



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, JULIUS
MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SIERRA LEONE AND CHANCELLOR OF NJALA
UNIVERSITY. 2019 CONGREGATION CEREMONY
FOR THE CONFERMENT OF DEGREES AND
AWARD OF DIPLOMA AND CERTIFICATES.
CONGREGATION GROUNDS, NJALA CAMPUS,
SIERRA LEONE, 13 APRIL 2019.**

PRESIDENT'S 2019 CONGREGATION ADDRESS 2

Honourable Chief Minister,

Honourable Ministers of Government present,

Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Court, Njala University,

Members of the Njala University Court,

Vice-Chancellors and Principals of Njala University and
other tertiary institutions present,

Deputy Vice-Chancellors of Njala University and other
universities present,

Your Excellences, Members of the Diplomatic & Consular
Corps,

Representatives of International Development partners,

Honourable Members of Parliament present,

Our Revered Traditional Rulers present,

Your Worships, the Mayors of Municipalities present,

Local Government Members of Moyamba and Bo Districts,

Alumni and Friends of Njala University,

Academic and Administrative staff of Njala University,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

Students and Soon-to-be graduates,

Good morning

It is indeed a great and singular honour for me to be at this this convocation. It is a day of good-byes to a nurturing institution, friends, and professors; a day of reflection and reckoning; and, a day of promise for new opportunities and new beginnings.

The review and amendment of the Universities Act of 2005 will be completed in the coming months and I shall cease to be Chancellor of this University. I will miss the unique feeling of burgeoning with pride and being effusive with hope for every one of you, our young graduates. I join your loved ones in congratulating you on your successes. Congratulations!

To those who will not miss me as Chancellor of this great University, I thank you. To those who will miss me as Chancellor of this University, I thank you for the opportunity to serve an institution that has contributed immensely to our nation's development.

So if, as they say, one saves the best for last, **I want to use my swan-song as Chancellor of this university to exhort you to challenge yourselves, to be bold, to be innovative, to be enterprising, and to make Njala University and its graduates RELEVANT, if not indispensable, to the national development of Sierra Leone.**

Great expectations await you, our graduates. Soon, you will be breadwinners and financiers for every family or community related problem. You will also be problem-solvers for family members, extended family members, friends, and the community. And yet still, you would have to get a job, a house, and pursue your own career dreams. That is seemingly impossible, right?

Do not despair. You are off to a good start. You have achieved what fewer than 10% of your compatriots have ever achieved; you have achieved what fewer than 10% of those with whom you entered primary school have ever achieved. You are a winner; you are victorious; you are the few of the many. Let us give each one of you a rousing round of applause on your success.

However much we serenade your achievements, I know most of you do not look forward to the uncertainties of the future. There are certain realities with which graduates must contend. Civil service jobs may be honourable but there are not enough for every graduate. Also, if all you see for yourself in your future is a civil service job, then it is unlikely that you will be wealthy just from the salaries of a few million Leones you are paid every month. Some of the wealthiest people in the world became wealthy not by getting jobs as civil servants but by becoming entrepreneurs. They see promise in opportunities and they are moved by that promise to explore the possibilities for creating wealth. I want to therefore encourage you to make bold choices. Sierra Leone abounds in opportunities.

As a government, we have put in place a favourable ecosystem for private sector growth. We have made the registration of businesses easy. We will continue to expand access to start-up financing. We will invest in capacity building and skills training. We are looking at developing a one-stop body in the investment board co-chaired by myself and the Vice President. There are

valuable prospects for value chain addition and services in various sectors. There are strong opportunities in innovation and technology especially in scaling and applying technology for private sector growth. So to the graduates, the future is bright if you make those bold choices about what next and where you want to be.

But we also must address the big questions about the future of Njala University as an institution. For me, Njala University is an incubator of excellence. So the question therefore would be, “How do we make Njala University even more relevant to the development of Sierra Leone? What practical steps should we take?”

I acknowledge the governance and institutional changes undertaken both internally and those precipitated by your engagement with my government through the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education. Additionally, the policy changes and reviews enumerated by the Vice Chancellor, can not only enhance the operations and other procedures of the university but also address compliance and institutional effectiveness. I advise that the university rationalise and periodically assess the impact of those

governance structures and processes with a view to continually improving on them.

I recognise the value of strategic partnerships in establishing new and innovative programmes that increase the portfolio of course offerings at the university. I am especially delighted about the renewed focus on outcomes-based education pushed through with the support of the Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform. There is tremendous value in inter-institutional collaboration for faculty training and professional development, research, knowledge and technology transfers, and for sharing best practices. My government will continue working to negotiate those strategic partnerships with the confidence that they can only enrich Njala University and other institutions. Let me give you an example. Just over a month, I was at MIT and Harvard University to conclude impactful agreements with both institutions. I am pleased to announce that about three weeks after the agreement of affiliation was concluded, one of your faculty, Dr. Maurice Sesay, was a participant in the Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab (J-WEL) Week that provided first-hand access to MIT

educational resources and practices and the value of computing everywhere for workforce and skills development. Njala University also deserves plaudits for producing outstanding researchers from Dr. Aiah Lebbie's discovery of *Lebbiea grandiflora* to urban settlement research, animal disease, urban settlements, to the Marburg virus and capturing bats. I strongly encourage and urge you to continue this tradition of excellence in research.

National development priorities must be strongly reflected in the expansion or consolidation of existing courses. Two key ones mentioned in the Vice Chancellor's resonate strongly for food security and access to healthcare - key staples of my government's flagship programme for Human Capital Development. The Agricultural Extension specialization in Post-Harvest and Value Addition will augment farmer skills in transforming post-harvest losses into additional profit. The establishment of the Njala Songhai Centre in collaboration with various ministries and international institutions will serve as a hub for innovative training in sustainable agro-

industrial training, skills development, agribusiness entrepreneurship for youth.

