

## **Goodwill Message**

**By**

**H. E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic  
And Commander-in-Chief, Armed Forces of Liberia**

**On the Occasion of the 2010 Armed Forces Day Celebrations  
February 11, 2010**

**Dear Friends, and our dear men and women in arms:**

**As Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Liberia, I welcome all of you to this 53<sup>rd</sup> Celebration of Armed Forces Day. I congratulate our men and women of the Armed Forces on this Day, which was first observed in 1957 to honor the dedicated men and women, both in active service and retired, who have devoted their lives to serve our nation.**

**A very warm welcome to our distinguished guest, Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, President of the ECOWAS Commission. We are pleased, and honored him a few**

**minutes ago, as a Distinguished Service Officer (DSO) in recognition of his exemplary service and contribution to peace in our sub-region.**

**Dr. Chambas, you have served ECOWAS so well. You have raised its performance to a different level. You have consolidated the work of peace and security, and gone beyond that to promote our efforts at regional cooperation and development. Many times when we wavered, seeking the course of least resistance in times of political turmoil, you have kept us on the path to preserve the right to dignity, to promote democracy, and to bring development to our people. As you move on to serve a greater humanity, taking on the responsibility in the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP), we in Liberia will remember the service you rendered and the credit you now so rightfully deserve in our state of progress. Thank you Dr. Chambas.**

**I'd also like to acknowledge the presence among us of other special guests, representing our sister Republic of Sierra Leone. Honorable Minister, we'd like to commend you, and send warm welcome, warm wishes to our brother, President Ernest Koroma. Thank you for being here.**

**We'd like to welcome everyone to this newly renovated Barclay Training Center (BTC) – the new home of our Ministry of National Defense – the rehabilitation of which was generously funded by the Government of the United States. Thank you, Madam Ambassador.**

**Indeed, Liberia is indebted to many of our friends. We are indebted to our neighboring States – Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Benin, and many of the other African States that not only supported our peace; Nigeria, Ghana, Benin and Sierra Leone have continued to support the consolidation of that peace by providing training for our men and women in arms.**

**We want to thank all of you, representatives of the neighboring States.**

**We are also indebted in a great way to the Government and people of the United States for the training and the mentorship provided to the more than 2,000 men and women of our Armed Forces, many of them showing their talents for us today.**

**What is especially significant this Armed Forces Day is the reactivation of the Liberian National Coast Guard, which we witnessed a few minutes ago. Under the 2008 National Defense Act, we are obliged to develop and re-establish our capacity to man our territorial waters. With an initial strength of 40 persons whom you see, trained in the United States, the Coast Guard has a mandate to improve the security of our coastline and control smuggling and illegal fishing. I congratulate you, the members of the Coast Guard, who have pledged to safeguard Liberia's territorial waters.**

**A little over a month ago, on January 1<sup>st</sup>, our Government assumed full responsibility for the growth, maintenance and sustenance of the Liberian Army, when the contractual arrangement with Defense contractors ended on December 31<sup>st</sup>. We are acutely aware of our Government's responsibility to sustain a professional armed force, including Coast Guard Personnel. We commit to providing budgetary appropriation for the maintenance and sustenance of men and women of the Armed Forces of Liberia, and I know that Members of the Legislature here present make that commitment with me. We commit to the continuous development of the AFL to a professional standard through training and other capacity-building programs both at home and abroad.**

**The AFL has successfully met its initial objective to form the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade consisting of some 2,000 soldiers, comprising 2 battalions and various sub-units. To**

**accommodate these forces, we have, in addition to the Barclay Training Center here, and with the support of our partners, renovated the Camp Tubman Military Barracks in Gbarnga, which was reconstructed by the People’s Republic of China; the Camp Edward Binyah Kesselly Barracks of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade in Schiefflin, and the Camp Sando Ware military base in Careysburg, both of which were renovated with support from our partner, the United States of America.**

**In collaboration with our international partners, a solid foundation has thus been laid for a new AFL – one that will play a key role in furthering our development agenda – the Poverty Reduction Strategy to “Lift Liberia” – while also providing external and territorial protection. I think we all agree that if Liberia is to develop, the AFL cannot be reclusive and remain in the barracks; and that our forces**

