



**KEYNOTE STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ON THE TURNING
OF THE SOD CEREMONY FOR THE
RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MYOHAUNG
OFFICERS' MESS AND SINGLE OFFICERS
QUARTERS. WILBERFORCE BARRACKS,
MYOHAUNG OFFICERS' MESS, MONDAY 30
DECEMBER 2019.**

Myohaung Turning of the Sod 2

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Sierra Leone, His Excellency Hu Zhangliang
Ministers of Government present,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
The Director General of Defence,
Deputy Chief of Defence Staff and All Assistant Chiefs of Defence Staff,
Officers of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning.

Let me, from the outset, convey hearty felicitations and fraternal season's greetings to His Excellency, President Xi Jinping, and the Government and People of the Peoples Republic of China.

Ever since the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries in 1971, we continue to pursue a shared future based on mutual respect, mutual benefit, equal footing, common security, fairness and justice, and common development.

Our mutual and multilateral cooperation have fostered mutual political trust and fruitful cooperation between our two countries. We acknowledge, with gratitude, technical assistance that supports capacity building in various sectors, logistical and infrastructural development assistance, and support toward our country's food security.

We continue to look forward to other areas of cooperation including healthcare infrastructure, agriculture and agri-business value-chain, Special Economic Zones and Growth Centres to boost small-scale

manufacturing, tourism infrastructure, and the marine and fisheries sectors.

But we are here this morning to acknowledge the continuing engagement of the Peoples Republic of China in enhancing the capacity of our country's armed forces.

As a result of new defence partnerships fostered within the last year and half, the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone has signed a series of memoranda of understanding with the Government of the Peoples Republic of China that will significantly transform the capacity of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces.

I will give a few instances:

Work on constructing a slipway at the Navy Headquarters, Murray Town will begin in the very near future to enhance the timely and effective maintenance of all future naval assets and platforms. Once construction is complete, the People's Republic of China will gift the Sierra Leone Navy a new offshore patrol boat.

The Peoples Republic of China will support continuous professional development and skills training for officers and men of the artillery battery The Peoples Republic of China supplied in 2011.

Personnel of RSLAF (officers and men) continue to benefit from courses ranging from Military Engineering, Medical, Communication, Information

Technology (IT), to Command and Staff training. Currently, over 33 personnel of the RSLAF are in China pursuing various courses.

These courses continue to enhance military knowledge and significantly expand the strategic and technical capacity of our armed forces.

As a great believer in human capital development and a man who served in these armed forces, Sun Tzu's perceptive statement that "Victory usually goes to the army who has better trained officers and men" resonates strongly with me.

Beyond training, The RSLAF continues to gain from key infrastructural investments from the Peoples Republic of China from The Joint Forces Headquarters to the Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Centre at the 34 Military Hospital, among others.

But soldiering goes beyond mere soldiering skills. Morale is critical and it is a key ingredient in regimentation, esprit de corps, and discipline. It is that intangible psychological currency that boosts the capability of soldiers.

Pondering in his "Some Notes on the Conduct of War and the Infantry Division in Battle" in 1944, Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery lays out the importance of morale thus:

"The soldier who is well provided for, who is not disturbed by petty and unnecessary inconveniences, who knows that everything possible is being done for him. [. . .] is a contented soldier."

As a man who served these colours with pride, a former Chief of Defence Staff, and now President and Commander-In-Chief of our Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, I know first-hand the value of morale for esprit de corps.

Morale is defined in the 2008 British Defence Doctrine as a “positive state of mind derived from inspired political and military leadership, a shared sense of purpose and values, well-being, perceptions of worth and group cohesion.”

A well-trained soldier is a better and more resilient soldier when imbued with a binding military or warrior ethos that is grounded in a shared history, shared traditions, as well as shared values. These elements establish legitimacy by reminding officers of the RSLAF of their obligation to maintain the integrity of their institution.

Retired General H. R. McMaster observes in an article, “Remaining True to Our Values – Reflections on Military Ethics in Trying Times” published in a 2010 series of the *Journal of Military Ethics*, that “the warrior ethos [. . .] permits soldiers to see themselves as part of an ongoing historical community,” one that “sustains itself via a covenant that binds them to one another and to the society they serve.”

It is in the transmission of institutional customs and practices that leadership skills and ethos are communicated. The future of RSLAF is in the hands of the junior officers but they must be nurtured and steeped

in our military's ethos, values, and traditions. This can only best be accomplished in the Officer's mess.

Clearly, for some time now, we all know that the Myohaung Officer's Mess has been inadequate for serving its purpose. The size of the RSLAF has quadrupled. Younger officers have not been able to identify with the structural, regimentation, morale, and historical purpose of the Myohaung Officer's Mess and have thus not asserted ownership as they should.

Additionally, because of inadequate housing, young officers have had to live off-premises in private accommodation. This has not enhanced that intangible but all too invaluable psychological salary for our soldiers – morale and esprit de corps.

In line with my Government's manifesto commitment to purposeful interventions to enhance the capacity and capability of the RSLAF, I followed initial contacts described by the Chief of Defence Staff in his statement, with high level meetings on the margins of FOCAC in late 2018 with a special focus on defence cooperation and assistance.

On the 11th July 2019, the Ministry of Defence of (MoD) of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Ministry of National Defence of the Peoples' Republic China signed a Memorandum of Understanding which included military aid grants to the value of 50 million Yuan or approximately (\$7.2 million US Dollars).

Myohaung Turning of the Sod 7

The Government of Sierra Leone determined that the grant should go to the construction of two edifices.

First, a five storey building comprising 104 rooms with all modern facilities will be constructed and designated exclusively as Single Officers' Accommodation.

Secondly, the Myohaung Officers Mess as we know it will be completely demolished and replaced with a brand new and expanded Officers' Mess comprising two floors with ultra-modern facilities.

Let me reiterate that this infrastructure project will not be used as an opportunity for inflating contracts and stealing public money.

My Government's policy on transparency and accountability with regard to infrastructure projects is clear and simple – the terms should be simple, clear, and in the public interest; the project must include Sierra Leonean expertise and labour; the project must be completed within time certain; the construction must meet international standards; and, there will be no hidden costs or debt burden for Sierra Leoneans.

The Government of the Peoples Republic of China will handle all details of the contracting (including identifying the engineering firm), and provide all materials and senior engineering expertise for the construction project.

The Government of Sierra Leone will bear the costs of clearing, transporting, and warehousing all the materials from the Port to the

Myohaung Turning of the Sod 8

construction site. We will also provide local expertise and multi-sectoral support.

So as I turn the sod today for this historical construction, we look forward to more strategic partnerships with the Peoples Republic of China and we will continue to pursue our commitments to enhancing the morale and capacity of our armed forces. Our cooperation agreements will prioritise the identified needs of our men and women.

We may not achieve everything in short order given the state of the economy, but our determination and pursuit will be sustained with the fervent belief that our armed forces deserve more and they will be accorded more as opportunities open up.

I was formed in AND I am forever of the great tradition of our armed forces. I therefore proudly associate with this great development in our institution's history.

With this, I now turn the sod for the complete reconstruction of the Myohaung Officers' Mess and the new construction of a five storey, 104-room single officers' quarters.

I thank you.