

## **ERW AND SURVIVOR SPEECH**

Mr Moderator, His Excellency the President, the First Lady, Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament, Members of the International Community, all other protocols observed

On this important day in the history of Sierra Leone, I am delighted to be here to tell you my story.

I first came into contact with Ebola in August 2014 when caring for my sick father. We now know that he had most likely become infected through his job as a pharmacy technician at the Rokupa Government Hospital. However, at the time of his illness my family and I had no knowledge of this. I had started to work with the community leadership learning about Ebola but when my father became sick I stopped attending to dedicate my time to his full time care. I never believed it possible that Ebola would infiltrate my family.

My father was the bread winner supporting 20 family members.

Everyone in our family helped him through his illness. We bathed him, fed him, washed his bedding and his clothes however, despite our efforts, after two weeks he died at Rokupa Government Hospital on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2014.

His corpse was handed over to us for the funeral. However, within days of the funeral many members of my family had fallen ill. Still not knowing that my father had died of Ebola but knowing that we were very sick, my family made several calls to 117 for an ambulance, but it was futile, no one came. Against the advice of my family, I decided to go to the Hospital. I was scared. I was showing all the same symptoms as my father, and afraid it would also take my life, I went to Connaught Hospital to get help.

I was met outside by a doctor. She immediately recognised my symptoms and admitted me to the isolation unit. I will never forget my first day and night inside the Isolation unit as 5 people died that day. I wondered what my fate would be.

After three days of waiting, my blood tests came back and the doctors came to tell me I had Ebola. With only two treatment centres in the entire country I stayed at Connaught Isolation unit under the care of the doctors and nurses.

My time in the isolation unit was lonely and scary. Most days my phone would ring with the news from friends and neighbours that another member of my family had died. I started to lose hope. In all, 16 members of my family were affected by the virus and by the grace of god, 3 of us survived.

After 2 weeks in the Isolation unit, I was discharged on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2014. I am the second survivor from the Connaught Isolation unit.

After my discharge I decided to become an Ebola Response Worker. I volunteered with a local NGO on an Ebola sensitization project. I spent my time explaining to my fellow Sierra Leoneans that the best thing someone suffering with Ebola can do is to go for treatment early and not to be afraid of the medical personnel. Many believed

that medical personal would give injections to make patients die – I needed to assure people that I have survived an Isolation unit and reassure them of the truth about Ebola.

Prior to the outbreak I have graduated from Fourah Bay College and also gained a Diploma in Social Work and so, in late 2014 I decided to become a social worker at an Observational Interim Care Centre in Freetown. The hours were long and the pay was low but I was able to provide a safe and welcoming environment for vulnerable children. We looked after children whose parents or guardians had tested positive for Ebola during the 21 days of their quarantine. At any stage, if a child developed symptoms, they too would be admitted to an isolation unit. I was responsible for ensuring these children were bathed and fed, helping the nurses take their temperature regularly and identifying signs and symptoms of Ebola early. If a child was admitted for treatment I would visit the child at the treatment centre as well as visiting family members in treatment, updating them on the child's progress and letting the child know I was still there for them. Every time a child died I was devastated.

During my time at the OICC I cared for the child that HE. The President met in August this year. She came to our OICC in January and survived Ebola. Many of these children, including her, are still my friends today and I am so proud to have been able to help them in their time of need.

At this juncture, as the outbreak is declared over in Sierra Leone, I call upon my government and the international partners to continue to support those of us who have survived Ebola. For us, Ebola is not over, for the 4,051 men, women and children who are our Ebola Survivor Community we will continue to live with the memories and the medical complications for a long time to come. We need your help to secure our futures – through healthcare, education and job opportunities.

I ask Sierra Leoneans to come together and commemorate those who we have lost in this fight, the orphans and widows that have been created, the heart break that has been felt and the suffering that for so many will never be forgotten.

I would like to dedicate this day to all those who have died at the hands of Ebola with a special place in my heart remembering the children who have been affected by this outbreak.