

The President of Sierra Leone, His Excellency Ernest Bai Koroma, speaks to the BirdLife International World Congress, 22 June 2013

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"Accept greetings from me and the people of Sierra Leone.

You are all gathered here today, from more than 100 countries, because of the common and global challenges facing the world and its people. The common threats, such as climate change and the depletion of natural resources, warrant global strategies. Most importantly however, they also require local and national actions.

Sierra Leone shares with other West African countries one of the world's richest tropical forests. My government takes great pride in having recently declared over 70,000 hectares of the Gola Rainforest as a National Park. From studies carried out in the Gola Rainforest National Park, by the BirdLife Partners in Sierra Leone and the UK (the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone and the RSPB), we know that through the sale of carbon credits and other innovative schemes, we may be able to secure the finances necessary to continue the protection of the Gola forest and sustaining local livelihoods.

That is why my Government has opted to protect the Gola forest and develop a REDD carbon project in the National Park. This project will be the first of its kind for Sierra Leone and for West Africa. It is a demonstration of my Government's commitment to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services, combating climate change, and at the same time, protecting and improving the lives of our people.

We are committed to the establishment of a transboundary "peace park" between Liberia and Sierra Leone. This pledge was jointly made by Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the President of Liberia, and myself in May 2009, during the launch of the "Across the River

Project?, in partnership with the European Union, the BirdLife International Partnership and our Governments.

The establishment of this area to be called the ?Greater Gola Transboundary Peace Park? is of great significance to both Liberia and Sierra Leone. It demonstrates the oneness of the Gola people who live on both sides of the border, promotes our common vision of unity, peace and development in the Manu river basin, and asserts our collective aspirations for a peaceful future where our people and forests prosper.

I am confident that our continued collaboration with the BirdLife Partnership will ensure that this initiative protects our environmental inheritance, promotes biodiversity in the Manu river basin, and enhances sustainable development for the citizens of both Liberia and Sierra Leone.

I wish you a successful congress.

Thank you."

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