The accreditation of surgical training for Community Health Officers will expand surgical services to rural areas of the country especially at the Peripheral Health Units my government is commissioning. The free ambulance services in each district will facilitate safe and faster transportation to those facilities.

I also recognise work done by the two education ministries and the Teaching Service Commission to establish the Centre for Pedagogical Excellence. The institution will be a research hub for innovation in teaching, curriculum design, teaching excellence, and a centre for professional development. There is tremendous value in active learning approaches over passive learning and it is my hope that the centre contributes significantly to placing quality at the heart of the country's free quality education programme.

I have listened to the concerns expressed by the Vice Chancellor of the University and as a government that believes in doing and talking, we have anticipated and

studied each issue extensively and engaged in purposeful planning.

Let be reminded though that the university is an autonomous institution supported by government because the work of the university has a direct impact for national development. I am therefore happy to announce a number of short-term interventions and more permanent medium to longer term solutions that will enhance the general infrastructure and operations of Njala University.

We cannot afford periodic industrial actions triggered off by disputes over unresolved financial matters. The academic environment must be predictably strife-free. The university is doing its fair share by continuing to restructure its past liabilities My government has fully paid Quarter 1 subventions to all universities and Njala has already received its Quarter 1 subvention of Le9.855 Billion.

Staff and faculty at Njala University deserve to receive their salaries and all emoluments at regular and predictable intervals. I have therefore directed that the Ministry of Finance and related institutions fast track the integration of

staff and faculty salaries into the general payroll system. What that means is that staff and faculty will get salaries at the same time as every public sector worker in this country.

I also note concerns about infrastructure and rising student numbers, student housing, medical, as well as sports and recreational facilities. Government will stay engaged on each of those issues and develop and implement a holistic and long-lasting solution to the problems. In the interim, government will continue to support the provision of drugs to medical facilities and I am informed that the Sports Minister has already transferred some sports equipment to the college.

My government is also working to address problems with water supply capacity on all campuses of Njala University starting with the Mokonde campus. The Ministry of Water Resources has done extensive feasibility studies for a longer term integrated solution that will supply the three localities of Njala, Taiama, and Mano Dasse with tap water. In the short term, I have directed the Ministry to sink three solar-powered industrial boreholes that will feed a 150,000 cubic meter steel tank every day. That tank will be

reticulated to the existing pipe work on campus and to ten public standpoints. Work will commence in the coming months.

A consistent supply of electricity is critical to the operations of the university. Again, I have directed the Ministry of Energy to fast track a medium term solution of installing a renewable energy generation plant that will serve the main campus of Mokonde. In the meantime, solar lamp posts will be installed around the student housing areas in order to improve student safety and security.

The recent fire accident and loss of the Education building at the Bo, Torwama campus has worsened the problem of infrastructural capacity on the Bo campus. My government will pay fully for the rehabilitation of the building including for furniture and all equipment. I have directed that work begin in short order.

In order to continue to pursue its mission of excellence and service and be competitive with peer institutions, the Ministries of Technical & Higher Education, Ministry of Information & Communications, and the Sierra Leone Cable Company (SALCAB) have worked to establish high-speed

Fibre Optic Internet connectivity to Njala University. The implications for e-learning, research, scholarly collaboration are enormous. I am hopeful that in the coming months, the University and other partners will work with the Directorate of Science, technology, and Innovation in the Office of the President to map out how to maximise its impact.

I am pleased that the University is focused on institutional and teaching effectiveness through periodic anonymous evaluations. I also urge faculty and staff to maintain the highest levels of discipline and ethical conduct. Members of the University community must desist from all forms of harassment especially of female students. The University must be a safe space for our women who constitute 51% of our nation's population. They are only striving like every student to be better in order to contribute to national development and therefore must be treated fairly and equally. That said, violence and criminality on campuses will be addressed with the full force of the law and miscreants will be arrested and prosecuted.

It is also my expectation that faculty will tighten thresholds for entry requirements, standards of success through degree programmes, and graduation standards. Foreign direct investors, private investors, and government expect no less of the university as the quality of graduates makes the country more or less attractive. Njala University must therefore strengthen standards right across board.

I also want to challenge Njala University to be innovative and entrepreneurial in its thinking about its future. The University can generate copious amounts of money for itself and for the country by harnessing its potentials and leveraging its research partnerships. The Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI) has been at the heart of agricultural innovation and research for decades. It has great potential that must be developed. The Educational Services Centre can contribute significantly to the national free quality education programme by bidding to produce teaching and learning materials for over 2 million pupils and teachers in basic and secondary schools. The Animal Production Department can reorganise and develop itself as a major supplier of meat, eggs, and chicken and associated value-chain improvements will make it a

major national and sub-regional supplier. The small ruminants project can help advance farmer knowledge in small ruminants nutrition and management that may have a multiplier effect on food security in the country and a generator of income for the university. The crop sciences department can apply research to the production of advanced seeds and the agricultural engineering programme can develop locally manufactured mechanised and other tools for farmers, irrigation and farming equipment that will enhance the production of our farmers. My challenge to Njala University therefore is be bold, be enterprising, and leave an even bigger footprint on the national development landscape of Sierra Leone. My government will support you.

So to us as a nation, and as citizens, let us **challenge ourselves, and let us be bold, innovative, and enterprising. That is the new direction to national development in our country.**

I thank you.