



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE**

ON THE OCCASION OF

SIXTEENTH ARMED FORCES DAY

**AT THE JULIUS MAADA BIO PARADE SQUARE,
WILBERFORCE BARRACKS,**

TUESDAY 18TH FEBRUARY 2025

**THEME: REPOSITIONING THE RSLAF FOR
ENHANCED NATIONAL SECURITY AND
DEVELOPMENT IN SIERRA LEONE**

- THE HONOURABLE VICE PRESIDENT,
- THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT,
- THE CHIEF JUSTICE,
- THE CHIEF MINISTER,
- MADAM FIRST LADY,
- HER WORSHIP THE MAYOR OF THE FREETOWN
MUNICIPALITY,
- THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENCE,
- MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT PRESENT,
- THE CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF,
- HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT
PRESENT,

- MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC AND
CONSULAR CORPS,
- THE DIRECTOR GENERAL, MINISTRY OF
DEFENCE,
- SERVICE CHIEFS AND INSPECTOR GENERAL OF
THE SIERRA LEONE POLICE,
- OUR REVERED EX-SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN,
SENIOR OFFICERS,
- OFFICERS, WOMEN AND MEN OF THE REPUBLIC
OF SIERRA LEONE ARMED FORCES,
- MEMBERS OF THE FOURTH ESTATE,
- DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
- GOOD AFTERNOON.

1. I stand before you with great pride as we mark the **16th Anniversary of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces Day.**

2. **Today is not just a moment of commemoration.**

3. **It is a testament to the dedication, valour, and sacrifice of the men and women who have pledged their lives to safeguard our great nation.**

4. But, before we proceed, **I would like for us to rise and observe a ONE-MINUTE SILENCE in honour of the brave men and women of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces who have paid the ultimate price in defence of this great country.**

(AFTER ONE MINUTE)

5. **May the souls of the dearly departed members of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces Rest in Eternal Peace – Amen!**

6. This year's event, with the theme **"REPOSITIONING THE RSLAF FOR ENHANCED NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN SIERRA LEONE"**, captures the spirit and letter of the Armed Forces — the very core of their existence.

7. For many years, **the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces** has stood as a bastion of national integrity, a guardian of our sovereignty, and a force for stability and peace.

8. **You have been the first responders in times of crisis.** In moments of uncertainty, you have remained the steady hands, ensuring stability.

9. **You are the shield that safeguards our democracy, the torchbearers of stability, and the vanguard of national unity.**

10. **In recent times, we have seen how you rose to the occasion in times of great challenge,** serving as the shield that protects our democracy and the sword that defends our freedom.

- 11. Today, we pay tribute to your bravery, agility, and patriotism.**

- 12. As a retired General,** I am fully aware that being in the Armed Forces is not just a profession.

- 13. It is a calling – one that demands unyielding commitment, discipline, and the highest standards of integrity.**

- 14.** Your commitment has ensured that Sierra Leone remains secure, allowing our people to thrive in unity and progress.

15. Whether responding to national security threats, providing humanitarian assistance, or supporting regional peacekeeping missions, **you have demonstrated professionalism, resilience, and an unyielding commitment to duty.**

16. **Your contributions are invaluable, and your sacrifices, both seen and unseen, shall never be forgotten.** We are deeply grateful for your service.

17. Today, I SALUTE EACH ONE OF YOU FOR THIS.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

18. We recognise that the challenges of our Armed Forces are immense.

19. As the Commander-in-Chief, I reaffirm my Government's unwavering commitment to strengthening our Armed Forces. This commitment is only made possible by the dedication and service of every one of you.

- 20.** Since I assumed office in 2018, we have embarked on major reforms aimed at significantly improving the welfare of our Armed Forces members.
- 21.** These reforms demonstrate our commitment to building a world-class Armed Forces that cares for its personnel.
- 22.** During my first term as President and Commander-in-Chief, the **Defence Council in 2019 adopted the reversion of the RSLAF to a functional Tri-Service structure**, in line with

our Constitution, with its three Services: the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

- 23.** This aspiration was reiterated during my address on the Fourteen Armed Forces Day on February 22nd, 2023.
- 24.** I charged the Chief of Defence Staff with harnessing a Tri-Service structure as a plausible modern military approach to enhance growth, increase morale, and boost the operational effectiveness of the RSLAF.

- 25.** I am aware that this transition will be a long and time-bound process.
- 26.** I urge the Chief of Defence Staff to re-establish a new Defence Headquarters and coordinate with the appropriate Ministries, Departments, and Agencies to support these transformational efforts by realigning resources to commence the acquisition of the right platforms to strengthen RSLAF's operational capacity to contribute to **the BIG 5 Game** Changers for enhanced national security and development.

27. My Government has worked diligently to progressively mechanise and modernise the RSLAF, enabling it to generate revenue through non-traditional military functions such as relief, disaster interventions, agriculture, construction, and health care delivery to Sierra Leoneans.

28. We are now poised to expand these initiatives to establish the **Armed Forces Enterprise Scheme**, fish farming, and the cultivation of over 4,000 hectares of cashew farmland across the country.

29. It will also include stores catering to personnel and civil communities and engaging in estate ventures by building houses for service personnel on a mortgage basis.

30. I use this occasion to give special thanks to the **Governments and People of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Algeria, Bangladesh, China, Cuba, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Russia, Tanzania, the UK, and the USA**, among others, for their invaluable

contributions to modernising our Armed Forces.

