



**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, BRIGADIER (RTD) DR. JULIUS
MAADA BIO, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SIERRA LEONE ARMED FORCES AND PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AT THE PASSING-OUT PARADE AND
COMMISSIONING OF SPECIALIST OFFICER CADETS AND
RECRUITS AT THE ARMED FORCES TRAINING CENTRE.
BENGUEMA. THURSDAY 3RD JUNE 2021**

The Honourable Vice President,
The First Lady of the Republic of Sierra Leone,
The Honourable Speaker of Parliament and Honourable Members of
Parliament,
Ministers of Government,

Armed Forces, Intelligence, and Police Chiefs,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Distinguished Guests; Proud Parents, Friends, and Relatives,
New Officers and soldiers of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces,

Good afternoon.

1. I am truly delighted to participate in this passing-out parade of 11 Specialist Officer Cadets and 549 recruits. I want to personally congratulate the 11 Specialist Officer Cadets comprising 5 medical doctors, 2 pharmacists, 3 nurses, and 1 Catholic priest. Sierra Leone is grateful that you have offered your professional training and expertise to serve in our country's armed forces. Thank you.

2. To the Army General Staff, Training Commandant, and dedicated team of officers and men who have transformed civilians into professional soldiers; who have barked out orders and pounded parade ground; who have instructed them during live-fire exercises and various manoeuvres; thank you for undertaking this very daunting task and accomplishing it with aplomb.

3. But there are more compelling stories of men and women from all over our great nation who have volunteered to serve in our armed forces. There is RSLAF 18184029 Private Tenneh Conteh from Kamabai village in Northern Sierra Leone who could not afford school fees, was vulnerable as a young woman, survived as a charcoal seller after losing both parents, but who today is a proud member of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces.

4. And there is the story of 18184038 Private Phillip Kamara from Kangama Village, Gorama Mende Chiefdom in Eastern Sierra Leone, who persevered as a farmhand but persisted in education, and never lost hope of serving our nation. Today he is a proud member of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces.

5. And here, there are 549 other stories from these men and women from all over Sierra Leone who have volunteered to uphold the proud legacy of gallantry and distinction from Burma to Congo, from Darfur to Somalia, and from Liberia to the jungles and cities of Sierra Leone.

6. We were lionhearted in battle; we fearlessly made peace; we have staunchly held up the peace. To all those who made the ultimate sacrifice, those who were injured, those who are retired, and those who have passed away, we owe each of them a debt of gratitude as a nation.

7. Kindly rise and join me in giving a round of applause to all veterans, and all serving men and women of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces.

8. Sierra Leone has been recognised the world over for its very successful fight against COVID-19. So, while hundreds of thousands of people are dying every day in other parts of the world, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention rates Sierra Leone as low risk and as having a low case fatality ratio. Our armed forces have been in the vanguard of our successful fight against COVID-19 from leading the technical and logistical teams, accompanying surveillance and contact teams, to manning checkpoints and border crossings.

9. As always in our proud history, Sierra Leone has enjoyed two decades of peace. It has been possible because the armed forces remained cohesive, steadfast, maintained esprit de corps and a strong sense of mission, and served with sheer grit and determination knowing that sustainable development is predicated on sustainable peace. As our democracy has matured through five election cycles, our armed forces must support its consolidation. That is possible when, together, we keep developing the armed forces we want.

10. We have started that irreversible process of transforming our armed forces into a modern professional force. For the first time, the recruitment process has been transparent, citizen-owned, and free of influence so that even charcoal sellers like Private Tenneh Conteh and farm hands like Private Phillip Kamara had an equal chance to serve their nation. Comprehensive and rigorous training modules have been instructed, advanced training and proper regimentation will follow, and then well-polished soldiers will be deployed to their units. The soldiers will gain more knowledge from advanced training, be disciplined and loyal, uphold a strong service ethic, and forever

believe in "Serving the Nation." Remember, a professional soldier is always a professional soldier first. He or she is not a thug-for-hire for politicians.

11. As a Government, we are doing our part. We have applied a 25% pay raise right across the sector. Since 2018, Sierra Leone has worked toward compliance with United Nations Resolution 1325 and recruited more women into the armed forces than at any time in our country's history. With a proportion of sixty percent women in our last two recruitments, we have exceeded the threshold of the UN resolution – one of the very few African countries to do so.

12. My Government continues to develop the capacity of our armed forces by leveraging goodwill and cooperation from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, The People's Republic of China, France, Canada, Bangladesh, the Republic of Korea, and Nigeria, Egypt, and Ghana, to name a few. We thank each of them immensely for their technical assistance and generous financial and other support, even throughout this COVID epidemic. We are expanding military cooperation with other states like the Republic of Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. There is everything to gain from building strong ties with new partners as there is from sustaining our long historic relations with our traditional partners and friends.

13. We are working assiduously to actualize the deployment of Sierra Leonean peacekeeping contingents to conflict zones in Africa and elsewhere. We are eager to share our professional skills and experience and we are most willing to give back to the world. The world helped us achieve peace; we are eager to contribute to world peace. We urge our development partners to support this aspiration so that Sierra Leone can deploy a contingent in theatre within the next year and a half. Serving on a peacekeeping contingent will be good for world peace and security and good for the men and women of our armed forces.

14. In spite of budgetary constraints, we have made good on our obligations to our servicemen and women in a timely way. We have constructed six modern forward patrol bases to accommodate our soldiers along the country's borders. We have completed 48 apartments at Wilberforce being married quarters and the Boom Defence at Kingtom. An ultra-modern Myohaung Officers Mess and Single Officers' Quarters will be

commissioned by August of this year. 34 Military Hospital is being transformed with new infrastructure and equipment, 100 hospital beds, an administrative building, and a pediatric centre for excellence, thanks partly to the great work of the First Lady of the Republic of Sierra Leone. We will continue apace with various infrastructure initiatives with a view to providing our servicemen and women with habitable quarters and appropriate facilities.

15. The Defence Policy Framework commits the RSLAF to supporting national development. Expanding the mandate of the Armed Forces Technical Education College and investing in both the Agricultural Unit and the Army Engineering Unit will underpin our national efforts towards our national food security targets and boost the productivity of our servicemen and women. The Navy has collaborated with the Ministry of Marine Resources to interdict illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing with its acquisition of some naval assets. This will both increase income from that sector as it will support the availability of fish in the markets.

16. There are always new threats on the horizon and we must never lose sight of possible security challenges from small arms proliferation, insurgency in the Sahel, to disaster preparedness and management that is being led by serving and retired members of the armed forces. But I fervently believe that our Armed Forces are equal to any challenge. They are well-trained and made of sterner stuff.

17. Let me conclude by reminding this graduating class that your primary obligation is to serve your nation with honour and courage at all times. While we are a nation at peace, we must sustain that peace, support national development, and continue building the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces we want.

Thank you and congratulations.