



ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, BRIGADIER GENERAL (RTD) DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ARMED FORCES AS REVIEWING OFFICER AT THE PASSING-OUT PARADE AND COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF OFFICER CADETS AND RECRUITS AT THE ARMED FORCES TRAINING CENTRE, BENGUEMA BARRACKS. SATURDAY, 7TH SEPTEMBER 2019

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Honourable Vice President, the First Lady, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to stand on all existing protocol.

I read out the following names with pride: Annie Monrovia, Euphemia Cole, Claudia Taylor, Mafulay Bangura, Mariatu Kamara and many others now retired. **They were some of the very first women who enlisted in our military forces.**

I pronounce the following names beaming with joy: Kestoria Kabia, Memuna Koroma; June Adeola; Ursula Hanciles and many more **were some of our country's first women officer cadets.**

I call out Brigadier General Kestoria Kabia, Colonel Memuna Koroma, Colonel Annie Paris, Colonel Leona Tucker, and Colonel Agatha Sandy among many more to come. **With deep pride and great appreciation, I thank you for your service, commitment, leadership and for blazing a trail for women to serve in senior command positions in our military.**

I also call out Col (Rtd) Annie Paris- Matron 34 Hospital - whose patriotic dedication to service and saving lives during the Ebola scourge earned her a Silver Medal;

Sgt Musu Foday - Ambulance driver - Bronze Medal and long service and good conduct medal, who acquitted herself valiantly as a driver in the Sector Reconnaissance Company (SRC) in

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Sudan, during Ebola in Sierra Leone, and who continues to serve these colours with pride in the Joint Presidential Guard Force;

Corporal Hannah George whose invaluable service as a nurse during Ebola earned her a Bronze Medal.

Each of these fine women and many more whose names I have not called out today, volunteered, stood side by side with their menfolk in war and public health emergencies, and in disaster management and national development.

Since 1978 and 1979, when 10 female Cadet officer and 64 recruits enlisted in the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces, more women have volunteered to serve. **They have showed us through over 40 years of dedicated service to country uncommon valour, courage, adaptability, selflessness, leadership, and they have carried through their pledge to defend and protect this land that we love.** Let us give them a round of applause.

They have defied traditional strictures; they have battled against stereotypes and unequal treatment and they have persevered and prevailed. It is a history and tradition to be proud of.

And today marks another important milestone in the history of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). My government is intentional and deliberate about

systematically integrating gender into governance structures and processes, policy-making, and legal and other reform.

At the same time, we will work to eliminate inequality and all structural barriers and cultural attitudes that give rise to and promote gender inequality. We believe that inclusive and sustainable development is only possible when 51% of our country's population is proactively engaged alongside the 49% male population to participate in nation-building.

So when my Government and the Office of the First Lady **launch national campaigns against early child marriage and all forms of sexual predation** through the "Hands-off Our Girls" campaign, it is because we believe girls must be allowed to thrive and be supported and allowed to be all they want to become and to achieve all their dreams.

When my government **made a national declaration on rape and sexual and gender-based violence**, we did so because we believe our laws and institutions should guarantee the security and dignity of girls and women in particular.

When I appointed women as Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Minister of Social Welfare and Gender, Minister of Tourism, Resident

Minister (Northwest), and deputies in the Ministries of Finance, Education, Local Government, Water Resources and several more senior positions in government and the judiciary, **it is because I believe that the elevated levels of participation of women in governance is good for national cohesion and inclusive development.**

When my government pronounced free quality school education and dedicated 21 percent of National Budget to Education, safe spaces for girls, school feeding, teaching and learning materials, and offered full scholarships to girls admitted to study STEM disciplines at University, it is because we believe that equity of access to educational opportunity will produce for this nation not unemployed teenage mothers and school drop-outs but women doctors, nurses, scientists, accountants, entrepreneurs, engineers, civil servants, and outstanding soldiers.

And when my government, in conjunction with the United Kingdom Government and the International Security Advisory Team (ISAT), launched this Special Female Recruitment, it is because we believe that expanding the presence and role of women in the national security sector is good for our national peace, cohesion, and development, and good for our expanding role in international peacekeeping and

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peace support operations the world over. **This initiative aligns firmly with United Nations expectations** to further leverage the invaluable role of women soldiers in peace engagement and peace support operations.

