



Address to the Nation on the Armed Forces Day Celebration 2026

18th february 2026

My fellow citizens,

There comes a moment in the life of every nation when truth must be spoken plainly – not to divide us, but to summon our collective courage. Sierra Leone stands at such a moment today.

We are not a country poor in people, nor in potential. We are a country held back by weak systems and by a politics too often shaped by short-term survival rather than the long-term work of building a just, prosperous, and unified republic.

If we are to rise, we must begin by naming our realities without fear.

First, we must confront the question of identity and belonging. For too long, our politics has leaned on region, religion, party loyalty, patronage, and personal networks. These forces fracture our national spirit and suffocate merit, innovation, and shared purpose. A nation cannot move forward when its citizens are encouraged to see themselves first as tribes, regions, or party loyalists, and only second as Sierra Leoneans.

We must also acknowledge a deep trust deficit. Too many of our people no longer expect institutions to work for them. In that vacuum, informal networks, favors, and survival mechanisms have become substitutes for the state. This weakens the social contract and erodes the very foundation of citizenship.

Our young people – the majority of our population – carry the heaviest burden. They are ambitious, energetic, and ready to contribute. Yet too many face too few pathways to dignified work. When opportunity is scarce, migration becomes an escape, manipulation becomes a risk, and despair becomes a quiet national crisis. A nation that does not create space for its youth is a nation that mortgages its future.

We must also speak honestly about gender inequality. Sierra Leonean women sustain our economy in countless visible and invisible ways. They are the backbone of our households, our markets, and our communities.

Yet they remain underrepresented in decision-making, underprotected in daily life, and underpowered in access to assets and opportunity. No nation can rise when half its population is held back.

We must confront the fragility of our state at the edges. Beyond our major towns, gaps in justice, infrastructure, and basic services create two different countries: one urban and connected, the other rural and left behind. This divide is not merely geographic – it is a threat to national unity and shared prosperity.

We must also face the truth about corruption. It is not merely the wrongdoing of a few individuals. It is often embedded in procurement, hiring, licensing, and service delivery. It thrives where systems are weak and accountability is inconsistent. To defeat corruption, we must strengthen systems, not just punish people.

And finally, we must address the paradox of our natural wealth. Our minerals and resources should be a blessing, yet they have not translated into broad-based prosperity.

Value chains remain shallow, institutions fragile, and accountability mechanisms too easily bent or bypassed. A nation blessed with such abundance should not struggle with scarcity.

Honouring Our Armed Forces

Today, as we celebrate Armed Forces Day, we pause to honour the courage, service, and sacrifice of the men and women of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces. They safeguard our peace, our unity, and our sovereignty – often in silence, often without recognition, but always with unwavering dedication.

Their oath is not to a person, not to a party, and not to a government.

Their oath is to the Republic.

To the Constitution.

To the people of Sierra Leone.

In their discipline, we see the standard of national service.

In their neutrality, we see the promise of national unity.

In their sacrifice, we see the cost of national peace.

Let this day remind us that a professional, impartial, and patriotic military is the backbone of a stable democracy.

And let it remind every leader – civilian or military – that the Armed Forces exist to protect the nation, not to be used as instruments of political manipulation or personal ambition.

My fellow citizens, naming these truths is not an act of despair. It is an act of national maturity. It is the first step toward renewal.

We stand today at the threshold of possibility. If we choose courage over comfort, unity over division, and long-term nation-building over short-term politics, Sierra Leone can rise – not in slogans, but in systems; not in promises, but in performance; not in isolated success, but in shared prosperity.

The future is not something that happens to us. It is something we build together.

Let us begin.

Together, We Rise.

Dr. Alpha Grace Bangourah, PhD

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alpha Grace Bangourah', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.