

**ADDRESS OF THE CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF AT
THE TURNING OF THE SOD CEREMONY FOR THE
CONSTRUCTION OF EIGHT ACCOMMODATION
BLOCKS AT WILBERFORCE BARRACKS ON FRIDAY
18 JULY 2014 AT 1100 HOURS**

SALUTATION.

HE The President and Commander –In –Chief of the RSLAF.

Cabinet Ministers

Parliamentarians

His Lordship, the Mayor of Freetown Municipality

DG, MOD

Officers, men and women of the RSLAF

Management of ECHO Construction Company

Family members of the RSLAF

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour and privilege for me to address this august gathering at another epochal event which records an important stage in our effort to address the accommodation deficiencies in the RSLAF. Let me on behalf of all ranks of the RSLAF welcome you to the event and particularly for those who are visiting Wilberforce Barracks for the first time.

The British refer to a place called Aldershot as Home of the British Army because of the historical link between the city and the British Army. The association dates far back to the 19th Century when the barracks system of quartering soldiers was introduced in Britain. Such a parallel could aptly be made between the Sierra Leone Army and Wilberforce Village, which with its long history

of hosting the Army can be referred to as the Home of the Sierra Leone Army.

On 17 February 2014, we were in Gondama, Bo to witness the Turning of the Sod Ceremony performed by HE the President and C IN C for the construction of 15 housing units which should accommodate 45 families of the 5 Brigade Headquarters. Almost 5 months later, we are here at Wilberforce Barracks launching a similar project which targets the provision of housing for 48 families. The lack of barracks accommodation for the RSLAF is well publicised and had received attention as an item for national debate in the past, it therefore does not warrant further emphasis at this forum. On record however is the vigorous effort to address this shortcoming in the RSLAF capability.

A barracks is a discrete military accommodation that is conducive for the enforcement of discipline, military proficiency and cohesion of a force. It should be a restricted zone to outsiders who are neither service personnel nor families of service personnel.

Your Excellency the President and Commander- In-Chief, Cabinet Ministers, Parliamentarians, Your Lordship the Mayor of the Municipality of Freetown, our esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen. You have all shared the experience of walking through some parts of Wilberforce Barracks and seen first hand the state of the infrastructure within the barracks. Wilberforce Barracks is the oldest and largest barracks in the RSLAF which was purpose built to accommodate an infantry battalion and ancillary units with a population of about seven hundred, family members inclusive. The situation changed dramatically during the war and post-war years when the strength of the RSLAF increased from 3,500 to

17,000. In spite of the drawdown after the war to the current strength of 8,500, attempts to provide housing for troops through the Operation Pebu programme have not been successful. Wilberforce Barracks because of its location and proximity to the city has borne the brunt of the overpopulation. The result of a population census shows that the Wilberforce Barracks is currently populated by 1005 service personnel and dependants of over 3,621 family members. These are official figures, but it is believed that conservatively about 1,500 unofficial dependants reside in the barracks who evaded the census exercise.

Over population of every kind have its attendant problems. You must have noticed that makeshift structures are strewn within the accommodation area to house the unofficial residents. The sanitary facilities are overstretched and waste management poor which pose a health hazard to troops and dependants. Because the barracks is not fenced, security is compromised with the barracks increasingly being used as a thoroughfare for residents in Tengbe Town. The porous nature of the barracks has rendered it as a haven for all forms of vices which sadly involves troops and family members.

Wilberforce Barracks under the current Force Establishment is the official accommodation for the 5th Battalion, known as the Freetown Defence Battalion (FDB). The primary role of the unit is to provide Rapid Response Capability for the defence of Freetown. The mix of occupancy comprising other units within the Western Area and upcountry units personnel whose dependants reside in the barracks have deprived the FDB of accommodation facilities to house all its troops. About 30% of the unit's strength is housed in Wilberforce Barracks; the remaining 70% are staying in civilian

dwelling within the Western Area. Troops housed outside barracks are transported daily to their place of work in Wilberforce on board Troop Carrying Vehicles. This phenomenon translates into the use of fuel and the wear and tear on the vehicle fleet for the daily shuttles to and from work on every working day. The Rapid Response Capability is therefore inhibited by this ugly situation.

Military barracks are purpose built to quarantine soldiers from civilians, in order to create a fitting environment for regimentation, foster esprit d' corps and force cohesion, and the enhancement of command and control. A military that is hugely deficient in barracks accommodation, dispersed in civilian settlements is prone to inculcating ideas current within the civilian society, which in effect undermines the commitment to military duty of unquestioned loyalty to the sovereign. Morale, a key factor that drives a Force to surmount the difficulties of military tasks and accomplish missions would be lacking in a Force that is not well housed. At worse, the combat effectiveness of such a military deteriorates over time as the command is not in a position to supervise the behaviour and conduct of troops 24 hours on and off duty as would exist in a barracks environment.

We in the RSLAF are witnessing a positive transformation in the provision of barracks accommodation for the troops. The Gondama Barracks is almost 90% complete, the battalion size barracks in Kambia will soon be advertised for bidding, Daru Barracks Hospital is getting a facelift and so is 15 Battalion in Lungi. The latest good news is that HE the President and Commander – In-Chief recently announced on 23 May 2014 at the last Passing out Ceremony of Officers and Soldiers in the

Armed Forces Training Centre, Benguema, GOSL's commitment to embark on the construction of a barracks every year in four locations. This bold step by GOSL should be applauded; it is in this spirit that we appeal to the goodwill and patriotism of Sierra Leoneans, and of course non-Sierra Leoneans alike for assistance in cash or building materials to the RSLAF Barracks Project.

While I would conclude this brief address by expressing our thanks and appreciation to you, our honoured guests for attending this ceremony, I look forward to your contributions, however little to our Barracks Construction Project in Wilberforce Barracks. Your Excellency, our esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your attention.