



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 52ND ASSEMBLY
OF THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY
ASSOCIATION (CPA) AFRICA REGION.
FREETOWN, BINTUMANI CONFERENCE
CENTRE, 6TH JUNE 2022**

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The Honourable Vice President,
The Speaker of the Sierra Leone Parliament,
Rt. Honourable Speakers, CPA Africa Region,
The leadership of the CPA International,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Ministers of Government,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Clerks of Parliaments,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I join the Rt. Honourable Speaker of Parliament, Dr Abass Bundu, in extending a very hearty Sierra Leonean welcome to this city and this country. As the Rt. Honourable Speaker has remarked, this city is replete with history and it is a compelling natural beauty that is available to our guests to indulge in. Indeed, we take great pride in sharing our peaceful country that is full of natural touristic sites from golden sandy beaches to islands, and beautiful waterfalls, eco-touristic delights, and a very hospitable and friendly people.
2. These are the same scenes and sights that welcomed and delighted Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II and her husband, the late Prince Philip, when they stepped off the royal yacht, Britannia, on November 25, 1961.
3. Let me hasten to say, on this platinum jubilee of Her Majesty's reign, that I and the people of the Republic of Sierra Leone, wish to commend and congratulate the sovereign of our Commonwealth of Nations for her selfless, steadfast, caring, and inspirational leadership over the last 70 years.
4. She has superintended our diversity and held us together. The Commonwealth has facilitated international trade, cooperation, and consultation; provided technical training and support, including healthcare, youth development, gender equality, and sports; protected the environment and advocated for sustainable uses of natural resources; promoted cultural exchanges; and supported good governance for nations. Indeed, the central notion of the Commonwealth as a set of nations united not just by history and

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circumstance, but by shared values, mutual trust, equal respect, and a common vision, has remained valid and invaluable.

5. This common vision has kept the Commonwealth together through the global COVID-19 pandemic and will guide us through the looming global food security and fuel crises, and other residual challenges including climate change. But more significantly, our 19 Commonwealth nations in Africa are at peace and continue to act concertedly on issues of mutual concern. So, I wholeheartedly welcome and thank the CPA for convening in Sierra Leone. Thank you and welcome.
6. I must add that the strengths of our democracies in the Commonwealth have endured, thanks to the role of Parliaments. You debate, modify, adopt, and pass legislation on policies, positions, and visions. You are tasked with voicing diverse views and approving the aspirations of citizens. That is no mean task.
7. But it is the fundamental expectation at the centre of those tasks that your decisions, laws and resolutions must contribute to promoting, what the UN Sustainable Development Goals 16 (SDGs) define as “peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development,” and “provide access to justice for all” as well as “build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”
8. The indicators call for respect for diversity; strengthening institutions and laws that promote inclusion and the rule of law at national and international levels, especially non-discriminatory laws; enhancing and protecting all forms of human rights; reducing all forms of violence and improve access to justice; promoting equal access to opportunity and services; and ensuring representative, participatory, responsive, and inclusive decision-making at all levels of governance. This, therefore, includes ending discrimination and removing barriers to political, social, and economic participation in society.
9. Honourable Members, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, anything short of these aspirations could lead to exclusion and to the widening of social, economic, and political disparities. Such exclusion could be

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structural or systemic. It comes at a severe cost to those disadvantaged groups and could further worsen vulnerability, social and health indicators, and poverty in the short and long run. Either way, exclusion must be addressed since exclusion can lead to tension, conflict, and instability in most countries.

10. So, the theme of this year's conference, "The Role of African parliaments in Building Inclusive Society to Counter Growing Insecurity in Africa" is, therefore, most pertinent. How can African Parliaments support the building of inclusive societies? How can they support legislations that narrow social, economic, and political gaps? How can they create and support agile and responsive laws that promote equal opportunity and access? How does parliamentary work support the building of inclusive, resilient, and sustainable societies?
11. How can parliaments act concretely to address vulnerability, inequality, and poverty? How can their work expand social infrastructure and investments in public services and other infrastructure that help accelerate inclusive and sustainable development? How can their work help support social protection or shockproof our national economies and societies in times of climate or health emergencies, food and energy insecurity as a result of global crisis, or social result as a result of conflict?
12. The Russia-Ukraine has exacerbated the economic and other impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Global capital and investment streams have dried to a trickle. Supply chains have been disrupted. Food and energy insecurity have worsened. There is a crisis of confidence in what and how much Governments can do. These are triggering new levels of tension and conflict right across Africa. So discussing the impact of these realities, proposing or supporting policies that address them, and supporting visions or agenda for transitioning out of and transforming our societies are key to the work of Parliaments.
13. To my mind, therefore, honourable members, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, these questions should constitute the staple of discussions over the next couple of days.

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14. At the national level, I must commend our national parliament for being proactive in supporting thoroughgoing reform over the last four years. We have removed the seditious libel law and unfettered free speech, abolished the death penalty, made governance more transparent and accountable, expanded access to justice, and reviewed laws that support the fight against sexual and gender-based violence, human trafficking, and corruption, among others
15. Additionally, the gender empowerment and women's equality bill will be transformative for our country because it will address several tiers of inequality and exclusion. It supports a substantial increase in the representation and participation of women in decision making, equal access to education and opportunities, equal access to resources and public services, financial inclusion, and greater promotion and protection of women's rights.
16. Honourable Members, ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude by hoping that the conversations over the coming days will deepen our mutual understanding of how we can work across the African Commonwealth to make our respective societies more inclusive. I hope we will share experiences, thoughts, and best practices, and conclude will resolutions that each of our countries can flux out into policies that will inform our individual agenda for building inclusive societies.

I once more welcome you to Sierra Leone and wish you fruitful deliberations. I thank you.