

MY STATEMENT ON ARMED FORCES DAY  
AT THE HOCKEY PITCH-WILBERFORCE BARRACKS  
18 FEBRUARY 2016  
PROTOCOLS



Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, we are gathered here today to commemorate our National Armed Forces Day; to raise our flag in remembrance of all the men, women and officers who gave their lives in the service of our country; to honour those who have helped preserve our freedom, to thank those who helped to bring peace back to our country and those who helped us to defeat the evil Ebola virus.

This is why the Armed Forces Day is not just another national holiday.

There is more to it than just the enjoyment of freedom and peace and stability. It is a special day with a great deal of historical significance. It is a day in which we must oblige to express our difference to those heroes, whose legacy should inspire all citizens to acts of patriotism. This is why the commemoration of this day should focus on making the general public become aware of what the Armed Forces have done and continue to do on our behalf.

I am honoured to address RSLAF troops on this important day; a day Commonwealth nations have set aside to commemorate the bravery and great sacrifice of soldiers in the First and Second World Wars. In Sierra Leone, this commemoration has been modified to include remembrance of all other wars we have experienced as a nation, particularly the 11 year rebel war and the war against the Ebola virus disease. We are also celebrating the victory and honour derived from such sacrifices in those wars.

We owe it to ourselves to be thankful to our Armed Forces and to demonstrate that there is great honour in sacrificing for one's country.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, it is because of this recognition

of the gallantry of our armed forces that my Government has given priority to improve the conditions of service and operational capacity of the troops. In the recent past, the RSLAF has gone through tremendous transformations especially in the areas of training, operations and discipline which have culminated in high levels of professionalism. This is why the RSLAF continues to excel in a number of areas including Peace Support Operations both at the African Union and the United Nations. This is why we are proud of our forces contributions to peace keeping efforts in Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, Lebanon, and Haiti.

Owing to the outstanding performance of our troops, we have more than 30 officers serving both as Military Observers, Arms Monitors and Staff Officers in various UN Missions around the world. We have RSLAF staff officers deployed on MUNISMA operations in Mali and plans are far advanced for the deployment of another battalion - LEOBATT II in South Sudan.

My Government will continue to pay attention to the troops' career development. Already, there are several training opportunities available to members of the RSLAF and they run across all ranks. To narrow the gender gap in the military, opportunities are also being created for women to be enlisted both as officers and other ranks so that they will be able to compete with their male counterparts.

I am heartened that you have established your own Armed Forces Tailoring Industry and the Armed Forces Agricultural Unit. I am heartened by the various self-help infrastructural projects you have embarked upon including the construction of Storage facilities, construction of Forward Patrol Bases, the Benguema Water Dam project, Expansion and upgrading of the Peace Mission Training Centre and RSLAF Drug Store.

My Government will continue to support these efforts and we will address the accommodation problem which our service personnel are faced with. Already, funds have been provided for the construction of 15 accommodation blocks each at the Wilberforce and Gondama Barracks. While the construction of an ultra-modern Barracks with all its complements will commence in Kambia in June this year, later this month, I shall be commissioning the newly constructed barracks in Gondama.

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen, let me now seize this moment to extend my Government's sincere appreciation for the diverse and invaluable supports rendered to the MOD/RSLAF by our friends including the United Kingdom, the United States of America, The People's Republic of China, the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Ghana.

As we commemorate the gallantry of those before you and commend your noble service to our nation, let me remind you of your constitutional role in our national development, your role to defend our sovereignty, to maintain peace and stability. I wish you all a memorable Armed Forces Week Celebrations.

God Bless Sierra Leone, God Bless the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces.