

**Tribute by HE Dr Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone to Former President of Ghana, Flt Lt (Rtd) Jerry John Rawlings (1947-2020) – 28 January 2021**

Although tributes never remove the sting of a hero's passing, they help us remember what we cannot undo about their lives and their impact on society. His Excellency, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings was a friend, a mentor and a statesman whose voice and deeds continue to inspire me.

He was unique among the class of military strong men of the early 1980s, who emerged in the Politics of Africa. He was a strong man who pulled his country from the brink by building strong institutions. He navigated a bi-polar world of East and West by focusing first, and rightly so, on tackling Ghana's unique challenges and then projecting his approaches and inspiring kindred action for younger leaders right across the continent.

His thoughts are found in the very rich compendium that was his life and leadership. His warm presence was complimented by his flamboyance in speech, where each thought was clearly expressed with such candour that it was impossible not to be captivated by his all-round brilliance and piquancy. He said his truths effortlessly, often in such a matter-of-fact way, that the audience was left with no option but to accept its validity. This was the case for personal relationships or advice about the peace process in Sierra Leone.

I will always remember his advice, that when a nation is broken and vulnerable; when injustice is so rife, leaders must make it their life's mission to stand up for the ordinary man. If changes should happen, he often emphasised, then leaders must express righteous rage on behalf of, and empower the people.

In such instances, Leaders then have an obligation to build strong institutions that are owned by ordinary citizens, and in which ordinary citizens participate. My nation's decentralisation policy and several other governance structures that have consolidated our democracy are based on the Ghanaian model that President Rawlings built. He was passionate about instituting change, and was impatient with impulses that threatened governance structures, particularly for personal greed or materialism.

I will remember President Rawlings as a patient and kind-hearted man who treated me with empathy and freely shared his experience and advice. He summed up what he stood for in a simple saying, "Stay true to your principle; maintain your integrity and history will always judge you kindly."

May He Rest in Peace.

Signed

Brig. (Rtd.) Dr. Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone