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REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ARMED FORCES

MEDIA POLICY

By Command of the
Defense Policy Committee

18 April, 2023

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
TOWER HILL
FREETOWN

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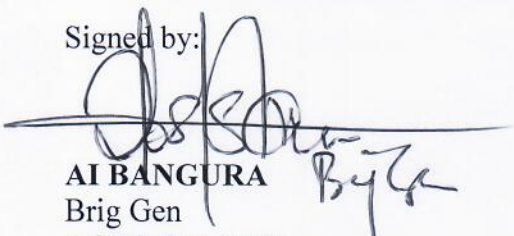
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Signed by:


AI BANGURA
Brig Gen
ACDS Ops & Plans



Authorized to sign on behalf of the Defence Council

Dated: 18 April 2023

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PART 1

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ARMED FORCES **MEDIA POLICY 2023**

INTRODUCTION

1. Following an Extant RSLAF Policy Review Meeting held in the Ministry of Defence on Wednesday 27 July 2022, it was agreed that the MoD/RSLAF Media Policy Guidelines 2017 be reviewed to cater for developing trends in the media industry. Advancement in media technology (new media) as an interactive form of communication that uses the internet and the changing global communications landscape has altered the way MoD/RSLAF as an institution communicates.
2. MoD/RSLAF personnel are allowed to access and respond to media platforms but within the borders of privacy and security so as to maintain the good reputation of the RSLAF. In online, MoD/RSLAF personnel must be wary about their scope of engagement so as to protect their personal information, maintain operational security and safeguard the good reputation of RSLAF.
3. This policy is therefore intended to guide MoD/RSLAF personnel (including civilian employees) on the scope of their media engagement within and outside the institution and country.

RATIONALE

4. Media handling is now an integral part of the Armed Forces and other security agencies. Personnel must be educated on information and technological advancement, and commanders at all levels are expected to make good use of media opportunities in getting the right messages across. This policy constitutes guiding principles regarding how we get our stories, views and reactions across to the public through the media in an authorized, accurate, professional and timely manner. It also regulates personnel's authorized and unauthorized interaction with the media and outlines standard response guidelines on how the MOD/RSLAF responds to issues raised by the media and the general public, keeping in view that the actions of the institution (military and non-military) are being conducted under the scrutiny of the media. Therefore, it is of high importance that an exhaustive media policy is promulgated by the RSLAF that serves as a control measure in regulating the forces to remain professional.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

5. The 2017 Media Policy Guidelines had several gaps which has precipitated this review. It does not adequately make provision for MoD/RSLAF media engagements in today's information society - a society where the usage, creation, distribution, manipulation and integration of information is a significant activity.


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Its main drivers are information and communication technologies. Consequently, MoD RSLAF is ill-equipped to handle emerging media challenges including; cyber, internet and various media platforms.

6. As a result of this, officers, soldiers and civilian staff of the MOD/RSLAF have been directly or indirectly releasing classified information to the media and interacting haphazardly without taking cognizance of the negative impact this has on the institution. This lackluster behavior has the tendency to compromise national security. The MoD/RSLAF has faced embarrassment several times due to such practices. It is against this backdrop that this policy seeks to provide direction on our engagement with all categories of media both within and outside Sierra Leone.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

7. Media is a communication tool used to store and deliver data/information to a large and diverse audience in an attempt to influence their mind set or perception in some way.

For the purpose of this policy, media is classified into three types:

- a. Print Media – refers to written communications platforms such as newspapers, magazines, books, Journals and Publications.
- b. Broadcast Media – refers to electronics broadcast platforms like; radio, television and films
- c. Digital Media/New Media – also known as multimedia, refers to any media that uses electronic devices for dissemination. It is a combination of all the interactive forms communication through the internet which provides quick and easy access to information in a variety of formats. It encompasses wide-ranging mediums such as e-mails, podcasts, blogs, websites, videos and social media, amongst others.


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PART 2

CLASSIFICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

8. For the purpose of this Media Policy, social media is classified into the following:
- a. Social Networking - This is the process of using websites and applications to communicate informally with others, find people and share similar interests. It allows users to directly connect with one another through groups, networks, and locations. Examples include Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Snap Chat, Telegram, LinkedIn and TikTok.
 - b. Micro blogging - Is the process of posting very short entries or updates on a social networking site. It allows users to subscribe to other users' content, send messages, and reply publicly. It also allows users to create and share hashtags in order to disseminate content about related subjects. Examples include Twitter, Instagram etc.
 - c. Blogging - Blogging refers to the recording of opinions, stories and links from other websites on a personal website. Examples include WordPress and Blogger.
 - d. Photo Sharing - Photo Sharing refers to the publishing of a user's digital photos, enabling the user to share with others either publicly or privately. Examples include Instagram, Flickr, Snapchat and Pinterest.
 - e. Video Sharing - Refers to the publishing of a user's digital videos, enabling the user to share videos with others either publicly or privately. It also allows users to embed media in a blog or Facebook post, or link media to a tweet. Examples include YouTube, Vimeo, Snapchat, Instagram Stories, TikTok and Facebook stories.

