



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE
COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF NEWLY
ACQUIRED ENGINEERING EQUIPMENT FOR
THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ARMED
FORCES ENGINEER REGIMENT, FREETOWN -
18TH NOVEMBER 2022**

The Honourable Vice President,
Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
The Chargé d'Affaires of the People's Republic of China, Li Xiaoyong,
The Director General, Ministry of Defence,
Chief of Defence Staff and All Assistant Chiefs of Defence Staff,
Officers of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces,
Friends, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,
Good morning

1. As Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), I am very delighted again today to be taking delivery of, inspecting, and formally commissioning these engineering equipment.
2. Let me, from the outset, thank the friendly Government and people of the People's Republic of China for yet this strong affirmation of our longstanding friendship. Indeed, our shared vision, shared interests are grounded in mutual respect, trust, and cooperation for the benefit of our people.
3. On behalf of the people of Sierra Leone, I wish to extend our sincere gratitude to President Xi Jinping for the extensive and significant support from China for the development of our country in all areas including education, technical training, healthcare, governance and diplomacy, agriculture, direct investments, trade, small-scale manufacturing, infrastructure and civil engineering, and especially security.
4. China has been a steadfast and consistent supporter. Indeed, Sierra Leone is committed to deepening and promoting the solidarity and cooperation between our two friendly nations. China has always been there; and we are assured yet again that China will always be there.
5. In the past few months, I have personally commissioned several projects that we have completed for the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces. First is the magnificent Myohaung Officers Mess and the 104 Single Officers Accommodation at the Wilberforce Barracks.

6. Next are the six Forward Patrol Bases in Yumkellia, Bomaru, Yenga, Sinkunia, Sanya and Sulima; all along our borders with our sister Republics of Guinea and Liberia.

7. Thanks to the untiring efforts of the First Lady, excellent progress is being made in rehabilitating and transforming the 34 Military Hospital into an ultra-modern facility with a 500-bed capacity, a centre of excellence, a well-equipped nursing school, and a modern paediatric unit. Three weeks ago, I visited the work site with the First Lady and senior officers of the RSLAF. When completed, the 34 Military Hospital will provide outstanding healthcare to service members, their families, and the general public.

8. Among other projects, my Government has funded the construction of the Warrant Officers and Sergeants Mess and the Other Ranks Canteen at Wilberforce Barracks. The Guest House at Kingtom has been completely refurbished. The Gondama Housing project, fully funded by Government, is nearly ready for commissioning.

9. The naval slipway at Murray Town, is nearly complete. As a consequence of my Government's continued close friendship and partnership with the People's Republic of China, and in furtherance of our mutual security collaboration, I am also proud to announce today that Sierra Leone has received a Type C Patrol Boat from the President of the People's Republic of China.

10. When commissioned soon, this offshore vessel will immensely improve the capability of our Maritime Wing for the monitoring and surveillance of our territorial waters including the International Exclusive Zone; fisheries inspection and control; maritime search and rescue; and, accident and disaster response, among others.

11. During my working visits in the provinces, I have made time out of my very busy schedules to share breakfast and fraternise with the men and women of these armed forces. I do so because I am extremely proud of the great service and sacrifice of the service men and women of the RSLAF.

12. As Commander-In-Chief, I promised that I would transform the RSLAF into a professional, well-equipped and capable institution of highly motivated men and women who would carry out their constitutional mandate when required.

13. I promised in the New Direction Manifesto, that as President, I would "work towards mechanising and modernising the RSLAF to enable them to generate revenue and to contribute to non-traditional military functions such as relief, disaster interventions, agriculture, and construction."

14. It was a promise made. Today, as a result of the deeply friendly support of the President and people of the People's Republic of China, it is a promise delivered.

15. I am here today to take delivery of and formally commission a large consignment of engineering equipment comprising 88 brand plant machines to equip the RSLAF Engineer Regiment. This is in addition to 40 sets of other types of machines procured by my Government and already in-country. These equipment will enable the RSLAF Engineer Regiment to use its expertise in peacetime and compete favourably to deliver public civil projects including road, bridge, and other public infrastructure construction.

16. With the equipment now available, the RSLAF Engineer Regiment will also undertake civil works in support of disaster mitigation and response. Including flood control, medical and humanitarian emergencies, and disaster response civil works. The RSLAF Engineer Regiment can henceforth also undertake the construction and maintenance of military facilities, support food production and agriculture, and use the machine to generate revenue for the RSLAF in peace time.

17. Finally, to the Officers and Men of the RSLAF Engineer Regiment, I want to encourage you to take full advantage of the several opportunities the equipment offer for enhancing your technical skills and to capacitate yourselves.

18. Let me once again thank the Minister of Defence and his senior Management team at the Ministry of Defence for organising this commissioning ceremony, even at short notice.

19. I will undertake a conducted tour of the equipment on display. But I hereby formally take delivery of and commission these engineering equipment.

20. Thank you all and may God bless Sierra Leone!