

**MG Pablo Estrada, Guest Speaker**  
**Armed Forces of Liberia – Armed Forces Day 2023**  
**February 11, 2023**

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning My name is MAJOR GENERAL Pablo Estrada. Thank you for the privilege of being invited to share in the important celebration of Armed Forces Day with you. Each time I have visited Liberia I am amazed by the beauty of this country and its welcoming people.

Today I'd like to talk about partnership.

Former U.S. President John F. Kennedy once said that “Partnership is not a posture but a process – a continuous process that grows each year as we devote ourselves to common tasks.”

My experience with partnership began more than ten years ago as part of “Operation Onward Liberty,” working here in Liberia toward defeating Ebola. I spent nearly a year here, and during that time I came to know and appreciate you, the people of this special place, your values – and of course – the deep history shared by the U.S. and Liberia that stretches back now *more* than 200 years.

Today, it is great to be back. Returning here, it is so exciting to see the evidence all around that the United States and Liberia **are and continue to be close partners.**

I am very proud to have been a part of the close cooperation shared by the Michigan National Guard and the Armed Forces of Liberia. We have been working together since 2009 and we have accomplished much together during that time. In 2021, it was a proud moment for us when we saw Soldiers from the Armed Forces of Liberia training alongside U.S. forces at Camp Grayling in Michigan. But much of what has been accomplished is your own. It's because of your own hard work and commitment to your vision for the Armed Forces of Liberia to be “A Force for Good”.

I want to take a few moments to highlight some of those good things that are very clear to me. They are things you can be proud of.

**First, the mission of the Armed Forces of Liberia is growing.**

For instance, the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. The AFL began their support for this mission in 2013 with a platoon-size element and now is contributing a company-size element of 150 Soldiers. You have also increased your Military Staff Officer support every year, while branching out from Mali across Africa with a total of over 14 military support officers.

Additionally, in 2018 and 2019, the Armed Forces of Liberia backfilled UN military posts in Voinjama and Zwedru to fill the void and provide stability after the UN Peacekeepers successfully fulfilled their mission.

In 2015, Watch Over 6 became the first Liberian National inter-agency exercise. Its focus was Defense Support to Civil Authorities, and it showcased true inter-agency coordination. Nearly every military, civilian, and governmental agency in Liberia were players and participated.

Since the first Watch Over exercise, the event has been held again successfully many times. It shows the Armed Forces of Liberia working together with other agencies to promote peace and stability that everyone in this country understands is essential for Liberia's future and democracy. The United States and Liberia, as two of the oldest continuous republics in the world, share a unique history paired with common democratic values. As Liberia looks to this year's National Elections, the country understands that the AFL, as an apolitical, professional military, will continue to be a force for good in helping to coordinate with the inter-agency to ensure peaceful elections.

Second, the **quality of training in the Armed Forces of Liberia is developing.**

Just recently, in December 2022, the first basic training class since 2016 graduated with 176 new soldiers. This recruit class will also include, for the first time, "professionals" – doctors and lawyers who will be directly commissioned as military officers to reflect their advanced degrees and experience. They will graduate at the end of this month.

In addition to Northern Strike, held in Michigan every August, Liberia has also participated in several multi-national exercises including Sage Eagle 22-2, and has participated annually in Obangame Express, the largest maritime exercise in West & Central Africa. That exercise recently featured Liberian sailors working with U.S. Naval Forces.

This past year, in 2022, officials in Liberia began working with the Latvia National Armed Forces, a Baltic State and NATO member, to craft a Status of Forces Agreement that will enable combined training in Liberia. This is an exciting development and an example for other partnerships that the National Guard has around the globe.

Finally, **your facilities are constantly improving.**

EBK, Camp Ware, Camp Tubman and other locations are receiving barracks renovations. Additionally, the 14 Military Hospital opened in September 2021 and is a fully functioning hospital, including an operating room, a NICU, in-patient services, x-ray, lab, an emergency department, and a cafeteria.

These are all things that I clearly see as I look at the Armed Forces of Liberia. They are a part of what makes it a credible organization for peace, stability, and sustainable democracy.

Yes, the **U.S. and Liberia are partners. It is a partnership that grows deeper and stronger each year.** And the value of our cooperation goes both ways. We see our work together as an investment in capability, interoperability, and relationships. This means that every time a U.S. Soldier visits Liberia, they gain an irreplaceable experience that teaches them how to work in a new environment with new colleagues. It helps them understand something new about how the world works.

Like Kennedy said, we are building on our partnership year by year. I know we will continue to grow and accomplish much more together because of our shared democratic values and a historical relationship unique in the world.

That is why I am proud to say with you today that **"the Love of Liberty brought us here."**