



MANO RIVER UNION
UNION DU FLEUVE MANO

Sub-Regional Meeting on Peace and Security

From 25 to 28 November 2019

Freetown, Republic of Sierra Leone

SPEECH

Amb. Medina A. Wesseh, Esq

Secretary General

Mano River Union

The Hon. Chief Minister

The Hon. Minister of Planning and Economic Development

The Hon. Minister of Internal Affairs

Her worship the Mayor of the City of Freetown

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps

Madam Ruby Sandhu-Rojon, D-SRSG UNOWAS

UN Resident Coordinators from the MRU Member States

UNDP Representatives

Ministers, deputies and Experts from MRU Member States

Representatives from the Election Management Bodies of Cote d'Ivoire
and Guinea

Presiding Officer from our Joint Border Units

Development partners

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to H.E. President Julius Maada Bio and the Government and people of Sierra Leone for affording us the opportunity to hold such a very high-level meeting with the aim of addressing sub-regional peace and security in the Mano River Union Space.

Acknowledging with gratitude the presence of Her Worship the Mayor of Freetown and the inhabitants of this beautiful city for the warm welcome and hospitality shown to our guests since their arrival here; I

also would like to appreciate all the dignitaries and development partners who accepted our invitation to join us at this auspicious gathering.

Allow me further to recognize and appreciate the technical and financial support of UNOWAS and the UN Resident Coordinators in our four Members States. Today, we can say that we have certainly started a very critical journey to properly plan and or re-design our strategy to ensure regional stability and peace from our border areas.

Hon. Chief Minister, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the conversation around the scope of peace, security and regional stability is broadened and embodies real life test that we all face every day. It is no longer confined to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as our region witnessed in the past decades, but includes many other issues before us as a global community. Today, we see and feel those enormous challenges such as climate change, migration, terrorism, cyber-crimes, pestilence, pre and post-election violence and the new wave of popular citizen up-rising, just to name a few. As the challenges expand the need to find solutions must also be established. The fact remains that we as a region should not limit ourselves to having only two choices, a choice of acting in concert with each other in our neighborhood or a choice of acting alone in our own self-interest. We must be each other's keepers. We must also acknowledge the world and in particular the United Nations has invested heavily to bring peace to our region and we must do all to build and secure the peace and be proud members of the Community of Nations.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, being cognizant of these facts and circumstances then, we can see that our Heads of States and Governments were foresighted, when in June 2012 they endorsed the **15th Protocol** which allows the MRU Secretariat to work on peace and

security issues in the sub-region. The 15th Protocol as the legal framework constitutes three statutory bodies; namely: The Joint Security Committee (at the margin of the Ministers), the Technical Committee (technical experts), and the Joint Border Security and Confidence Building Units (established at Class A and B border communities). The establishment of nearly 40 Joint Border Units have helped in many ways to address and or minimize some of the cross-border crimes: such as human, drugs, animal wildlife and small Arms trafficking. These remain constant threats which we must address in a planned and concerted manner. We want to keep this momentum, and to do so, there is need to revisit the strategy and examine ways to secure the peace with the sub-region.

There is a need for the MRU to re-position itself and create innovative ways of addressing the (pleh) thora of challenges the sub-region now faces. That is why the June 26th meeting in Abidjan this year, held amongst MRU/UNOWAS and UN Resident Coordinators of the four Member States was very instructive. The holding of this meeting today further strengthens the partnership with UNOWAS to ensure that all the critical minds would be assembled here today and over the next four days to review various reports and activities on peace and security, strengthen these and proffer ways of addressing the new challenges of the sub-region.

Distinguished, Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to draw your attention to some thematic areas that should claim our focus as we deliberate, and they include:

- ✓ Strengthening cooperation between MRU Member States on Peace and Security;
- ✓ The role of the Joint Border Security and Confidence Building Units as a strategic necessity for cross-border security;

- ✓ The pre-electoral (Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire) and post-electoral (Sierra Leone and Liberia) contexts, of tension and challenges
- ✓ The overarching political, peace and security environment towards economic development and regional integration.

Our Member States and the diverse stake holders in the societies only need a gentle reminder that we all stand to benefit from a stable and predictable bilateral, multilateral and regional order. At the Secretariat we are convinced that the competence of the relevant experts in the Member States and the revised strategy will enable us to achieve the expected results. The governments and peoples will be provided with additional and effective methods to help consolidate peace and security in the MRU Sub-region. We must begin to internalize the fact that we must all work concertedly in every way to be peacebuilders and not look for peace keepers. We must be mangers of the peace and work toward regional economic development and integration.

Thank you