



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY JULIUS MAADA
BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA
LEONE, AT THE CONFERENCE OF THE WEST
AFRICAN COLLEGE OF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY
(WACN&M)/15TH BIENNIAL GENERAL MEETING/24TH
SCIENTIFIC SESSION AND 39TH COUNCIL MEETING
IN FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE - 19 MARCH 2019**

The honourable Vice President,

First Lady of the Republic of Sierra Leone,

Ministers of Government,

Members of Parliament,

Our revered local and religious leaders,

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,

Our development partners,

Fellows of the West African College of Nursing,

Fellows of Sister Colleges- West African College of
Physicians, Surgeons, and Pharmacists

Local and Religious Leaders,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good afternoon

It gives me great pleasure to welcome each and every one of you to this conference and to the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Whenever so many midwives and nurses gather around someone, their next line is normally “Congratulations, it is a boy or a girl or you have twins.”

As for midwives, I have never seen a profession so obsessed with delivery, delivery, and more delivery. But let me heartily welcome each one of you to this event where you are discussing how to improve your service to humanity. On behalf of the people of Sierra Leone, I want to thank you immensely for your service and dedication to the nursing profession. My government is pleased and honoured to host the 15th Biennial General Meeting/ 24th Scientific Session and 38th Council meeting in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

I am always curious but eternally thankful about how nurses and midwives combine their professional training with acute critical thinking and mix all of that with compassion, care, communicating with empathy, and building trust as caregivers. Their deep sense of integrity and discipline; their responsiveness as the only source of hope to the pregnant, the ailing, and the sick; and their ever calm, dignified, and transformative poise in the face of challenges, is always a source of great comfort. Thank you again for your service. Let us give them a rousing round of applause.

The aims and outcomes of this conference align very closely with my flagship programme – investing in human capital development. As I have emphasized severally, human capital development involves feeding the mind through free quality education, feeding the body with food security initiatives, and taking care of the human body through delivering

affordable and quality healthcare. Only an educated, productive, and healthy population can drive sustainable development in a nation. So the work that you do is a critical baluster for sustainable national development.

I have also emphasized that the Sierra Leone of now and of the future is not the Sierra Leone of the past that floundered in a morass of mediocrity. The Sierra Leone of now and of the future is one that embraces a culture of excellence. So this conference is very near and dear to my heart because it is all about renewing a commitment to excellence through interactions with other practitioners in the sub-region, sharing best practices, presenting groundbreaking research and new knowledge, and reminding one another of a shared sense of accountability, integrity, and professionalism in the nursing practice.

I am informed that papers have been presented on everything from clinical practice, evidence-based care, professional responsibility and ethical standards of practice, to nursing and midwifery education. This can only have a positive impact for improving professional and clinical expertise and practice. I am also gratified to see nurses, midwives, surgeons, and pharmacists engaging in interdisciplinary/interprofessional conversations about how to improve overall health outcomes for patients in the sub-region. This should lead naturally to more collaboration across borders including professional placements and educational opportunities across the sub-region.

Let me digress for a moment and bestow special praise on our midwives. For every new child that you midwife; for every mother's life that you save during childbirth, thank you. The great work that you do for humanity often gets reduced to statistical figures

about maternal and child mortality. For me, every cry of a new born baby and every smile of a new mother reminds me as a leader that I must work even harder to support, and continue to advocate for and invest in women's health and in primary and maternity health care services.

But such investments by us leaders in improving nursing care and practice must be purposeful and well-anchored on key staples.

First, we should invest in excellence in midwifery and nursing education. We must encourage rigour and sustained standards of excellence in the nursing education curriculum and in clinical practice. Part of the objectives of the free quality education programme is that we can create a highly educated cohort of citizens available to opt for the nursing and midwifery professions. As a government, we will invest in incentives and tuition schemes to defray the

cost of their training and education. My government, through the Ministry of Health and Sanitation and the Ministry of Tertiary and Higher Education, is working to improve the quality of nursing education around the country while training increased numbers to meet the needs of a growing population. In line with our emphasis on capacity building, my government also fully supports advanced nursing and midwifery training both in Sierra Leone and in the sub-region. I therefore hope that in addition to knowledge sharing, this conference also places premium on technical expertise and knowledge transfer by opening up opportunities across the sub-region for advanced training and placement of advanced and specialist nursing practitioners and educators.

Next, my government recognises and grants nurses the professional autonomy and authority to make professional decisions and act freely in accordance

with their professional training and expertise. To my mind, this recognition empowers nurses to provide nursing care within the full scope of their practice. But this also should be balanced against concerns about patient safety and patient health outcomes. I am therefore encouraged that in Sierra Leone, as in parts of the sub-region, a regulatory nursing and midwifery council has been set up that will oversee overall professional standards of nursing practice and ethics and also monitor service delivery to patients. Rest assured that government fully supports this professional regulatory body. Its constitution provides for leadership and governance of nursing and midwifery, the continuous professional development needs of the practitioners, and provides a point of contact for partnerships within the sub-region and with multilateral development partners.

Further, my government is working to address the working environment and conditions of our health

care professionals. Government has increased budgetary allocation to healthcare to 15% of the national budget. We have also undertaken the refurbishment of key hospitals, constructed peripheral health units, and provided free ambulance services in various districts across the country. The government recognizes and appreciates the numbers and the tremendous work nurses and midwives do within the healthcare workforce. Government, through the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, has already increased the of allowances for all health professionals effective this January 2019 by 100%. We will continue to do more by providing the enabling environment, equipment, and facilities to support our nurses and midwives.

We have also worked with our development partners (especially the UNFPA and WHO) to develop the first ever first ever Nurses and Midwifery Strategic Plan for Sierra Leone 2019-2023. The strategic plan

lays out six major pathways for developing the nursing education and practice in Sierra Leone. My government fully supports the implementation of this well-thought-out, integrated and holistic strategy for changing the health outcomes of our citizens through enhanced recruitment and training of nurses, robust regulatory and governance standards, strengthening professional standards and leveraging the benefits of partnerships across the region, and working with development partners. This is good for nursing practice across the sub-region and good for Sierra Leone especially.

With this therefore, I formally declare this conference open and launch the first ever Nursing and Midwifery Strategy 2019 – 2023.

I thank you.