



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA
BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE,
AT THIRTY-FOURTH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE
AFRICAN UNION ASSEMBLY. 6TH AND 7TH FEBRUARY
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Chairman, Colleague Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Permit me to extend warm greetings to everyone even as we battle a deadly pandemic. Our cooperation and collective action have kept the worst of this global tragedy away from our continent. We must continue to do even more in adopting measures that prevent and protect against COVID 19 as we make efforts to procure vaccines for our most vulnerable populations.
2. COVID has ravaged lives and it has had an even more adverse effect on our economies and ways of life. As we plan to recover and rebuild our national economies, we must leverage the full potential of every sector.
3. The theme of this year's assembly foregrounds such an underdeveloped but key sector -- the arts, culture, and heritage -- that can be a catalyst for recovery and inclusive development if properly harnessed.
4. Sierra Leone has ratified the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance. We share the objectives and principles of the Charter and we remain committed to prioritising Pan Africanism in all its forms.
5. We are also mindful of the value of the creative cultural industry and therefore fully support the speedy implementation of the Statute of the African Audio-Visual and Cinema Commission.
6. I approach this year's theme, "Arts, Culture, and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa we want," from a development perspective. In that respect, I want to urge us all, Excellencies, to look beyond the historical, beyond the mere preservation of memory and artefacts, beyond creativity and cultural identity, and beyond mere

symbolism, to how arts, culture, and heritage inform our shared development aspirations as outlined in the AU's Agenda 2063 and in the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. Additionally, contained among the seven core aspirations pursued under Agenda 2063 are "an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics." – and an Africa that is resilient, peaceful and secure, and where inclusive development maximises the potential of women and youth.
8. Our human capital development initiatives can be embedded in the key staples of our cultural heritage. Cultural heritage education, for instance, supports the development of children grounded in their own contexts, experiences, and shared values. Within this, can be imparted valuable knowledge and perspectives that support sustainable practices, for instance, for food production or peaceful inter-communal Co-existence.
9. Permit me to digress briefly, Chairman, Colleague Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, that while the economic impact of COVID is putting a strain on our national economies and budgets, education is key to the pandemic response and recovery. Providing quality education for every child, boy and girl, can be the foundation for expanding opportunities, transforming our economies, fighting intolerance, protecting our planet and achieving the AU Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals. For those of our countries supported by the Global Partnership for Education, this is a pivotal moment to commit our leadership and call for global solidarity to keep education financing a top priority.

10. Cultural heritage knowledge can also be used to demonstrate and support other aspirations that drive inclusive development such as women's empowerment, the fight against sexual and gender-based violence, women's financial inclusion, and youth participation in development. This can also support our shared aspiration for peaceful and inclusive societies.
11. With the impact of climate change, cultural heritage education can also support community resilience by fostering knowledge about or principles of environmental practices that sustain our communities.
12. The cultural and creative industries can support the development of vibrant and innovative local economies around such sectors as local or a revamped international tourism. These contribute to economic diversification and long-term resilience.
13. Our task therefore is to identify and harness the economic value of the African cultural renaissance by thoughtfully planning for and embedding its full economic value into our national development plans. We should therefore plan for and fully domesticate the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance and the Statute of the African Audio-Visual and Cinema Commission.
14. We should also reduce the risk profiles of our nations through good governance and creating a business-friendly ecosystem. In addition to being attractive to investment capital in this sector, those measures will also have a catalytic effect on other sectors of the economy.
15. We should also map out areas of inter-African cooperation on investing in, developing, promoting, and trading cultural goods and

services in innovative ways to support various facets of inclusive development in the Africa we want. We can start with local initiatives at scale, learn from peer countries, adopt best practices, and work to reap the benefits of this renewed emphasis on our cultural renaissance.

16. Let me conclude by arguing that Pan-Africanism should not only be a slogan. We should fully utilise its development value for our unique cultural heritage, and for recovering and rebuilding our respective countries. The value of working toward a common purpose on this count cannot be more urgently emphasised therefore.

I thank you.