

Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

At Official Launch and Fundraising Program

Of the Grand Bassa Community College

Buchanan City, October 21, 2010

Let me first say a big thank you to all of those who have come out to participate in this important event – those who have come from towns, those who have come from embassies, non-governmental institutions and organizations, friends of Liberia, friends of Grand Bassa County.

When this Government – your Government – started in 2006, the stakes and the statistics were startling. They showed that the current generation is less educated, less informed, and less knowledgeable than the one ahead of it. How, then, could we run a country? How, then, could the future leaders take over from the many of us who will be passing from the scene?

So we started with primary education, by enforcing compulsory primary education. We made a lot of progress – 40 percent increase in enrollment. But progress brings challenges. And so we quickly found out that we didn't have enough school facilities, we didn't have enough teachers, we didn't have enough instructional materials to be able to provide the quality education that is required.

We started with the teachers, and what we did was to reactivate our Teacher Training Colleges. The one in Kakata is now operational; the one in Zorzor is now operational; and this year, the one in Webbo will become operational.

We brought in the Peace Corps, and we asked them to focus primarily on teacher education, and they are essentially the main instructors at those Teacher Training Colleges. The numbers are still relatively small, but they've told us that within a year or so, they will be doubling and tripling their numbers, to be able to have them go

all over the country, as they are now. Not only are they in the Teacher Training Colleges, some of them are in different counties, and we want to see their numbers increase.

We then recognized that unless we produced our own teachers, also, we would never be able to get what we wanted. On Friday last, we announced that there will be free tuition for all of those who pursue teacher training. They will also get a stipend. So, we encourage many to begin to go into teacher training so that you can take on the responsibility of preparing our students for the future.

But then we also – and that’s why we are here today – said higher education is important, because even the training of teachers has to be done at an institution of higher learning if they are going to be equipped. And this is why we said we were going to decentralize it by having Community Colleges and full universities in all of our counties. Dr. Slawon [Director General of the National Commission on Higher Education] has talked about the Sinje Technical College that will open in January; Tubman University, in Harper, has already opened; Nimba County has opened; Grand Bassa has opened, even though it is not fully equipped; and Bomi has opened. And so we are going to continue to pursue that until all of our children have access to education and to quality education to equip them.

To do this took partnership – partnership among all of those you see here. There’s one thing that brings us together: a common development objective. So in Bassa County, it didn’t matter what your party was; it didn’t matter what your county was, or your tribe. They got together to build this College, and they crossed all the divides to be able to achieve. That’s what we want to see in all counties – that people are going to get away from the divides, that they are going to come across in an act of positivism, not criticism or negativism. They are going to come together and pursue a common objective in the interest of our citizens and in the interest of our people. That’s how you build a nation.

We are here today to say – they didn't tell us it's a fundraiser – but I think they mentioned some things that some of us can do. And so what we can do is, let's dream a bit.

Just how the dream of bringing Bassa Community College came about, we can all dream, and sometimes dreams do come true if we work at it.

Just think: if we were to have, not an Ellen Johnson Sirleaf name, but Mayor Reeves – that's who we ought to name the college after because that's the one who has dedicated her life to serving Grand Bassa County. My time will come, but right now let's recognize those to whom honor is due.

Just think: if we had a Bropleh ICT Center.

Just dream: if we had an Arcelor-Oderbrecht Engineering School; and if Warwick would come and introduce ROTC in our schools.

Just dream: if you had a David Jallah and Charles Brumskine Law School, and they were willing to put some time into it, quality time – their skills, their talents, their resources – they would come together and build Grand Bassa.

The vocational schools: just think if GTZ were to come and say “we will do a technical school...”

And so we just want everybody here to begin to think big, to dream and to see what we can do for Grand Bassa Community College, to lift it up, to bring it to the place where they can truly begin to help Dr. [Levi] Zangai and the partnership we talked about, and people like him, and like Dr. Elizabeth Davies-Russell and others at universities in the States are coming to make the sacrifice to come and serve their country and their people. That's what makes a nation great.

I want to applaud all of you, commend you. And to these students, thank you for pursuing higher education. Thank you for preparing yourselves for leadership in the future. We will be there with you.

Madam Superintendent, Legislative Caucus, I thank all of you for what you've done to bring us to this point. We will be breaking the grounds tomorrow, and we will be working with the President of the University to assure that all of those here, and those not here because they haven't yet reached Buchanan but will be here tomorrow when we break ground, that we'll come around you, and give you the support that is needed.

As to the naming of the College, we will confer with the leadership of Bassa, to make sure that we find the right people who have served Bassa County for many, many years, and to make sure that we honor them. And once we have found that person, then my personal support will be given to be able for us to do something in their name.

In the meanwhile, we don't want the students to come to school in the night with no lights. So, on an immediate basis, we are going to get for you, before I leave from here, the 50 KVA generator.

Let me stop talking, before I get carried away...

President's Remarks at Official Ground Breaking of Main Campus

Of Grand Bassa Community College at Pynsberry

October 22, 2010

I see Ma Gahn over there. As I've been told, this is something she has been praying for, her dream that education would be brought to this part of the city. We've thanked her and to say that, finally, this is the start of a dream coming true comes today when we break this ground for the College. With a school nearby, already half of her dream has been fulfilled.

My commendation also to all the members of the Grand Bassa Legislative Caucus, which has remained on target on this matter, meeting with different groups that have put a lot of pressure on them to make sure that this happened.

We thank all of those, like Dr. Zangai [President of Grand Bassa Community College] who have made the sacrifice to actually come and make this a reality. We're pleased to be a part of this, part of our decentralization effort, making sure that we have education facilities and quality education for all of our young people and all of our children. I am, therefore, pleased to break this ground.