

REMARKS

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. GEORGE MANNEH WEAH
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA
AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES OF LIBERIA

AT THE

65th ARMED FORCES DAY CELEBRATION

THE BARCLAY TRAINING CENTER
CAMP JOHNSON ROAD
MONROVIA, LIBERIA

FEBRUARY 11, 2022

Madam Clar M. Weah, First Lady of the Republic of Liberia;

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro-Tempore, and Members of the 54th Legislature;

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;

Mr. Chief of Staff, and the Gallant Men and Women of the Armed Forces of Liberia;

Former Officials of Government;

Traditional Leaders, Chiefs and Elders;

Political and Business Leaders;

Religious Leaders;

Members of the Fourth Estate;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

We gather here today to commemorate Armed Forces Day, a day set aside to celebrate our Men and Women in Arms for the many sacrifices they make in protecting our Country, and also to remember our fallen heroes who have paid the ultimate price in defense of this Nation.

Today I join our citizens in acknowledgment and appreciation of the loyalty, dedication, and commitment of the gallant men and women serving in the Liberian Armed Forces, as well as other para-military institutions in our country. Our country salutes you, as heroes and heroines of our time.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

At this time when the world is plagued by a pandemic that continues to take the lives of millions, I am thankful to the Almighty God for sparing our lives in these stressful times. To all our visiting guests, we are glad to have you join us, despite the tedious COVID-19 traveling protocols imposed around the world.

At this juncture, may I ask that you kindly join me to observe a moment of silence for all those who have lost their lives to this deadly disease; for the twenty-nine (29) persons who died in the recent stampede in New Kru Town in Monrovia; and for all those gallant members of the Armed Forces of Liberia who lost their lives since this day was celebrated last year.

PLEASE STAND.

PAUSE FOR A MOMENT OF SILENCE

May their souls rest in Perfect Peace, and may Light Perpetual shine upon them. AMEN.

THANK YOU. PLEASE BE SEATED.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

As I welcome you to these 2022 Armed Forces Day Celebrations, allow me to express the gratitude of the Liberian Government to all of our foreign guests and dignitaries who have traveled from far and wide to grace this occasion. Our citizens, most especially the members of the Armed Forces of Liberia, are honored and remain very appreciative of your presence.

Our Nation stands proud of the countless contributions of the Liberian Military to the peace and development of our country and the world at large. The Armed Forces of Liberia can boast of tremendous successes emanating from the support of our government and the level of training assistance provided by our foreign partners.

However, changing times and circumstances in the world continue to post challenges to the Liberian Military, which include welfare, housing, and logistics for our soldiers, to name a few. Yet, in spite of these challenges, there have been some significant accomplishments, of which we are very proud.

Fellow Liberians, four years ago, during my first Armed Forces Day speech, I promised that I would construct a hospital for our Military, which would cater to the health needs of our Men and Women in Arms and their families. Many thought that the project was too ambitious and farfetched to ever be completed.

Today I am pleased to inform you that the 14th Military Hospital in Duazohn, Margibi County has been dedicated and opened for business. The 200-bed facility provides both in-patient and out-patient services and has brought relief to our servicemen and women and their families. Let me assure you that my Government remains committed to the continuous modernization and staffing of the 14th Military Hospital to ensure that it will eventually be counted among the best in the West African region.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Our government is fully aware of the numerous challenges currently facing our military, much of which negatively impacts morale among soldiers, as well as the recruitment and force development of the Armed Forces of Liberia. Accordingly, we have begun the renovation of military barracks around the country, as a way of providing a remedy to congestion within the facilities currently in use.

In this regard, renovation works are presently ongoing at the Edward Binyah Kesselly Barracks in Scheflien, while the Zwedru Military Barracks in Grand Gedeh County; the Camp Todee Military Barracks in Todee, Montserrado County, and the Voinjama Military Barracks in Voinjama, Lofa County will soon follow suit.

Additionally, as a way of further de-congesting the EBK Military Barracks and further insuring that our servicemen and women and their families are provided adequate and conducive living quarters, I hereby announce the construction of an additional twenty five (25) housing units and five (5) multi-purpose bathroom facilities within the EBK Military Barracks, while we continue at the same time to explore other possibilities that will ensure that the quality of life within the walls of our military facilities in and around the country will improve.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Our country's security remains of paramount concern to my Government, and as a result, we have taken steps to ensure that the force capacity of the Armed Forces of Liberia is commensurate with our nation's current and perceived threats, as well as our international obligation to maintain world peace.

In this regard, we have taken the necessary steps to insure that the Liberian troops serving in the UN Mission in Mali have all the needed logistics and weaponry as required to enable them to effectively carry out their responsibilities in that theater. As a consequence of this, our government continues to receive resounding acclamations and commendations of the professionalism, dedication, commitment, and valor of the Liberian contingent deployed in the MINUSMA mission in Mali. For once, it is clear for all to see, that Liberia is making positive strides in contributing to global peace among the comity of nations.

In order to continue along this positive trajectory, as Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces of Liberia, I have ordered that One Thousand (1,000) additional soldiers be recruited into the Liberian Armed Forces in the ensuing year. Recruitment for the first batch of 350 personnel has already started in and around the country and will continue subsequently, as our fiscal space will permit.

My Government has also begun taking the requisite actions to remedy the issue of troop mobility in the military. Our soldiers must have the capacity to respond when the need arises, regardless of which part of Liberia requires their intervention. In this regard, the Government has made available twenty (20) off-road vehicles to the Armed Forces of Liberia for both military operations and administrative use.

I now hereby instruct the Minister of National Defense to review the files of both enlisted men and officers of the Armed Forces and ensure that all those who qualify are promoted to the next rank, with immediate effect.