I am informed that hundreds of young women volunteered for recruitment at the various Regional Recruitment Centres in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, and Makeni. The initial intent was to recruit just 50 Officer Cadets and 250 Recruits, a total of 300. We ended up recruiting 332 because of the very high calibre of applicants and their distinction in the recruitment process.

But above all this, to you the soldiers gathered here today, I ask that everyone joins me to commend your resilience and tenacity. You have trained rigorously through adverse conditions during the rains. Your Commandant has mentioned highlights of your training from the extensive Basic Physical Assessment Exercises, long marches with heavily loaded backpacks, Basic and Advanced Rifle Marksmanship Principles, Basic and Advanced principles of soldiering, and you even climbed the Pawpaw Hills for Basic Map Reading and navigation exercises.

You have indeed accomplished yourselves with great distinction in training. **You have proven again that what man can do, woman can do even better.**

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You enter the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces at a time of progressive change. **Internationally, RSLAF is committed to peacekeeping and peace support operations in various countries in the world. At home, the role of the RSLAF has evolved considerably from a traditional border security role to a true partner in development.**

With Military Aid to Civil Power (MAC P), the RSLAF partners with the Sierra Leone Police to maintain maximum security in elections, secure key installations, and conduct night patrols to curb armed robbery.

With Military Aid to Civil Community (MAC C), RSLAF is engaged in public sanitation, flood mitigation, and disaster aversion interventions.

With Military Aid to other Government Departments (MAG D), the RSLAF plays a vital role in street clearing for free vehicular traffic flow and pedestrian safety, rehabilitating of key public infrastructure, and battling epidemics.

Soldiers who have participated in all the foregoing have all protected the well-being, health, and security of citizens in our beloved nation. I thank you. My Government will continue supporting and enhancing the capacity of the RSLAF in performing these critical national development and security roles.

As commander-in-Chief, let me formally welcome you into the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces. Let me also **assure you that you are coming into this noble institution at a time when there is growing opportunity for female service personnel** in terms of career progression, educational development, and participation in global Peace Support Operations.

We are also fully committed to recruiting, training, and retaining more women soldiers and we will promote women leadership within the RSLAF. We will put in place accountability mechanisms to ensure that our RSLAF pursues a progressive agenda for women and our institution will continue to evolve as we learn lessons and best practices across the globe.

May I remind you also of your responsibilities. The oath of allegiance, to which you subscribed moments ago, means that you have agreed to subject yourself to public scrutiny as a soldier both on and off duty. **You have sworn to respect, uphold, and protect the National Constitution of the Republic of Sierra Leone, and to obey all lawful orders from any superior placed over you without question.**

You must not involve yourselves in partisan politicking or engage in partisan political discussions. **As professional soldiers, do not allow yourselves to be unduly influenced by**

politicians irrespective of your personal relationships or other unseemly affinities with them. You serve the Republic of Sierra Leone and no one individual's personal interests or ambitions.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, as we witness the Commissioning and Passing out Parade Ceremony of these 60 female Cadet Officers and 272 Recruits, let me conclude my address by thanking abundantly the International Security Advisory Team (ISAT) for this laudable initiative of this Special Female Recruitment.

I also acknowledge with deep gratitude the support of the United Kingdom Government through the British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone for providing the greater part of the support to this training.

I also thank the Commandant and Staff of the Armed Forces Training Centre for transforming these young women into the fine soldiers we are seeing before us.

To the family members of these trainees I say a big "thank you" for motivating your children to join the RSLAF and to serve our nation. To our distinguished invited guests, I say thank you all for honouring our invitation and witnessing this history-making event.

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Lastly, to you our new soldiers, you have just sworn into one of the finest military traditions and institutions – one that has hewn and shaped patriots; men and women who have fought and made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation in war and in peace. They have served selflessly from Burma to the Congo, from Timor Leste to Lebanon, the Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, and in the jungles of Sierra Leone. They have stood up when it mattered; they have shed their blood when their country needed it most. They are the proud men and women of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces. **Let us all continue to stand for our country's peace, unity, freedom, and justice because we have only this one Sierra Leone.**

May God bless us all.

I thank you.