31. Thank you for your remarkable contributions to our country.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

32. As part of the revised welfare initiatives in the RSLAF, we have made the following changes:

- i. Funeral financial support was increased from NLE 840 to NLE 10,000.**

- ii. Families of deceased service personnel now receive salaries and occupy the military accommodation for six months as opposed to the previous three months.**

iii. Marriage financial support will be increased from NLE 250 to NLE 5,000.

33. I charge the new Chief of Defence Staff to **adopt a welfare-driven leadership, embrace a "Soldier-First Culture",** and constantly review the existing welfare initiatives over time to include:

i. Support schemes for widows and beneficiaries of fallen service personnel.

- ii. Support scheme for service personnel with service-related injuries or disabilities.**

- iii. Post-Military Housing Scheme.**

- iv. Leverage the investment into 34 Military Hospital to become a fully operational Level 3 Military Hospital by 2027.**

- v. Establish RSLAF Shops nationwide to sell goods and services at cost recovery to service personnel, their families, and certain authorised civilians.**

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

- 34.** When I signed the **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act of 2022**, the RSLAF made remarkable strides to balance the previously male-dominated RSLAF with increasing female inclusion.
- 35.** Before 2018, the female percentage in the RSLAF was in the single digits. **This narrative has changed under my administration.**

36. Female inclusion has increased to double digits, accounting for 13.3 per cent of females between the ranks of Private and Colonel.

37. I, therefore, urge the Chief of Defence Staff to adopt an affirmative action policy to fast-track the inclusion, promotions and appointments of more competent female officers and soldiers to be represented in both command and leadership roles at all levels.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

38. I am aware of the obsolete state of the **Pay Regulations in the RSLAF.**

39. Despite this hurdle, my Government is still committed to having an enhanced pay structure for the RSLAF.

40. In line with my efforts to ensure overall reform, I approved on 4th July 2024 the establishment and appointment of members of the **Armed Forces Pay Review Board** under the decision of the **Defence Council of January 2024.**

- 41.** The Board will address one of the key pillars of the TACOS and review and recommend a pay structure that is broadly comparable with pay levels in the public sector.
- 42.** The X-Factor must also be given due consideration in recognising the harsh exigencies of military life.
- 43.** I have received the initial Report, and I urge the Board's chairman to make efforts to submit the final Report for speedy action.

- 44.** When completed, the new enhanced pay structure for all ranks in the RSLAF will address festering welfare and moral challenges.
- 45.** It would also attract and retain the right calibre of men and women with the necessary skill set for the Armed Forces.
- 46.** However, no compensation will ever be enough to repay you for your sacrifice to this country.

47. Still, we assure you that history and posterity will remember your fidelity to this nation forever.

48. Beyond military capabilities, we also acknowledge your crucial role in national development.

49. The Armed Forces are not just defenders of our borders; they are contributors to our nation's growth, involved in infrastructure development, disaster response, and community engagement.

50. This spirit of service makes you not just warriors but also nation-builders.

51. Remember, the strength of the RSLAF is not just in its firepower but in its members' unwavering character and moral fortitude.

52. We express our heartfelt appreciation to the families of our servicemen and women.

53. Your sacrifices and unwavering support empower these brave individuals to serve with dedication.

- 54.** We acknowledge your hardships and remain committed to supporting you in every way possible.
- 55.** To our veterans and fallen heroes, we owe you a debt of gratitude that words alone cannot repay.
- 56.** Your sacrifices have built the foundation upon which we stand today.
- 57.** Your legacies and memories are etched in our hearts; we shall bear them like scars forever.

58. I am aware of the **Association of Military Veterans of Sierra Leone Bill** that seeks to provide for the benefits and welfare of military veterans and establish an independent **Department of Military Veterans Affairs** under the supervision of the **Ministry of Defence.**

59. I charge the **Deputy Minister of Defence** to expedite the process to bring this Bill into law.

60. We will continue to honour your legacy by ensuring that those who have served with distinction are remembered, respected, and supported.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

61. Security is not the Armed Forces' responsibility alone but our collective duty.

62. Let us forge stronger partnerships between the military, civil society, and all national stakeholders to sustain the peace and security we enjoy.

- 63.** Sierra Leone's development aspirations can only be achieved in an environment of stability.
- 64.** That is why I call upon all citizens to support our Armed Forces, to champion peace, and to foster national cohesion.
- 65. To the members of the Armed Forces,** I urge you to be eternally vigilant as the forces of retrogression who seek to reverse the wheels of democracy are still among us.

66. I also urge you **to remain professional and above politics and to be loyal to the people, the Constitution, and the democratic institutions that form the foundation of this great nation.**

67. Let your service be marked by integrity, patriotism, and an unwavering dedication to peace and unity.

68. **To every soldier standing in formation today, know this — your nation is proud of you.**

69. Every Sierra Leonean stands with you today and always.

70. And as long as our Armed Forces men and women are willing to serve with honour and integrity, Sierra Leone will remain strong, united, and free.

71. I would like to assure our service men and women that their sacrifices will never be in vain.

72. My Government will continue to support you and your families.

73. Working together, we shall build a nation where **Unity, Freedom and Justice** shall reign.

74. Long Live the Republic of Sierra Leone and her People.

75. Happy Armed Forces Day, and May God bless and protect our Armed Forces.

76. THANK YOU ALL FOR LISTENING.