

CDS SPEECH FOR THE HANDING OVER OF THE BATON OF OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF CEREMONY AT MYOHAUNG OFFICERS' MESS ON WEDNESDAY 10TH JANUARY 2018



Please permit me to stand on all existing protocols. It is with deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty God that today I am handed the Baton of Office of the Chief of Defence Staff after my appointment as Chief of Defence Staff of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) on 29th November 2017.

Let me also extend my profound gratitude to His Excellency the President and Commander-In-Chief of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, Dr Ernest Bai Koroma (GCRSL), the former Deputy Minister of Defence (Capt Rtd Abdulrahman Kamara) and the Minister of Defence (Major Rtd Alfred Palor Conteh) for appointing me as the Chief of Defence Staff. This decision speaks volume about the confidence reposed on my leadership. I view my appointment as a new dawn in the evolution of leadership in the RSLAF. To be honest, I will dispel all that myth that normally surrounds leadership in the RSLAF. I will reach out and make it inclusive and all encompassing. We will own this command.

When my career in the then Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) as a cadet officer at the Benguema Training Center (BTC) now the Armed Forces Training Center (AFTC) about 26 years ago, little did I know that destiny will take me to the pinnacle of my career – as Chief of Defence Staff. As the saying goes in the Armed Forces ‘A General was once a cadet, but not all cadets can make Generals’.

The RSLAF has come a long way in its journey towards being a reputable and professional Force that serves the interest of its troops, the Government and people of Sierra Leone. Today, the RSLAF is known for its discipline, commitment and professional competence. It has demonstrated unwavering commitment over the years, commitment that have gone beyond the call of duty in the service of our beloved nation. Our contributions to the Ebola Fight and recently, the August 14th twin disasters are vivid examples. The RSLAF plays a critical strategic role in the nation's security, stability and development. In that light, the RSLAF is ever willing to undertake or perform duties geared towards the wellbeing of the State of Sierra Leone. To buttress this, in the recent All Walks of Life (AWOL) National Achievement Awards Night on 30th December 2017, the RSLAF was given an award in appreciation of the various roles played over the period from the 11 year civil war to the Ebola and the recent mudslide and flood disasters.

As I have taken over the mantle of leadership at a time when His Excellency the President and Commander-In-Chief of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the Government has expressed strong desire to capacitate the RSLAF, we were fortunate to receive strong political support and a steady investment of resources to capacitate the RSLAF; piece-by-piece, block-by-block. Such desires have been translated into some laudable investment on our Peace Support Operations aspirations for LEOBATT 2 and the ECOWAS Stand-by Force, construction of modern barracks at Kambia and Gondama, procurement of all types of ceremonial and regimental uniforms procurement of G 1098 Stores and the establishment of Defence Attaches among others.

However, it is a known fact that the Government, being the sole financier of the RSLAF has been going through challenges that warranted the economic rationalization policy across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). In such circumstances, coupled with the competing demand for resources from other priority MDAs, the RSLAF needs that leadership that recognizes these challenges as well as the opportunity they present. It should be a leadership that re-calibrates the philosophy of our approach in dealing with the core issues we face and one that holds the RSLAF at heart and places this institution's interest above all other interest. This is exactly what my leadership will offer to the RSLAF and God willing I will try my best. I implore the RSLAF Senior Management, Commanders, Staff Officers and the rank and file to give me the necessary support to achieve this feat.

We are in an era when we need to be progressive and productive in endeavours. We are in an era when we need to think differently and act robustly in our quest to make the RSLAF a forward looking organisation. This requires cohesiveness and team work we must work together to deliver the expectations of the officers, men and women of the RSLAF. We should be agile in scanning the horizon for solutions to our problems. We must therefore adopt enduring techniques and tools that are essential to the effective and efficient management of the RSLAF. In as much as we engage our international partners in doing so, we must also lay emphasis on home-grown initiatives for self-reliance. There is no gain saying the fact that no nation can exercise freedom of action in meeting its security and defence aspirations while totally dependent on foreign assistance. Therefore, we must look inwards to harness available opportunities to drive us from where we are now, to where we

want to be in the coming years. Therefore, in the coming months, I shall set out my vision for the RSLAF and the lines of development in fulfilling that vision. This will be done on the belief that we must be simple, workable and achievable. Furthermore, that strategy must be understood by all and thus supported by all. It is only then that we can succeed.

