

## PRONOUNCEMENT BY PRESIDENT DR ERNEST BAI KOROMA ON THE EXTENSION OF STATE OF PUBLIC EMERGENCY

Fellow Sierra Leoneans

It has been just over one year since I declared a National State of Emergency as our country was confronted with an outbreak on an unprecedented scale.

Over the months that followed that declaration, our healthcare workers, our Ebola Response volunteers and our communities, working in close collaboration with our international partners have battled with vigilance and determination to overcome the Ebola Virus Disease epidemic. We have made tremendous gains and today we have just 4 confirmed cases nationwide and only two transmission chains. 9 of the 14 districts have not recorded a confirmed case for in excess of 110 days.

When I addressed you on the issues of restrictions related to Ebola in June, we experienced upsurges of cases in the Kambia and Port Loko Districts. I am happy to note the successes of Operation Northern Push in tackling these events and today both districts have recorded 26 days with no new cases. This is a clear demonstration of how with sustained community engagement and the backing of appropriate health support we can beat this disease.

But we are not yet out of the woods.

In the last two weeks we have recorded three cases in Tonkolili District, a district which had gone over 150 days without a case. We still have over 500 contacts to monitor from those cases. We are monitoring them for at least 21 days to ensure that if they develop symptoms, we can quickly move them to a facility for testing.

It is credit to Sierra Leoneans that you have complied with the exceptional regulations and restrictions my government has implemented on the advice from the world's leading epidemiologists from the World Health Organization and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention.

Sierra Leone did not experience this Ebola epidemic alone. Our sister countries and neighbours, Guinea and Liberia were also badly affected by the same deadly viral disease. And Ebola is a very stubborn disease, and our experts tell us that it usually comes back to places that are declared Ebola free. We have seen this happen in our sister Republic of Liberia. This is a reminder to us in Sierra Leone that even as we strive to get to zero, we shall have to remain vigilant and on our guard in

anticipation of any future Ebola outbreaks. Together we must remain the eyes and ears in this fight.

So as I say again that we have made progress but we still have more work to do.

Only after we have recorded 42 successive days of zero cases after the last Ebola patient has been tested negative will the World Health Organization declare the Ebola outbreak over in Sierra Leone. Until that point, my government deems it wise to maintain in force key restrictions to protect public health.

However, some measures are no longer deemed necessary at this stage of the fight. My government will lift the following restrictions with immediate effect:

- 1. The prohibition on public meetings and gatherings is lifted.**
- 2. The prohibition on sporting activities is lifted.**
- 3. The prohibition of nightclubs and video centre operations is lifted.**
- 4. The prohibition on market and general activities is lifted. However, the ban on markets and general trading on Sundays shall remain in place.**
- 5. Okadas to operate from 6 am to midnight daily.**

These restrictions are eased, provided venues and facilities adhere to all Ebola Prevention Protocols, including temperature screening of employees and customers, hand-washing and prevention of overcrowding. Failure to observe these essential public health measures will result in the closure or barring of activities.

However, in view of the challenges we still face with incidences of unsafe burial, and the need for quarantining and placing restrictions on large number of persons who may be contacts of persons with Ebola, I hereby proclaim another state of Public Emergency as by law provided.

Through the National Ebola Response Centre (NERC), my government is still consulting with stakeholders and international technical experts and partners on changes to the safe and dignified burial policy. The CEO of NERC will announce more on this shortly. Let me stress that pending this announcement, there are as yet no changes to the burial practice.

The Ebola epidemic has been a devastating challenge to Sierra Leone. However, we can emerge stronger and wiser. I cannot stress enough the importance that we stay

the course.

The easing of restrictions is not a sign that Ebola is over. It is not. We must remain on our guard. The risk has receded but Ebola has not fully retreated. We must stay the course.

We must all remain vigilant in our households and communities. We must continue to call 117 to report the sick and the dead in our communities and households and provide the right information to Ebola response workers who visit our communities to investigate cases. We must continue to implement the safe and dignified burial policies. It is only by doing these right things that we can be sure of a resilient zero.

I thank you all for your continued cooperation. Together, we shall overcome this scourge of a disease, recover, and resume our path to prosperity and development.

God bless Sierra Leone