

## REMARKS

BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. GEORGE MANNEH WEAH

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA  
AND  
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF  
OF THE ARMED FORCES OF LIBERIA

ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE 62ND ARMED FORCES DAY

BARCLAY TRAINING CENTER

MONROVIA, LIBERIA

11 FEBRUARY 2019

- Madam Vice President and President of the Senate;
- Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives;
- Mr. President Pro-Tempore and Members of the Liberian Senate;
- Your Honor the Chief Justice, Associate Justices of the Supreme Court and Members of the Judiciary;
- The Dean and Members of the Cabinet and other Government Officials here present;
- Our Distinguished Guest Speaker;
- The Doyen, Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps;
- Your Excellency, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Liberia;
- The Officers and Staff of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL);
- Mr. Chief of Staff, Men and Women of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL);
- Former Officials of Government;
- Traditional Leaders, Chiefs and Elders;
- Political and Business Leaders;
- Religious Leaders;
- Members of the Fourth Estate;
- My Fellow Liberians;
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

We gather here today to commemorate the 62nd Armed Forces Day; a day set aside to honor the gallant men and women serving in our Nation's Armed Forces, and to recognize the immense contributions and sacrifices they have made in defense of our National Sovereignty.

Let me begin by congratulating the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), and also express to you, Major General Prince C. Johnson III, Chief of Staff, and all Officers and Members of the AFL, not forgetting the Liberian National Police, the National Immigration Services, our Fire Service, and all Para-Military service men and women, how proud we are as a Nation for the services you continue to render our country.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE.

My Fellow Citizens, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Before I begin my official remarks, I have to tell you that my heart is saddened with grief over the many deaths which have occurred recently, and particularly in the past 24 hours.

As you are aware, when I was returning to Monrovia yesterday from Gbarnga City in Bong County, where I had attended the closing ceremonies of the 186th Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, my convoy was intruded upon by a vehicle, which slammed head-on into a car carrying the Press Corps of the Executive Mansion, resulting in two fatalities, and seriously injuring several others.

One of those killed was a lady identified as Victoria Wlue, who was a passenger riding in the intruding vehicle, and Gabriel Wilson, commonly called Executive Horn, an employee of the Ministry of State, who has been the traditional horn blower to all Presidents of Liberia for thirty-eight (38) years, since 1981.

Before setting out for Gbarnga yesterday morning, we received the sad news of the death of Senator Geraldine Doe Sheriff, my friend, a patriot and one of the pillars of our contemporary women movement.

The passing of Senator Doe-Sheriff does not only serve as a big blow to her family and Senate, but to women in leadership and our young girls and women that are aspiring to be great leaders of tomorrow.

She paved the way for women to rise up to the top and become voices of reason within our political spectrum; when she rose to the position of Chairlady of the Congress for

Democratic Change.

Also, just last week, we attended the funeral of our late Deputy Minister of Defense for Operations, Hon. Ernest Varfee, who recently passed away.

Today, as we mourn the death of these exemplary public servants and an innocent citizen with great anguish, let me join my voice with the many others, on behalf of the Government and in my own name, in wishing their families, my deepest and heartfelt condolences as we endure this time of distress and grief.

I therefore ask you to stand and join me in observing a moment of silence in memory of these dearly departed, as well as our late service members who passed away during the course of last year.

MAY THEIR SOULS REST IN PERFECT PEACE

Moment of Silence

PLEASE BE SEATED.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I would like at this time to acknowledge the presence of Ambassador Christine Elders of the United States of America. On Wednesday, 6 February 2019, just five (5) days ago, Ambassador Elders and I were together in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, to cut the ribbon for a new boat house for the Coast Guard of Liberia. This is a facility that was built by the United State Government that will enable our Coast Guard to adequately conduct patrols along our Southeastern waters. Madam Ambassador, your presence here again today, is a manifestation of your Country's support for the Armed Forces of Liberia. The long-standing ties between Liberia and the United States of America are becoming even stronger under our Administration.

Ambassador Elders, on behalf of the People of Liberia, I ask that you kindly extend our heartfelt appreciation to your Government for the steadfast and consistent support of the professional development of the Armed Forces of Liberia as a "Force for Good."

I also understand that General John Rogers of the Michigan National Guard is here today. Thank you, General Rogers, for your leadership. Further thanks also go to the Michigan National Guard for their partnership with the Engineering Company of the Armed Forces of Liberia.

