

Special Message by

Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

President of the Republic of Liberia

On the Occasion of the

162nd Independence Anniversary of the Republic of Liberia

Gbarnga, Bong County,
27th July 2009

Mr. Vice President & Mrs. Boakai;
Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members of the House of Representatives;
Mr. President Pro-Tempore and Members of the Senate,
Mr. Chief Justice, Associate Justices and Members of the Judiciary;
Mr. National Orator;
President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo; Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas;
Our Special Guests;
Former NTGL Chairman Gyude Bryant;
Ministers, Officials of Government;
Chiefs, Traditional Leaders;
Former President and Mrs. Blah & Former Speaker & Government
Officials;
Doyen, Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
The SRSG, United Nations Family;
Bishops, Prelates, Members of the Clergy;
Development Partners;
Superintendent, Local Government Officials;
Political Leaders, Business Leaders, NGO Leaders, Media, Marketers,
Students;
The Kind People of Bong County:

KWAA KER WON TONO!

When on January 16, 2006 I spoke to the nation, I recognized that the vote for me was a vote for change. More than that, it was a vote for peace, security and stability, a vote for individual and national prosperity, a vote for healing and leadership. I expressed humility in the enormity of the challenges that lay ahead – to heal our nation’s wounds, redefine and strengthen its purpose, make democracy a living and effective experiment, promote economic growth, create jobs, revitalize our health and education facilities and services, and quicken the pace of social progress and individual prosperity in our country.

Although we still have a long way to go, we have come a long way in meeting these challenges. We have energized the programs that have trained 2000 new soldiers and renovated their facilities at the Schiefflin and Gbarnga military barracks. Our growth rate has averaged over 6 percent in the past three years. Our development agenda is formulated and in the process of implementation. We are close to the end of the program that will bring us relief from the US\$4.9 billion external debt which we inherited. Our Central Bank international reserves have gone from US\$5 million to US\$50 million. We have removed UN sanctions on our diamonds and forestry, joined the Kimberley process, passed a new forestry law and joined the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative that covers both of these

resources. And we anxiously await the recently enacted Land Reform Commission law to begin the process of much needed reform that will address property rights and land disputes which has the potential to further divide our people.

We have undertaken the first national census in twenty years. Enrollment in our primary schools has increased over 40 percent, the majority of whom are girls. We have renovated two of the three rural teacher training institutes and graduated the first 456 students in 20 years. The University of Liberia will move next year to its US\$20 million renovated Fendall campus. The Tubman Technical College renamed Tubman University will reopen its doors in September to be followed by the Technical College in Sinje. Plans for other County colleges are well advanced in planning.

We have restored lights and water missing for over fourteen years, to the Capital and a few other cities. We have started the reconstruction of primary and neighborhood roads and the streets of our Capital city. We have attracted private investment of over US\$ 8 billion in our mineral, agriculture, forestry and oil exploration potential. We have constructed or renovated more than 215 schools, 30 hospitals and clinics, several county administration buildings, court houses and security facilities throughout the country. The Telewoyan Hospital in Voinjama is now renovated and in full

operation while a US\$10 million renovation of the Tappita Hospital is underway. The majority of our schools throughout the country will have books with a national orientation when they open in September. For the first time in two decades, six year olds will start school knowing only an environment of peace.

We have made significant progress in settling arrears to former security forces, civil servants, foreign missions, former Legislators, regional and international organizations. We have qualified for the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and obtained Threshold status under the Millennium challenge Corporation. We have strengthened the General Auditing Commission and established the Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC). We have mobilized non-official flows from foundations, non-official organizations and individuals to the tune of US\$15 million to support our capacity building, education and market development program. We have increased revenues from US\$80 million to more than US\$347 million, pensions from LD\$50 to LD\$1000, civil servants salaries from US\$15 to US\$80 with a floor of US\$100 for security, teachers and health care workers. The JFK Hospital is undertaking a program of major physical renovation and capacity building and is on an irreversible path to recovery. We have started judicial action for recovery of illegally sold government physical assets in five of our diplomatic missions. We have restored our nation's good relationship

and reputation throughout the world. In recognition of this, VIPs from 17 countries visited us and I was privileged to make 14 official visits and be honored by 4 nations and 24 institutions of higher learning. Moreover, we have restored in all citizens, particularly the young, hope in the future.

Fellow citizens, a nation rises to its potential when its people are prepared to seize the opportunity, to capture the moment, to accentuate the positive. A nation rises to its potential when its people are proud of their achievements, are prepared to extol their values, are ready to rise above self interest in demonstration of nationalism and patriotism.

Such was the character of Martin Luther King when, despite the discrimination and inhumanities to which his people were subjected, saw not the nightmare of things that were but the dream of things that could be. Such was the character of Nelson Mandela when he said “the impossible remains the impossible until it is done”. Such was the character of Barack Obama who when no one believed that an African American could become President of the United States said, “Yes, we can!”

Fellow Citizens, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission spent three years interviewing tens of thousands of Liberians in country and amongst the Diaspora. We commend them and each and every person who participated

in this process. Where the report lives up to its mission and mandate, the Liberian people have my steadfast commitment to work with all branches of government, the Independent Human Rights Commission, the religious community, civil society and the media to actualize its recommendations.

This is as much as I can say to you as I am named in the report for sanction and I have been advised that it would be legally imprudent for me to give a more extensive comment on the report. Also, my comments could be misinterpreted as an attempt to influence what ever action the National Legislature might take on the report, and I do not intend to do so. I believe in the wisdom of the Liberian people and am convinced that they will make a proper judgment on the TRC's Final Report.

Fellow citizens, as many of you know, I have dedicated my life to navigating a future for Liberia free from war and fear and grounded in individual freedom and opportunity. Sometimes, the circumstances were opaque, the distinctions between evil and good were not so clear—this is the nature of conflict and war. Like thousands of other Liberians at home and abroad who did, I have always admitted my early support for Charles Taylor to challenge the brutality of a dictatorship. It was equally clear that when the true nature of Mr. Taylor's intentions became known, there was no more impassioned critic or strong opponent to him in a democratic process. I have talked about this

openly over the past twelve years and expressed remorse to the Liberian people for my misjudgment. In turn, the Liberian people rendered their judgment. In 2005, I was elected President of the Republic of Liberia. My mandate was to return hope to the country and to make the children smile again.

During the past three years, my Administration has remained true to the faith that the Liberian people bestowed to me in that election. We have made gains toward restoring our security and our prosperity – and more importantly restoring our belief in ourselves, our potential, and our love of God and country. I know that there is much work to be done to bring the benefits of this work to all Liberians and my Administration will not rest until the gains of peace are felt by all. I strongly believe that Liberians, through their vote, have an inherent right to determine the direction of the nation, just as I believe that they each, in their own way, has the wisdom to know truth and the desire to seek reconciliation.

I will always stand as a servant of the Liberian people and will always respect their wisdom.

KWAA KER WON TONO!