APPLICABILITY

9. This policy document applies to all MoD/RSLAF personnel (including civilian employees and dependants) within and outside Sierra Leone.

WHO ARE AUTHORISED TO ENGAGE THE MEDIA

10. The Directorate of Defence Public Relations and Information (D Def PR/Info) MoD (includes Media Operations Cell, Headquarters Joint Force Command) on the approval of the Chief of Defence Staff Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, or the Minister of Defence is the body responsible for engaging the Media on behalf of MoD/RSLAF. However, all members of Senior Management of MoD/RSLAF can at different times engage the Media in consultation with the Directorate of Defence PR/Info.

11. The handling of the Media at Formation and Unit levels is a command responsibility. Only the commander or his designated competent Media Officer is allowed to handle Media


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related issues at Formation and Unit levels. However, such engagement should be restricted to issues relating to the Formation or Unit. Therefore, complex issues such as dealing with MoD/RSLAF (strategy, policies, politics etc.) or delicate matters (issues that have far reaching adverse consequences on the image and reputation of MoD/RSLAF) on the MoD/RSLAF must be referred to the D Def PR/Info.

CATEGORIES OF DOCUMENTS TO BE RESTRICTED TO THE MEDIA

12. All intelligence, security and key operational documents classified as secret, top secret, restricted, confidential etc.) must not be disclosed to the media. These documents may be in the form of video clips, photographs, tapes electronics or hard copies.


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PART 3

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR MEDIA USAGE

13. Mod/RSLAF personnel (including civilian workers) must:
- a. Adhere to high standards of conduct and behavior online as is reasonably expected
 - b. Protect personal information, maintain operational security, and be careful about the information you share on the Media.
 - c. Never speak to the Media without authorization from the appropriate superior authority or your chain of command.
 - d. Seek authorization from the Chain of Command when appropriate before you speak to the Media.
 - e. Do not post images or videos on the Media/Internet that may tarnish the image of the MoD/RSLAF.
 - f. Do not post videos of yourself in RSLAF uniform on any social media platform, for example, TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat etc.
 - g. Do not post or comment on critical political issues (i.e. any discuss or action that gives undue advantage to a certain political party) on any media platform.
 - h. Not attempt to gain unauthorized access to MoD/RSLAF information technology and telecommunications system or content for which you do not have permission (i.e. Hackings)
 - i. If you are serving with the MoD/RSLAF and at the same time serving as an Admin on any social media platform (Blogs, WhatsApp, Facebook etc.), you must take responsibility for whatever is posted on that platform.

CODE OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA

14. **DOs.** When engaging the media:
- a. Remember the Name and Organization of the Reporter
 - b. Speak with respect and sympathy about other people.
 - c. Answer questions about your own work and be positive about your own role.
 - d. Refer to your superior if you don't know the answer.


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- e. Report to your appropriate superior authority what was said and whom you spoke to.
 - f. Be brief and precise; stick to the facts and be polite
 - g. All Officers should know the basic points on RSLAF Vision, mission and its Defence Missions and Tasks. These points will be provided by your Public Relations & information office if requested for.
 - h. Don't forget, you are representing your Institution, be mindful of RSLAF regulation.
 - i. MoD/RSLAF and HQ JFC should conduct regular Press/News Conferences on the approval of the Minister of Defence and the Chief of Defence Staff, Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces.
15. **DONTs**. When engaging the Media, Don't;
- a. Talk unnecessarily.
 - b. Address questions you are not authorized to answer but refer these questions to your Commander or appropriate Media Officer.
 - c. Give personal opinion about any situation or critical issues that you are not responsible for.
 - d. Speak about something that you don't know or is not your responsibility
 - e. Answer speculative questions. For example, "what will happen if...."
 - f. Disclose operational security plans or procedures.
 - g. Discuss other Forces
 - h. Post your own images/pictures on social media with any category of military uniform.
 - i. Appear to favor one side over the other (impartial)
 - j. Attempt to access, amend, damage, delete or disseminate another user's files, emails, communications or data without to appropriate authority.

USE OF INTERNET

16. In a number of instances, MoD/RSLAF personnel have posted comments, queries and concerns on the internet, provoking unwarranted media spotlight and heightening public


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concerns. The under-mentioned guidelines are therefore intended to strategically regulate the MoD/RSLAF cyber traffic for service personnel (including civilian employees) making personal use of the internet. These guidelines shall apply to any engagement with social media sites, blogs, photo or video channels, messaging applications, or any other online forum.

