

**BROADCAST TO THE NATION BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT DR
ERNEST BAI KOROMA JANUARY 2015**



Fellow Sierra Leoneans

We have been ensuring a steady downward trend in the number of Ebola cases in Sierra Leone over the past seven weeks and I wish to express my deep and sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed to this achievement.

In my working visits to all districts and nearly all treatment centers in the preceding months to urge, endorse and monitor the measures we have collectively taken, I saw first hand the courage and great work of all our Ebola response workers and the determination and commitment of ordinary Sierra Leoneans to fight this disease. We owe the downward trend to this collective commitment. This positive development also reflects the significant improvement in the infrastructure that government and our partners have put in place across the nation to combat Ebola; we have substantially more beds and lab capacity, more ambulances, better processes and response time and more trained staff across the breadth of the response.

We are now entering a transition phase. Given the progress being made against the disease, we must take action to enable economic and social recovery.

Starting tomorrow, we are taking the following measures:

First, restrictions on movement will be eased to support economic activity. As such, there will no longer be any district or chiefdom level restrictions on movement. No quarantines or restrictions on movement above the household level will be imposed either by Government or local authorities. But we should not become complacent. I welcome the initiatives taken by District Ebola Response Centres and local authorities to enhance community surveillance and community watch efforts. These efforts must continue as we move into a phase of hunting down the disease.

Second, at the same time as we embark on the second phase of the Western Area Surge, we have decided to ease the restrictions on trading hours in the Western Area. Trading hours on Saturday will now end at 6pm. However, restrictions of trading on Sundays remain in force.

Third, as we move towards our target of zero cases by 31st March, hazard pay for Ebola Response Workers and health workers will be removed at the end of March. We are reviewing the needs of the sector as a whole, to ensure we are able to transition towards a stronger and more resilient healthcare system. Starting on the 1st of February, we will implement a more rigorous system of payment for hazard pay, ensuring fair compensation for exposure to risk, whilst ensuring that others do not take unfair advantage of the system. Any persons found to have falsified lists or taken advantage of the system will be investigated. We will not let the heroic works of our burial teams, swabbers, doctors, nurses, lab technicians, surveillance officers and others be tainted by those wishing to take advantage of the situation for their own personal gain. In the mean time, the NERC and the Ministry of Health and Sanitation are working intensely to ensure urgent payment of all back pay owed to Ebola Response Workers.

Fourth, we are well into putting modalities in place for the safe re-opening of schools. Our target date is the third and fourth week in March. Towards this, we have designed a Schools Re-opening Programme that will ensure the following actions:

Disinfection of institutions used as holding and/or treatment centres as well as those institutions identified as having accommodated Ebola victims; satisfactory water and sanitation facilities at schools; provision of educational institution with thermal sensors, training of teachers on Ebola safety protocols; incentives to get pupils to schools. This include school feeding programme, education provisions in place for girls who became pregnant during Ebola period and are unable to return to school; and supplementing teaching and learning at all levels through broadcast programmes.

Let me also state that the fight is not yet over. Even as we ease restrictions,

- We must focus on surveillance and contact tracing, until no new cases are coming from unknown sources;
- We must enhance our social mobilisation and community engagement efforts. We must own the response and Ebola must stop with us.
- We must continue to refrain from washing and touching corpses. Our records show that this is now the greatest threat to our victory over the disease. Law enforcement agencies and chiefs are under instruction to ensure that the full force of the law is brought to bear on those who touch or wash dead bodies.

Fellow Sierra Leoneans

The fight will not be over:

- until we have had zero cases for 42 days;
- until our neighbours in Liberia and Guinea have had zero cases for 42 days;
- until our surveillance capacity can ensure that no new cases are going beneath the radar; and
- until we have built the capacity and resilience in our healthcare system to interrupt transmission and prevent future outbreaks.

Only then will the fight be over. Therefore, though victory is in sight, we must not relent, we must continue to soldier on, we must continue to refrain from touching the sick and corpses, we must continue to support surveillance and contact tracing activities. These are the actions we must collectively continue to take ensure victory in the shortest possible time, and intensify the recovery of our beloved Sierra Leone.

God Bless You, God Bless Sierra Leone.