I would also like to thank the People's Republic of China, through its Ambassador accredited to Liberia, His Excellency Fu Jijun, for his Government's continuous support to the Armed Forces of Liberia. Ladies and Gentlemen, I am pleased to inform you that, the People's Republic of China, through its Embassy near Monrovia, recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of National Defense and the Armed Forces of Liberia, to build a modern laboratory facility for the 14th Military Hospital. The laboratory will cost several million United States dollars, and when completed, will be one of the best in the West African sub-region. We want to extend our deepest appreciation to the Chinese Government for its unflinching support to our Military.

Let me also recognize the presence of His Excellency, Ambassador James G. Dimka, of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Ambassador Dimka's service in Liberia creates the basis for a sustained bilateral relationship between Liberia and the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which seeks to promote Regional Peace and Security, and which underscores Nigeria's commitment to peace and prosperity in Liberia.

Let me also thank this year's Keynote Speaker, a legal luminary and a former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of Liberia, His Honor Justice Philip Banks, for the wonderful speech delivered, which has given us much food for thought. Justice Banks' well-known contributions and leadership to our justice system over the years have elevated Liberia's management of the rule of law, and revived and strengthened our jurisprudence. Thank you, Justice Banks, for your service to our Country.

#### DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

It is a great and singular honor for me, as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Liberia, to lead a military of young and brilliant Liberians whose call to patriotic duty is motivated by their love for Country. I am grateful and inspired as your Commander-in-Chief; and I am exceptionally proud of the enormous sacrifices, you have made – and continue to make -- to our Country.

Every year, the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) award is given to individuals for their invaluable services rendered to the Armed Forces of Liberia, our Nation, and humanity. This year, it gives me great honor to recognize and thank the 2019 recipients of the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). It is hoped that this recognition will reinforce your resolve to continue to serve our Armed Forces and human kind.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Each Armed Forces Day is celebrated under a theme carefully selected to serve as a focal guideline to the operations, growth, and development of the Armed Forces for the ensuing year.

The theme for 2019 is “Building a Force for Good through Service and Welfare”, and is designed to highlight the fact that the services and sacrifices made by our men and women in uniform, fundamentally exceed the care and benefits they receive from our Government.

One of the hallmarks of any civilized nation is the way it supports and respects those who fight in defense of their Country, including their families. The Government of Liberia, under our watch, is committed to upholding the welfare of our men and women who continue to put their lives on the line to keep us safe. They are an integral part of who we are as a nation, and an inspiration to us all.

As a country and people, let us honor that commitment by showing our support to our Military. Our government will take tangible measures to make their lives easier and better. We cannot have a well-respected Military if they are not assured of their welfare. Our soldiers are under oath to sacrifice their life for the safety of our nation, therefore as their Commander-in-Chief, I am obligated to cater to their wellbeing at all times.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Cognizant of the plight of our military, in my first Armed Forces Day message to our soldiers, our government promised to build a state-of-the-art Medical Center for the use of our Military, their families and dependents as well as other citizens of our country.

For some, it was a just mere words. For others, it was just a pipe dream...an illusion not grounded in reality.

But as I have often told you, I am not a man of words, but a man of action!

Today, I am pleased to report that significant progress has been made to date in fulfilling this promise. After the conduct of a professional feasibility study, a suitable site was chosen for the 14th Military Hospital, and construction is now far advanced. With the assistance of the Engineering Company of the Armed Forces of Liberia, the structure has now reached roof level, and is expected to be completed by the middle of 2020.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The welfare of our men and women in arm remains the primary concern of this Administration. Our military personnel should not have to pay for their own welfare. Last year, I instructed the Chief of Staff of the AFL to immediately prescribe the appropriate policy, procedure and management of all welfare-related issues; including the present welfare account. I am pleased to have been duly informed that disbursement of soldiers' Compulsory Savings is currently in progress.

Of equal importance, the men and women who are trained to defend and protect the sovereignty of our country should not dwell in congested and low-standard housing facilities.

To this end, I have instructed the Ministry of Defense to commence an immediate evaluation of all military barracks around the country and begin urgent repair and renovation of damaged housing units. You can rest assured that, when completed, the problem of congestion at our military facilities will be finally eliminated and our men and women in uniform and their dependents will have better accommodations.

**DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:**

Our military families are our unsung heroes. As a nation, we must pay keen attention to them! When families are stressed and distressed, it impacts negatively on the overall readiness of our soldiers. So, my administration will strive to create a secure environment and wellness programs for our military families, and provide them with a quality of life that is commensurate with the value of their support for our men and women in arms.