MY FELLOW LIBERIANS,

while the welfare of our troops remains our utmost priority, my Government is equally committed to our military families, most especially the children. Today, I hereby direct that the Minister of Defense works in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance to ensure that the Gray D. Allison High School at the BTC Barracks and the Linda Thomas Greenfield Junior High School at the EBK Barracks are fully equipped with standard computer and science labs to allow a student at these facilities to have adequate computer knowledge before their graduation.

May I also use this occasion to announce the construction and completion of the Clar Marie Weah Vocational Center for Army Wives at the Edward Binyah Kesselly Military Barracks. This facility will shortly be dedicated and will provide life-sustaining skills to the spouses of our men and women in arms.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Each Armed Forces Day is celebrated under a theme purposely chosen to align with the efforts of the role and future training needs and requirements of the Armed Forces of Liberia. Hence, the theme for this year's celebration, "Inter-Agency Cooperation as a Panacea for Contemporary Security Challenges", no doubt coincides with current occurrences in the body politic of our country.

Our ability to effectively solve our nation's problems, while at the same time preparing for future challenges, will not only require that we work cooperatively together in government as a whole, but effectively collaborate beyond traditional boundaries into a national unified and collective approach. This approach requires a collective attitude and information-sharing for the common good of our country. I, therefore, call on all Liberians, regardless of religion, creed, or ethnic background, to work peacefully together to develop our country.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I would now like to thank our Guest Speaker, Ambassador Babatunde Olanrewaju Ajisomo, Former Representative of the ECOWAS Chairperson to Liberia, for such a thoughtful and insightful speech. The Guest Speaker's in-depth understanding and commitment to peace and security in the West African region made him best suited to serve as this year's Guest Speaker, in my view.

Ambassador Ajisomo, we recognize your good judgments and recommendations in ways to promote peace and collaboration nationally and regionally, most particularly as we move towards the 2023 Presidential and Legislative Elections. We thank you for sharing your wisdom and experience with us.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

At every celebration of Armed Forces Day, we recognize and award the "Distinguished Service Order" (DSO) to individuals whose outstanding contributions have had a significant impact on the growth and development of the Armed Forces of Liberia, our nation, and humanity. As Commander-in-Chief, AFL, it is my pleasing duty to duly recognize and congratulate this year's Distinguished Service Order Award recipients:

1. His Excellency Babatunde Olanrewaju Ajisomo, Former ECOWAS Ambassador to Liberia;
2. Colonel Aminu Usman Gumel, Nigerian Army;
3. Colonel Gbenga Sunday Oyinwola, Nigerian Army;
4. Colonel Emmanuel Chukwo, Nigerian Army;
5. Colonel Ismaila Sule, Nigerian Army;
6. Lieutenant Colonel Abdulkadir Yahaya, Nigerian Army;
7. Colonel Kwedu Hagan, Ghanaian Army;
8. Lieutenant Colonel George Nuetey-Ablade Dottey, Ghanaian Army;
9. Staff Sergeant Addo Adu Kenedy, Ghanaian Army;
10. Lieutenant Colonel Mahammed Abubakar Swaray, Sierra Leone Armed Forces;
11. Colonel Chris Wyatt (Rtd.), United States Army;
12. Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Moulton, United States Army;
13. Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Alden, United States Army;
14. Major Eric B. Willis, United States Army

MY FELLOW LIBERIANS, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The history of the growth and development of the Liberian Military is characterized by many challenges and difficulties. Nevertheless, theirs is a future filled with hope and aspirations. I therefore urge you to continuously see our military as a true representation of all Liberian citizens. Our soldiers must be seen as citizen soldiers of the people as they perform their duties.

Let me assure you that my Government is committed to providing, as much as is possible within our budgetary constraints, all of the necessary support to ensure that the Armed Forces of Liberia is, and remains, a "Force for Good".

The process of building the Armed Forces of Liberia to meet competing security demands of our country and the world is on track. Above all, we appreciate all of the training opportunities provided by our Partners. The Liberian Government remains proud and appreciative of your continuous support to our men and women in arms.

Fellow Liberians, our country's future is bright and we must work together to support our Armed Forces. Once again let me express my delight that our soldiers continue to exemplify the attributes of true servicemen and women. I am particularly proud of the AFL contribution to the UN Missions in Mali, South Sudan, and the Republic of Sudan.

I would also like to express my personal thanks and appreciation to my Defense Minister, Major General Daniel Dee Ziankahn, Jr. (Rtd.), the Chief of Staff of the AFL, Major General Prince C. Johnson, III., the AFL High Command, and the authorities of the Ministry of National Defense, for ably steering the affairs of the Armed Forces of Liberia during the past year.

I also wish to thank our partners - the United States Government, the Government of the People's Republic of China, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Republic of Ghana, the Arab Republic of Egypt for their continuous support to the Ministry of National Defense and the Armed Forces of Liberia.

Most importantly, we express our gratitude to our military partners, the ECOWAS Advisory Training Team (EATT). The Mentorship and training provided by you continue to enhance both the administrative and operability of the AFL.

Special thanks also go to our neighboring partner, the Government of the Republic of Guinea for the support to the AFL MINUSMA operations.

To the families of our Men and Women in Arms, we want to thank you for your support to our servicemen and women. You continue to demonstrate your love for our country by granting them this important support while they are serving our nation.

To our gallant men and women in arms, we salute and thank you for your service to our nation. You continue to demonstrate a keen sense of patriotism and regimentation as a citizens' army while bearing the flag that binds us together as a country. Despite the numerous challenges which you face, you have stayed the course and have remained committed to keeping the peace, as well as building on the gains we have made over the years.

I WISH YOU A HAPPY 65th ARMED FORCES DAY!

I thank you.