17. In summary, you must not knowingly transmit:

- a. Offensive, indecent or obscene materials, abusive images and literature.
- b. Materials which can be reasonably considered as harassment or insulting to other people
- c. Materials obtained in violation of copyright and/or in breach of a licensed agreement.
- d. Spam (electronic junk mail) or chain email.
- e. Materials that could by their presence online embarrass or compromise the RSLAF chain of command and reputation.
- f. Any form of gaming, lottery or betting
- g. Any form of share dealing.
- h. Materials designed to mislead people about who originated or authorized it (e.g. through misuse of signatures).
- i. Materials that will attempt to compromise MoD/RSLAF information technology and telecommunication systems prevent legitimate access, damage or seek to cause degradation of performance or a denial of service. Additionally, avoid unauthorized access to MoD/RSLAF information technology and telecommunication systems or contents for which you do not have permission (i.e. hacking).

18. MoD/RSLAF Personnel making Personal Use of the Internet:

- a. Are expected to adhere to the same high standards of conduct and behavior online as they would in any other aspect of their professional life.
- b. Should be aware of the dangers to themselves and others in sharing information online. At all times, they should seek to protect the following categories of information:
 - i. Personal Information - is always at a premium in the criminal and espionage world and can be used to take advantage of you and your family. Personal information includes: your full name, date and place of birth, full home address, telephone numbers, NASSIT number and passport details, pin-codes or NIN etc.


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- ii. Account Details - Criminal groups may also try to gain access to accounts using your details. These include details like: pin code numbers, memorable phrases, security questions, account numbers, login or user IDs and passwords among others.
- iii. Details about your work- hostile intelligence services or terrorist organizations may seek details about your work or your establishment/unit. This may include: work telephone number, establishment/unit location, rank /service number and position/role, among others.
- iv. Operational Information – if you are involved in an operation directly or supporting it, information protection becomes even more important and attempts to gather information by hostile agencies or groups may become more determined. Information that will be of interest to these groups include: operational programs, development plan, development details, capability shortfall, casualty details, morale and mission specific information among others, communication codes/networks.
- c. Are allowed to identify themselves as MoD/RSLAF personnel
- d. Do not publish information about 3rd parties including colleagues, without their permission.
- e. Do not need to seek clearance to publish information not connected with your work for example, material relating to personal interests and hobbies.
- f. Are to seek authorization before publishing any wider information relating to work which;
 - i. Reflects on wider defense and MoD/RSLAF activities.
 - ii. Do not attempt to speak in a manner that could be interpreted as speaking on behalf of the MoD/RSLAF.
 - iii. Do not mention things or issues relate to classified operational, controversial, or political matters.
- g. Should consider using or referring to materials on MoD/RSLAF corporate websites/Facebook page in your conversations.
- h. Should think about personal reputation and not publish anything that could be defined as inappropriate.
- i. Should not use rank or military uniforms or position during their online personal engagements.


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- j. Can act anonymously or pseudonymously in a personal capacity where appropriate but must:
 - i. Still follow this policy.
 - ii. Beware that very few things on the internet are genuinely anonymous and most can be traced.
 - iii. Understand that MoD/RSLAF, the Sierra Leone Police's cyber-crimes unit, and other authorities will pursue serious breaches of the rules regardless of whether the person intends to publish anonymously or not.
- k. If you are unsure, always seek advice from your superior commander or your line manager before going ahead.

PROTECTING FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES' INFORMATION

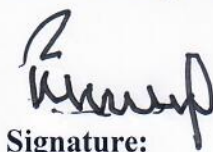
19. Some social networking sites enable you to publish information about other people, for example, by identifying them in photographs. Do not disclose information about friends and colleagues. Respect their privacy and maintain their security; remember;
- a. Breaching of rules or the handling of other peoples' personal information is potentially a disciplinary offence.
 - b. Do not to disclose personal information about your friends and colleague that they might want to keep private.
 - c. Be wary of publishing group or course photographs which link individuals to organizations. Are all the people in your photograph happy to be identified?
 - d. Exercise particular care in posting photographs or other information about 3rd parties working with the MoD/RSLAF. You could inadvertently place them at risk.
 - e. Be reminded that you could be sued to court for violating peoples' privacy.

PENALTIES

20. Serving personnel who default or fail to adhere to this media policy shall face summary trial and/or administrative action according to RSLAF's prescribed disciplinary regulation. Commanders and supervisors who fail to take appropriate disciplinary action on violators of this policy shall be deemed to be in violation of this policy and attract the necessary disciplinary action.

POLICY REVIEW

21. This policy shall be reviewed at least every two years.


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IMPLEMENTATION

22. It is incumbent on all MoD/RSLAF personnel to take ownership for its implementation. Regular trainings and engagements for a thorough understanding on the application of the Media Policy at all levels is also a command responsibility.

CONCLUSION

23. As interactive forms of communication necessitate the use of internet; it must be borne in mind that security is everyone's responsibility. Our personnel are our eyes and ears on the internet. Personnel are expected to contact their appropriate superior authorities when they see any information that falls into any of the categories of protected information, so that mitigating actions can be taken.


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