

“Liberia’s Need for Transformation”
Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Celebration in Observance
Of the 165rd Independence Anniversary
Of the Republic of Liberia
Centennial Pavilion, Monrovia
Montserrado County
Thursday, July 26, 2012

Let us first give praise and thanks to God Almighty because it is by His grace and goodwill that we celebrate our 165th Independence Day.

Last year, in Lofa, President [Ernest Bai] Koroma was to have joined us for our Independence Day celebrations. Bad weather prevented him from doing so. So once again, we are very pleased that, this time, you are with us.

Let me express appreciation to Dr. Elwood Dunn for his candid retrospective of where we have come from as a people, where we are today, and where we are headed tomorrow.

You no doubt noticed that Dr. Dunn was gowned, departing from the previous way of doing things, when he should have been decorated as the National Orator. He pointed out – as was pointed out by Dr. Edward Binyah Kesselly, and by me, several years ago – about the anachronistic symbols that we continue to have.

And so, today, we call on Dr. Dunn to head a committee, a small committee that will invite proposals for changes in our national order. Dr. Dunn, please accept that responsibility.

Our country has gone through many changes in the past few decades. Some of those changes, long expected, did not live up to the full potential because they were marred by anger, frustration, and sometimes a deep sense of alienation that

led to violence. However, because of the resilient people that we are, we have managed to move past those days. Today's young Liberian will grow up with no experience of the trauma that the older generations have gone through. We now have peace, we enjoy an emerging democracy, and there is light at the end of the tunnel. I am humbled to be a part of the leadership of the nation into this era of transformation, a process that will positively impact in every aspect of our society.

In the first six years, our goal was to reform state structures by changing procedures, processes, and technologies to make existing systems more effective in doing what they intended to do. Thus, our reform agenda included, first and foremost, building safeguards, so that we don't slip back into the old habits that almost destroyed our country. By changing structures, we launched a new political culture. Now, when Liberians speak of corruption, national budget, gross domestic product, press freedom, the rule of law, they do so freely and with an understanding of what these words mean.

Our agenda in building these structures and reforms included promises. We promised hope; we promised better education; we promised a new Liberia. But I hope we know that those promises will not be realized overnight. It's a process in which all must participate.

This is not something that government can do on its own, no matter what amount of resources it has. The government can create the institutions and the environment, but every Liberian must take responsibility for transformation. It is a patriotic duty for every Liberian – whether in government or in the private sector, in urban or rural areas, old and young – to support the process.

I therefore call on all Liberians to join us, in these next 5½ years, to be exact, in our aim to transform these systems and structures as a pathway to an enduring future.

By transformation, we mean doing things radically different from the ways they were traditionally done. For transformation to occur, the beliefs, values and

culture of institutions must be altered completely. Transformation also involves changing the current rules, roles, and relationships so that the innovations, so well spoken of by Dr. Dunn, can be embraced.

One of our first aims of transformation, is the issue of feeding ourselves – growing food that we eat, and eating the food that we grow. Our second is transforming our social fabric – our traditions, our values are taught less, and that is because the dislocation of the family structure has been one of the negative consequences of our civil conflict. Families broke down, and, in turn, family values broke down. We must bring back those moral and civil lessons that once made families strong.

Another key to transformation –one that requires a serious paradigm shift – is that if we are to become the middle-income country that we strive to be, we have to be a nation whose economy is not based solely on exporting primary goods, but adding value to ensure that we have the sustainability in our growth and development effort.

Transforming our politics. The truth is that we will not transform our country without rebuilding new political institutions. Our political institutions are weak. They lack sufficient depth to survive after elections or when one party loses state power. They lack the human, organizational and infrastructural capacity to make them autonomous and impartial.

Our new era of political dispensational democracy must be built on institutions that are capable of standing on their own. Our political system – one of “big personalities” who carry the political institution on their back – needs to change. We must move away from personalities and domineering figures to an institutionalized political structure which is strong enough, financially and otherwise, to be able to compete in an environment of compromises. The financing of political parties is a subject of debate; but we can only support institutions, not individuals.

The struggle to regain our dignity is the real reason behind our quest for transformation. As a people, we must renew hope and confidence in our own

abilities to transform our country and shed the dependency syndrome that has gripped so many of us. We believe that partnerships with the international community are good; they help us to build strong institutions. But we must not become overly aid dependent and become perpetual wards of the donor or the NGO community.

We must accept and take pride in our native Liberia by being patriotic and nationalistic, putting Liberia first, above all else. We must take ownership of our communities and not wait for the government to do everything. We must respect our Constitution and the rights of equality of all people.

We are at a new juncture, Fellow Liberians. Having laid the foundations, we must now ensure that the new structures we put in place will stand the test of time, will not carry the same deficiencies of the past. In order to succeed, we must change our mind-set about the public good, the national interest and the greater good.

I call on all Liberians to take a moment and think about the future. I invite you to envision a greater and better Liberia. If we are capable of looking into the future, and if we are able to envision the better days ahead, then we can all put in place the mechanisms for success.

Montserrado County Celebration

Today, we are celebrating “26” in Montserrado County, the seat of our capital. We dedicated many projects. We even went beyond Montserrado, on Monday, to Grand Cape Mount County, to be able to dedicate the Straz-Sinje Technical and Vocational College. We’d like to say a big thank you to the people of Grand Cape Mount County, Garwula District, and Mr. Straz, for the contribution made that enabled us to do so.

This morning, the guns fired and our National flag was hoisted, signaling our nation’s 165th Independence Anniversary, and I officiated, as Commander-in-Chief

of the Armed Forces of Liberia, at the Military Inspection of Units and the March Pass-in-Review.

We are celebrating this year's Independence in Montserrado County, where the official observance of this Day began 162 years ago, in 1850. It was also here, in Montserrado, that we began our rotational celebration, in 2006, which has taken us, subsequently, to Grand Bassa, Margibi, Bong, Nimba and Lofa Counties.

There are not enough years in our second term to celebrate the "26" in each of the remaining counties. So here's what we will do: Next year, 2013, we will take the celebration to the three counties of Bomi, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount, with the main activities in Tubmanburg; in 2014, to Sinoe and Grand Kru, with the main activities in Greenville; in 2015, to Maryland, River Gee and Grand Gedeh, with the main activities in Zwedru; and, in 2016, to River Cess, to celebrate a county transformed. To ensure celebrations in all counties, we plan to spend Christmas, 2012, in Bopolu, and a non-walk trip to Belle Yallah; 2013, Fish Town; and Barclayville, in 2014.... You're supposed to clap; we'll celebrate in all counties!

We are continuing the tradition because these countywide celebrations provide opportunity for expanding and enhancing the national infrastructural development. More importantly, they provide the space for genuine reconciliation, national healing and unity because they bring people together, as we are today, in a festive mood.

To everyone present, to Liberians and residents throughout our nation, to our compatriots in the Diaspora, and to our special guests, partners and friends, we extend hearty greetings and say a "Happy 26."

May God continue to bless Liberia!