My leadership will proactively engage with the Minister of Defence, the Government and our international partners in exploring opportunities that could move the RSLAF to higher heights. We must continue to demonstrate high level of commitment in monitoring and evaluating the various developmental strands that are ongoing. Our aspirations to grow the RSLAF will not come easy. We must therefore brace our minds to surpass the challenges that lie ahead. In our just concluded 15KmRoad Walk on Saturday 2nd December 2017 which started at Richard Allen School at Shell Company, Kissy to the National Stadium, my troops greeted me with a round of applause when I mounted the stage to address them before the exercise started. Equally, on Wednesday 29th November 2017 when my appointment was broadcast over the SLBC TV, troops all over jubilated. So in addressing the troops before the 15 km walk, I told them that the way they have greeted and welcomed my appointment was sending shock waves through my spine. It means that I have to deliver and God willing and with the assistance of us all, I will deliver. I and us all have no other institution but the RSLAF.

To the officers, men and women of the RSLAF, let me assure you that the RSLAF leadership shall listen to your voices and will work in your interest. We will learn from a famous quotation from Gen Collin Powell who once said and I quote:

‘Leadership is solving problems. The day the soldiers stop bringing you their Problems is the day you stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you cannot help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership’ unquote.

Let me also assure you that my leadership is well informed about the issues affecting your well-being and I shall make exact representations of these issues on your behalf. I shall work assiduously to ensure the RSLAF leadership addresses those issues. It would not happen overnight, but with time. But let us remember that a journey of a thousand miles start with the first step. I am however not new to the challenges of the RSLAF. As Comd Joint Force I personally undertook a lot of activities to ensure the well-being of my troops were met. This ranged from paying school fees for both personnel and their families, support to funerals and weddings of both serving and retired personnel, paying hospitals bills for various operations and providing seed money for al formations and units canteens in the RSLAF – to name but a few.

To my colleague Generals, we must imbibe the principle of hard work, professionalism and above all trust. Trust is the glue that holds us together and must allow us to be separated for

individual reasons. I urge us all to work as a team in addressing the common issues affecting the RSLAF. We must build on the trust and confidence as we set out in discharging our duties in the interest of the RSLAF. You are the main source of this confidence.

To the former Chief of Defence Staff, Lt Gen (Rtd) JE Milton, let me on behalf of the RSLAF extend our sincere thanks and appreciation for the service you rendered to the RSLAF and mother Sierra Leone. We will always remember you as one of us. As stated by the ACDS Pers/MS, you rose through the ranks to become CDS of the RSLAF. There is virtually nothing about soldiering that you have not seen or gone through. I appeal that you open your doors to us as we might once in a while seek your advice on issues that concern the RSLAF. You are now one of our resource persons. The RSLAF wish you well in your new engagement as Deputy Commissioner to the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Your Excellency Sir, I salute you and wish you good luck.

To His Excellency the President and Commander-In-Chief, the Minister of Defence and our international partners, let me assure you that I will uphold the trust and confidence you have bestowed upon me. With Almighty God being my helper, I shall work to deliver according to your expectations.

I also want to thank retired officers of the RSLAF. Sirs, your direction and assistance in my formative years have contributed immensely to what I have achieved today. I served in various capacities under your various commands and leaderships both as commander and staff officer. I am indeed grateful and I thank you for coming. Your advice and mentoring will still be appreciated as I settle down to perform my functions and duties to the best of my abilities.

To my family, friends and well wishers let me thank you for your continuing support in making me what I am today. To my wife, Sunkarie and my beloved children I thank you for providing that support I always needed throughout these years. There is a common adage which says to every successful man there is a very serious woman. You have always been there for me. I have no doubt that you will continue to do so in the coming days, months and years.

To the Armed Forces Wives Association, you have always been there for me and my wife has always been part of you. I appreciate your support to me over the period. You have really displayed to me that you wholeheartedly supported my appointment as CDS. You even contributed in cash and kindness to make this occasion a success. I will take this opportunity to please appeal to you to come together as one body and let us all move this institution forward. I thank you for coming and your support.

To our distinguished invited guests, I thank you for your support over the years. Let me finally thank all for coming and I appreciate you all for attending this memorable occasion. I hope this New Year will bring us all success. I thank you all and God blesses us all.