**MY FELLOW LIBERIANS:**

Our Military is and remains a 'Force for Good'. This is evident by the series of initiatives the AFL has been involved with across the country, ranging from construction works on the 14th Military Hospital, collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works on road repairs and rehabilitation, and renovation of houses in our barracks around the country. Our troops also provide medical and public health education, comprising family planning and HIV/AIDS awareness, to communities and areas within the vicinities of their barracks.

In a post-UNMIL environment, support to civil authority and local government remains critical. That is why my Government will continue to provide the Armed Forces of Liberia and the Ministry of National Defense the necessary support within the scope of our fiscal space in the implementation of these initiatives, as we harmonize our strategies toward the achievement of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development.

Over the years, our Military has been involved in lethal and non-lethal operations, both internally and externally. These operations were meant to protect our borders against armed aggression and restore the confidence of Liberians in our Military.

It is clear to me, that the effectiveness and enhanced capabilities of our soldiers, can be

credited to the quality of training that our partners have imparted to our Armed Forces, coupled with their preparedness and willingness to execute assigned tasks.

As we celebrate the gallantry of our men and women in uniform, I want to reiterate the commitment of our government to building the capacity of the AFL to assure that civil authority is fully supported. My government will support the expansion of the Engineering Company to a battalion in the next couple of years, to enhance the ability of the AFL to fully exercise its civil-military engagement.

**DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:**

The Liberian Coast Guard, which has the mandate of protecting Liberia's territorial waters, remains a very important element of the Armed Forces of Liberia.

Quite recently, the Liberian Coast Guard interdicted and arrested fishing vessels engaged in illegal fishing activities in our territorial waters. These operations not only protect and defend our territorial waters, but also contribute to the economic viability of our country. We will continue to step up patrol of our coastal waters and we shall prosecute any individual caught violating our maritime domain.

As part of our commitment to National Security, we hereby reaffirm our strong support for all of our Law Enforcement Agencies, including the National Police, the National Security Agency (NSA), the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the Liberian Immigration Services (LIS), such that they will become more proficient and professional in the discharge of their functions.

**DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:**

As a developing Force under a democratic dispensation, the AFL has continued to grow. In this regard, we all witnessed a change of Command at the top echelon of the Force last year when Major General Daniel Zee Ziankahn, Jr (Retired), the current Minister of Defense, handed over to his then Deputy, Major General Prince Charles Johnson III, the current Chief of Staff. We also had the privilege to appoint the first female Deputy Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Geraldine George.

We are encouraged by the many commendations we have received from our development partners, including the USA, China, ECOWAS and many others, regarding the progress we have made with the development of our Armed Forces. This has reinforced our resolve to do more. We will remain committed to this task, and will not rest, but work even harder, to ensure that our Armed Forces, through training, education, and support, will continue to develop as a "Force for Good".

**DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:**

The successes of our military would not have been achieved without the active and generous support of our international partners. We are grateful for the immense contributions to our troops through scholarships and training opportunities, logistical, and other support that continue to enhance the administrative and operational capabilities of the AFL as a "Force for Good".

To date, more than 500 personnel of the Armed Forces of Liberia have been trained in various fields in the United States of America, the People's Republic of China, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Bangladesh, the Arab Republic of Egypt, and Rwanda.

Similarly, we are grateful to the ECOWAS Advisory Training Team (EATT) provided by our sister nations of Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone. On behalf of the people of Liberia and members of the Armed Forces of Liberia, I want to extend our appreciation to you.

#### DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Despite the significant gains made in the handling of post-UNMIL security responsibilities, we expect the tasks of the AFL and other Law Enforcement Agencies to become even greater in the coming months and years. The operations of the AFL will likely increase and civil-military engagements will become more frequent in order to shoulder responsibilities that were created as a result of the departure of UNMIL.

We are optimistic that the tactical, administrative and operational enhancement provided by our bilateral and multilateral partnerships will enable the Armed Forces of Liberia responsibly execute their assignment in a professional manner and to the collective interest of our sovereignty.

To members of the National Legislature, we extend our profound gratitude for upholding your constitutional mandate in appropriating the necessary budgetary support for the Armed Forces of Liberia. Special commendations are extended to the Defense Committees in both the House of Representatives and the House of Senate.

And now, in closing, let me encourage you, our men and women in arms, to continue to serve and protect Liberia with diligence, dedication, commitment, courage, bravery, and, above all, loyalty, in defense of our Country's cause.

**I WISH THE ARMED FORCES OF LIBERIA A HAPPY CELEBRATION OF ARMED FORCES DAY!!**

I thank you.