



**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS  
MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC  
OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE  
UNIVERSAL HEALTH PREPAREDNESS REVIEW,  
(UHPR) SIERRA LEONE. FREETOWN  
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE,  
- WEDNESDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> MAY 2023**

The Honourable Vice President;  
Ministers of Government;  
Honourable Members of Parliament;  
Dr. Mike Ryan, Executive Director, Global Pandemic Preparedness and Response, WHO;  
Dr. Lindiwe Makobula, Assistant Regional Director WHO-Regional Office for Africa;  
Representatives of Development Partners;  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;  
Good morning,

1. It is a real pleasure welcoming our guests from the World Health Organisation, and being among you this morning, albeit briefly, to formally launch the Universal Health Preparedness Review of our country.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us a number of lessons. First, that no country is fully prepared for pandemics. Secondly, that we must strengthen and make our health systems more resilient while promoting Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Finally, it has also taught us that we must create a platform for shared engagement and accountability among countries.
3. This Universal Health Preparedness Review, being a holistic initiative that provides a comprehensive view of emergency preparedness and interlocks emergency preparedness with UHC, is, therefore, most welcome. It aligns critical gaps identified in emergency preparedness and prioritizes timely technical and financial support, leading to predictability and sustainability, and hence resilience.
4. Sierra Leone has a wealth of experience in handling epidemics and pandemics space. Our posture is informed both by what worked and what did not work during the Ebola outbreak. With over 14,000 infections and nearly 4,000 deaths, it is hard for us as a nation to forget that. We vowed that we will never again be caught unprepared.
5. Our level of preparedness for epidemics/pandemics is best reflected in our country's response to COVID-19. At the first sign of a pandemic in the world, I assembled a task force combining all aspects of society, including all of government, civil society and the private sector. I personally chaired the task force I had constituted. The pre-emption and mitigation measures we put in place resulted in lower infection rates and lower mortality.
6. As we worked to prepare for epidemic outbreaks, it was clearly recognised that effective preparation is predicated on an effective and robust healthcare delivery system. We, in Sierra Leone, have fully embraced Universal Health Coverage as the backbone of our healthcare delivery system. The emphasis on providing high-quality healthcare for the entire population is a fundamental pillar of my national strategy of Human Capital Development.

7. With policy and systemic reforms, training for healthcare personnel, innovative healthcare financing initiatives, and extensive investments in healthcare infrastructure, we are beginning to see the dividends. Maternal mortality rates are down. In the district where there is a Special Care Baby Unit, survival rates for neonates are up by 87%. Medical laboratories, blood transfusion and dialysis facilities, and oxygen plants are up and running. Vaccination rates, including for HPV, are way above target. Our COVID-19 immunisation target of 85% has been achieved. The hospital-on-wheels project is fully operational and there are higher rates of healthcare service delivery at government facilities.
8. We are looking to get better. We are working hard to rehabilitate existing facilities and construct new hospitals and healthcare training facilities. There are also investment opportunities in patient records and digital health management, a national health insurance scheme, pharmaceutical manufacturing, and nutritional supplement manufacturing.
9. Let me conclude, ladies and gentlemen, by re-stating Sierra Leone's firm commitment to the Universal Health Preparedness Review process. It provides an excellent nexus among Universal Health Coverage, healthcare resilience, and global health security. We are eager to work collaboratively with other countries to promote collective global action for preparedness, in a spirit of solidarity. I am pleased therefore that Sierra Leone was selected as the first country in the ECOWAS region to embark on this review.
10. In that spirit, I have the honour and pleasure to launch the Universal Health Preparedness Review in Sierra Leone.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you fruitful deliberations.