

New Year's Day Broadcast by His Excellency President Dr Ernest Bai Koroma

Fellow Sierra Leoneans

The New Year is a moment for resolutions, and today I call on all Sierra Leoneans to strengthen our individual and collective resolve to defeat Ebola. I firmly believe a resolution by each and every Sierra Leonean to act to end Ebola will see this virus defeated very soon in our beloved nation.

The resolution must be action oriented and geared towards positive change. I am very sure that all Sierra Leoneans want this scourge to end; and it is therefore time for all Sierra Leoneans to follow up their aspirations with their actions. And these actions that are required have been stated over and over again. Do not touch the sick; do not touch corpses; call health workers to handle the sick; do not seek to disobey quarantine orders. As we make our New Year resolutions, these are the actions that we must commit ourselves to doing.

As a nation, and with support from our international partners, we have increased our capacity to defeat the virus. From a single treatment centre when the virus struck in May, we now have over 30 treatment and holding centres; from a single lab for testing suspected cases, we now have over 10, and from a single doctor specializing in the treatment of Ebola, we now have thousands of health personnel all over the country, with skills to handle Ebola cases.

With firm resolutions from all Sierra Leoneans we will get ahead of the virus. And there are many examples to show that firm resolutions are registering successes in our fight against the virus. Now people who go to Ebola Treatment Centres have far better chances than before of surviving the disease. Our remarkable doctors at the Hastings Treatment Centre are now making sure that most people who get admitted within three days of getting Ebola symptoms survive. Other treatment centres are also greatly improving the survival chances of those who report early. Most districts, including Kailahun, Kenema and Bonthe are now registering zero infections over several days and weeks; and the surge in our lab, treatment, sensitization, and surveillance activities in other districts are ensuring faster test results, more people being taken to treatment centres, and more safe burials.

But whatever we do as a Government, whatever support is given to the country by our international partners to fight the disease, however hard our valiant doctors, nurses and other health personnel work to stem the disease, the fight would still be very difficult without resolutions by every individual, every family and community

to refrain from touching the sick and from touching, washing, and burying the dead.

I know what we are being asked to do is very difficult; we are a people that have built our humanity on hugging each other, on shaking hands, on caring for the sick and showing communal empathy by participating in funeral activities. But today the Ebola devil of illness and death hides in the innocent clothing of our culture to get us. That is why it is very necessary to suspend these cultural practices to defeat this evil virus. Suspending these practices for now does not reduce our humanity, rather it gives life to us. Humanity is about promoting life; let us continue to display our humanity by promoting habits that promote life during this unprecedented Ebola outbreak.

We are people of faith, a people who believe that without God's intervention, we struggle in vain. With the consent of religious leaders, we hereby declare seven days of prayers, fasting and charity with effect from today 1st January 2015. Our Muslim Leaders teach us that God is closer to us than the veins in our necks, and He has commanded us to call on Him in prayers, for He is ever ready to answer the call of His people. We have put in place mechanisms to secure our country from this evil virus; but the Bible teaches us that except the Lord keep the city, the watchman watches in vain. Today I ask all to commit our actions to the grace, mercy and protection of God Almighty. I also call on you to make resolutions of prayers for the lives of our health workers and all other Sierra Leoneans and our international partners who are putting themselves in harm's way to defeat this evil. We shall ever be grateful for your services. I also ask that we remember in our prayers the sick and those whose lives have been cut short by this deadly virus. And let us also pray for strength to do what is right and proper to promote life and healing in our beloved nation.

Fellow Sierra Leoneans, with my instruction, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is putting in place modalities to reopen schools and colleges in the shortest possible time. Dates for the reopening and other modalities will be announced by the ministry in due course.

Fellow Sierra Leoneans,

There are some people, from all regions, professions, and age groups, who want to use this moment to make money, to score political points, or to cause mischief and disaffection in the land. We must resist them. There are people who don't work but want to hide under the cover of those who work to get paid; we must expose them. There are people who are not involved in raising awareness about the disease, but

who are raising funds to siphon unto selfish ends, we must bring these shameless crooks to book. Government agencies stand instructed to keep record of all Ebola related transactions for accountability now and a more thorough auditing of the process after we defeat this virus. We expect all international agencies, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations who have received the majority of funds to fight Ebola to have similar records for a thorough accounting of their actions.

The task ahead is difficult. The focus now is on defeating the virus. This is not a time for politics; it is a time for healing. This is not a time for strikes; it is a time for service. This is not a time for partying and going unto crowded places, but a moment for reflection and prayers. This is not a time for holding on to practices that cause death; it is a moment for promoting habits that promote wellbeing, understanding, and national survival. We now have the capacity to end this outbreak. It is now only a matter of time. We now have the treatment centres in place. It is now only a matter of time. We now have the holding centres and personnel in place. With our individual and collective resolutions as families, district and region, it is now only a matter of time for our nation to end this outbreak, and like we did after the war, we will once again become a symbol of recovery, healing and growth.

I wish you all a Happy New Year.

God Bless Sierra Leone
New Year Message 2015