**must work alongside other agencies in contributing to our national development objectives.**

**In a statement I made before you in August 2008, I mandated that the AFL Engineer Company be augmented to a Battalion level with the mission to contribute to the civil reconstruction of our country. By December of that year, the AFL Engineer Company, along with our development partners, constructed a Bailey bridge to link communities divided by the Sehnkwehn River along the Buchanan – Cestos – Greenville Highway. Last year, in collaboration with Defense contractors, UNMIL and Public Works, AFL Engineers rehabilitated several roads and constructed culverts in Gbarnga for the July 26 celebration, and constructed bridges in Sinje, in Cape Mount, and Weala, in Bong. We want to see more of such activities. For example, we want to see the AFL Engineering Battalion working alongside the Ministry of Public Works in opening up the hinterland**

through the construction of bridges and culverts and in logistic support where necessary.

Liberia and its Armed Forces have also benefited from the assistance and interventions provided by so many in this room. Contributions of capacity-building training and the professional development of officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) have come from many places I mentioned, primarily from the United States, but also from the People's Republic of China; the Governments of Benin, Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, as well as international and regional organizations. I have asked the Minister of National Defense to make sure that we have budgetary provisions so that we can continue the training of our basic officers and non-commissioned officers into leadership training slots that have been offered to us by our partners.

**I would like to note and show appreciation to the Africa Command of the United States who have sent 64 U.S. Marine “mentors” on a year-long assignment to build upon the training previously provided by the U.S. Defense contractors, thereby increasing the stability of our nation as we transition from the support we have received from our partners and UNMIL. We greatly appreciate the generous support that we continue to enjoy from our Defense Support Group partners.**

**Some of you have benefited from training to prepare you to participate in the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF). Liberia, a recipient of the generosity of ECOWAS, will contribute to the stability of our sub-region and to Africa by participating in the ESF when called upon. The goal which the leadership of ECOWAS seeks to achieve through its Standby Force is in line with our Government’s policy of good neighborliness and being our brothers’ keepers. I urge you to take advantage of the opportunities to acquire knowledge and**

**experience from this and other initiatives so that you will be able to prove yourselves to be a force for good not only for Liberia, but for West Africa, Africa, and the world.**

**On this Armed Forces Day, let me extend greetings to the families of our men and women of the AFL. You, too, have faced challenges in being separated from your loved ones. We are working to ensure that family housing and other facilities are provided in the barracks in the near future. We have already constructed recreational and other support facilities to enhance the stay of the family members in the barracks, and we are going further in providing the enabling environment for AFL personnel to thrive and function.**

**I congratulate the Minister of National Defense and all of his associates, the Commanding Officer-in-Charge of the AFL, and their staff, for their achievements in rebuilding and positioning the new AFL. We know that there is still much more work to be done.**

**To our troops, I urge you to remain steadfast in your chosen profession, respectful of the rights of others, and loyal to constituted authority. I call upon you to emulate the example of Sgt. Melvin K. Tolbert, one of our new Drill Sergeants of the Armed Forces Training Command, who was just honored for his selflessness and bravery in the face of danger.**

**Let me also acknowledge and commend the colorful turnout of the Army, the Coast Guard and the AFL Band in their parade today.**

**“Building a Force for Good” – the theme of this 2010 Armed Forces Day Celebration – is most appropriate, given the achievements of our Armed Forces. Let me quickly enumerate:**

- You have achieved initial operational status;**
- You completed the Army Readiness Training Evaluation Program (ARTEP), conducted by the U.S. Army, to**

**ensure that the initial training capacity of the AFL corresponds with international military standard;**

- Anticipating Government's taking over full responsibility for the AFL, and realizing the importance of continuous training in developing a professional army, you established the Armed Forces Training Command, composed of all-Liberian training instructors and Drill Sergeants, and you successfully conducted your first recruit training exercise;**
- You trained in civil-military operations, which has enabled you to undertake environmental clean-up campaigns and medical outreach to communities in and outside Monrovia;**
- You also received training from our international partners in human and child rights protection.**

**I challenge you, our men and women of the Armed Forces of Liberia, to continue to live up to the motto of this institution, “Daring to Protect and Defend.” I challenge you to go forward, and to be a force for the good of our nation – our patrimony, Liberia.**

**Congratulations, once again, to all of those who have participated.**

**I tried to keep this short, although I was told that to test your resilience, I could have spoken for two hours. But because we are all not soldiers, and we have so many civilians in our midst, let me thank you all for being a part of this great Armed Forces Day.**