

“One People, One Nation United for Peace and Sustainable Development”

**Remarks by
H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at
Celebration in Observance of the
167th Independence Anniversary of the Republic of Liberia**

**July 26, 2014
Centennial Pavilion, Monrovia
Montserrado County**

(As Delivered)

**Fellow Liberians
Friends and Partners of Liberia**

Given the many challenges with which we are faced, we mark the 167th Independence Anniversary of our nation with solemn reflection. Even as we do, we must continue to give praise and thanks to the Almighty who continues to shower his manifold blessings and kind mercies upon us.

And so, we celebrate this Anniversary with a difference, eschewing the many festivities in favor of prayers for our nation. Last Friday, July 18, and Sunday, July 20, Intercessory Prayers for the Nation were held throughout our land.

Two days ago, on July 24, we conferred honors upon distinguished personalities and citizens for their invaluable service to the Nation and to humanity.

This morning -- "26 Day" -- as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Liberia, we officiated at the Military Inspection of Units and the March Pass-in-Review at the Barclay Training Center.

Celebrating in the counties is a tradition began in 2006. It is intended to take events to the people, to encourage and expand infrastructural development, and to promote national healing and reconciliation. Thus, in addition to Montserrado, we have held celebrations in Grand Bassa, Margibi, Bong, Nimba, Lofa, and, last year, in Bomi, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount Counties.

We should have been marking this Anniversary in the southeastern counties of Sinoe and Grand Kru. However, we decided on a postponement to ensure that we are better prepared to give the best to our compatriots in Greenville and Barclayville, and the several other

cities and communities, which are to benefit from the multiplying effects of hosting these celebrations.

At the same time, we use this platform to remind ourselves that the celebrations are scheduled to take place in Maryland, River Gee and Grand Gedeh in 2015; and in River Cess, in 2016. Let us all begin the preparations for those counties right now.

We have just heard a stirring National Oration, delivered by Dr. Elizabeth Davis-Russell, President of the William V.S. Tubman University, in Harper, Maryland County. She has called for the transformation of minds, attitudes and behaviors, as our nation rebuilds, observing that, in the face of competing priorities of infrastructure development, education, and healthcare, it is of the utmost importance to seriously focus on the human factor.

To bring about the transformation of our country, Dr. Davis-Russell has called for the family, education, and society to work in concert. She invited us to look to our Constitution to restore some of the values upon which this new Liberia must be built. She also proposed a model of servant leadership, challenging the common practice of leadership that is often built upon self-aggrandizement.

Thank you, Dr. Davis-Russell, for this inspiring message to the Liberian people.

My fellow citizens:

By all accounts, this has been a very difficult year. We have had a serious budget shortfall, depreciation in the exchange rate, floodings from climate change and other man-made interventions, the sharp decline in the price of rubber which has further offset the balance of trade, and more sadly the spread of the deadly Ebola virus which has already claimed the lives of more than 100 of our countrymen.

As unfortunate as these are, we still have a lot to be thankful for. The productive sectors in large scale agriculture and mining have generally resolved land issues and are accelerating operations. Liberia is on course to meet MDG Goal No 4 in recognition of the best record in reducing child mortality. We expect to meet the required number of indicators on our MCC Index ensuring our participation in President Obama's Power Africa Program. Landmark cases on human trafficking and corruption have been tackled and won by the Justice System. Additional communities are getting electricity and we expect the cost to go down when the HFO plants come on stream at the end of this year. Having concluded financing arrangements, we await the dry season to show significant progress in improving our air and sea ports and the continuation in the construction of primary roads.

Away from home, our country continues to enjoy goodwill and respect regionally and globally and we look forward to Liberia carrying out its role in the first ever historic United States - Africa Leaders Summit.

Now, let me return our attention to the Ebola Virus. We have already declared it a national emergency.

On Wednesday, we witnessed the unthinkable when a man, angered over perceived neglect after his sister died of Ebola, decided to revenge by setting fire to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. This is how damaging this virus has become. This is how the risk and the danger now go beyond the virus. We understand the anger. But we cannot and will not accept burning buildings and attacking health care workers or facilities.

In another event, one of our compatriots met his untimely death and put to risk others across borders because of indiscipline and disrespect for the advice which had been given by health workers.

Fellow Citizens, the hallmark of success of any nation is not the improvement in social and economic infrastructure, it is not in sound policies and laws. It is the love for country. This love must make us be brave in times of trouble, as well as compel us to reach out to each other in times of distress. We must come together as never before inspite of our political, religious and social persuasions. We must show a deep sense of Nationalism. We must reach across borders and join our brothers and sisters in the other neighboring countries that are affected to ensure continuing common response.

This is why today I am establishing a National Task Force on Ebola which I will chair; to be co-chaired by the Minister of Internal Affairs in his role as the Chairman of the National Disaster Relief Commission. That Commission will now be reactivated and strengthened. We're going to be calling upon Women and Youth Organizations, Inter-Religious Council, Market and Labor Organizations, Political Parties Leaders, Traditional Leaders, and the Press Union to send us representatives to serve on this Task Force. Our task is to work with the Health Team and provide support and guidance to them. We also will be establishing a Community Outreach Force with individuals mobilized from each community to reach out to communities, to sensitize them to the disease to provide them information as to how they can protect themselves.

To the families of all those affected and afflicted by the virus, to our doctors, and the National Health Team led by Dr. Gwenigale, to our dedicated and sacrificial health workers, we extend to you our deepest personal and official sympathy for your loss, and commit to our obligation to respond to you in the time of need. We also seize the opportunity once again to extend our appreciation to the family of brother Dr. [Sam Mutooro Muhumuza] from Uganda. To all our partners, to all our leaders, to all our citizens who have contributed financially and materially in assisting us address this national emergency, and to all of you who have kept us in your prayers.

Finally, my fellow Liberians over 167 years we have come up against many challenges and we have overcome. This is the proud history of our country. We lay claim to that legacy today. We will fight against this deadly Ebola virus – not by blaming each other or anyone else but by coming together. **EBOLA IS REAL. IT KILLS, BUT IT CAN BE PREVENTED IF WE MOVE IN UNISOM TO RESIST IT.**

To Liberians and residents across our great nation, to our compatriots abroad -- in the Diaspora -- to our partners and friends: Happy 26!