream of making a spiritual pilgrimage. It is about all of those altogether and more.
3. So while others may invent history for the purpose of marketing tourism, you have lived your own history through over 400 years. This is the land of our mutual ancestors who were to later work rice fields and plantations that sustained the economies of the 13 British Colonies in the Americas. This is the land of Sengbeh Pieh

of the Amistad revolt. This is the land of the rice coast, of the Gullahs, of folktales about the trickster, of handicraft, of food ways, of seeking rituals, and the call and response of African-American song and dance. This is Sierra Leone.

4. You have walked on the footpaths and breathed the air our mutual ancestors breathed over 400 years ago. You have retraced their final footsteps through the gates of no return on Bunce Island. You have visited sites of great torture, humiliation, and pain. But you have also come back to sites of great welcome, peace, and joy. Welcome again to Sierra Leone.
5. We can only imagine the pain and humiliation of centuries of slavery and centuries more of racial socio-economic and physical discrimination -- from Jim Crow lynching by racist mobs to the needless violent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd.
6. As a country, we have also come a very long way from slavery and colonialism, through repressive dictatorships, bad governance, corruption, epidemics and natural disasters, and civil wars.
7. But as our ancestors in fields and plantations kept hope alive with such songs as "We shall overcome," so too have we stayed the course as a nation, persevered and never relenting to overcome the stigma of the past.

8. So today, we suture the violence of our collective memories on both sides of the Atlantic; the pain of our mutual pasts; and we consolidate and transition to a future of close familial relations and optimism.
9. I am informed that Paramount chiefs in your respective ancestral homes have formally welcomed you and I hope you have thoroughly enjoyed your stay. I am sure through the naming and healing ceremonies, trips to heritage sites, musical performances, and more, you have learned and experienced even more about your history and about your new homeland.
10. Beyond mere fascination, I encourage you to immerse yourself fully in the culture, foodways, sights and scenes, the breath-taking beauty of the mountains, verdant and serene beauty of virgin forests, over 300 kilometres of golden sandy beaches, dozens of small islands waiting to be transformed into holiday resorts and paradises, riverside settlements along half a dozen major rivers, exotic birds and wildlife, inland valleys and rolling hills. . . Sierra Leone is all yours to explore, own, and settle. This is home.
11. We have thousands of fertile hectares of farmland. We have rich mineral deposits from diamonds, gold, iron

ore, rutile, bauxite and more. Our seas are teeming with fish and sea food.

12. We are developing infrastructure in ICT, roads, more electricity, and soon a second port and a new and modern airport terminal. We are working on public service delivery of electricity, water, and healthcare. Clearly, we may not be near what you are familiar with but we are making irreversible progress
13. This is home. Welcome home. Here, all lives matter. Especially, YOU matter because YOU ARE one of us. You are Sierra Leoneans.
14. According to the 2020 Global Peace Index, we are the 46<sup>th</sup> most peaceful country in the whole world. We are the 5<sup>th</sup> most peaceful country in Africa. We run a very close second to Ghana as the most peaceful country in West Africa. However, unlike Ghana, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention rates us as Tier 1 low risk. We have under 3% case fatality ratio and only 76 recorded deaths. We are rated with a significantly lower violent crime rate. We have a free press, a free society, decongesting prisons, and working hard to build resilience in every facet of our nation.
15. Two months ago, I addressed the 2ND ANNUAL CGA-APRM PAN-AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE titled

“Creating the Africa, We Want; Creating the Sixth Region We Want – through Agribusiness, Research, and Innovation”.

16. I argued that we should advance Diaspora interests in Africa’s development in ways that are problem solving, capacity building, revenue generating, and mutually beneficial.
17. Our task as leaders of African nations, I further argued, is to lower the risk profiles of our countries by improving good governance, fighting corruption, fostering national cohesion and peace, and creating an even, fair, predictable, and simplified investment landscape. We have reduced legal barriers to investment and international trade. We are MCC compact eligible for the first time after passing a record 13 indicators including control of corruption and political rights.
18. We are creating an enabling environment for the private sector to flourish, to protect investments, and to support the establishment of businesses and organisations that touch lives either through direct employment and or social capital impact.
19. Within that conducive win-win ecosystem, we want to collectively identify opportunities, and pursue those investment opportunities through structured linkages and

interventions. We want to create private sector networks and networks for skills and knowledge transfers to your other compatriots – Sierra Leoneans.

20. There is possibly a lot on your minds as you think about relocating permanently or semi-permanently to Sierra Leone. There are issues around land rights, housing, investment and tax laws etc. There are possibilities for investment programmes and trade flows. There are possibilities of developing Diaspora bonds and Diaspora Capital markets. Clearly, your presence and your voice on such economic relations councils will be especially valuable. These are all issues we can collectively handle at a later date through the respective ministries, departments, or agencies.
21. But that's the heady stuff. You already know that English is our official language and our Krio is mutually intelligible with English. **"So we gladi for welcome oona na we kontri Salone."** You may have also noticed that Sierra Leoneans are very patient and very friendly communicators. Work on learning a local language.
22. As new citizens, know that you are fully vested in Sierra Leone and tied to our nation by history and genealogy. This is home.

23. I therefore urge each of you to protect the image of our collective country at all times. In the words of our national anthem, we resound our commitment to this nation– “High we exalt thee, realm of the free; great is the love we have for thee.” So as a Sierra Leonean, jealously guard our international image at all times.

24. I would like to close off these remarks by formally declaring each of you citizens of the great Republic of Sierra Leone.

I thank you.