

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

“The Values of a Patriot”

By Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia

Monrovia, Liberia,
January 16, 2012

(As delivered)

Special Guests, Special Representatives of Colleagues, to Compatriots, to our Opposition Leaders sitting there:

We observe today, for the first time in two generations, the swearing in of a second successive democratic government elected peacefully by the will of the Liberian people.

Today, Monday, January 16, 2012, on this Capitol Hill, in the presence of international dignitaries and the eyes of a watching world, we inaugurate a new beginning, a rebirth of our democracy and a restoration of hope.

Today, we can state with conviction that our country has turned the corner. Liberia is no longer a place of conflict, war and deprivation. We are no longer the country our citizens want to run away from, our international partners pitied, and our neighbors feared.

We have earned our rightful place as a beacon of democracy – a country of hope and opportunity. The achievements marked on this day, my fellow citizens, are yours. This is your moment. You are the heroes of the day, and it is you whose triumph we come together to celebrate.

I am deeply honored to have been re-elected to the Presidency of the Republic of Liberia, to serve this great nation for another six years. I have sworn, for the second and final time, “to protect, and defend the Constitution and laws of the Republic,” and faithfully execute the sacred duties of this office.

The second election in any emerging democracy is the most important. The first takes place on the world stage, in the spotlight, with great fanfare. But the second election is the true test of the will of the people and the institutions they have created. If the second election works, it establishes a pattern, a tradition, a routine of democracy that subsequent elections can follow.

You, my fellow Liberians, have conducted another national election, described by all observers as free and fair. It was a miracle summoned by the people, and in so doing, we as a nation have set our faces irrevocably toward democracy and peace.

The cleavages that led to decades of war still run deep. But so too does the longing for reconciliation – a reconciliation defined not by political bargaining or by an artificial balance of power by tribe, region, religion or ethnicity but by the equality of opportunity and a better future for all Liberians.

True reconciliation means a process of national healing. It means learning the lessons of the past to perfect our democracy. But above all it means economic justice for our citizens and the spread of progress to all our people. It means creating jobs, opportunities and giving our young people the skills they need to prosper and create the life they choose.

The youth of Liberia are our future, and they sent us a message. They are impatient. They are eager to make up for years of conflict and deprivation. They are anxious to know that their homeland offers the grounds for hope. Let me say to them: We heard that message and it is our solemn obligation to ensure that their hope will not be in vain.

I believe that the achievements of the last six years, and the challenges of the next six, come down to hope. Hope is being restored to people from whom it was brutally ripped by war and chaos. Hope is making it possible for our people to imagine a future of security, of progress, and of improvement for themselves, their families, and their society. Hope is fuelling the fires of ambition, and an ambitious people, secure in their homeland, capable of great things. But now we must follow through on the commitments we have made to our people, so that their hope is not in vain, so that their hope is real and they can actually taste the fruits of their hard work and dedication.

To all who have yet to feel the hand of progress touch your life, your time has come. We have laid the foundations for peace and prosperity, and we must now hasten our true mission: putting people, especially young people, first and lifting the lives of all Liberians.

This mission, and our national challenge, will test our love of country. Some of these challenges may be confronted and resolved during the next six years. Some will require more years than will be left to me, or to my administration. But we commit to you that we begin today.

My friends, dear compatriots, let us recognize here today that securing a future of prosperity and democracy will require commitment and hard work from all of us. Liberia will not reach its potential unless each and every Liberian resolves to reach his own. We will rise or fall on the spirit of purpose and patriotism that we summon between us today.

I swear before you now, to do all my position as President allows to broaden and to deepen the opportunities for a better life available to you. But it will be up to you – it will be up to each of us – to seize those opportunities, and translate them into prosperity for ourselves and for our children. Yes, our government must do better; we have an obligation and a sacred oath to fulfill. But it is up to us all to ensure that this country lives up to its true potential.

Your government should offer you education worthy of our heritage, but it will be up to you to stay in school, to study hard, and to learn the skills required for success in this new technological world. Your government should foster equality of opportunity so that you can get a job, and to know the dignity of receiving an honest day's wage. But it will be up to you to work honestly and hard to realize those ambitions. Your government should provide a system of justice that all of us can trust: law enforcement officials who act out of a sense of duty; judges who interpret and apply the laws fairly; administrators who live up to their oaths of office whatever the temptations may be. But it will be up to you and to me in demanding transparency and accountability.

Six years ago, I stood before you in this same place, and pledged to you my commitment to a process of national renewal. Now I address a new and very different Liberia. I call on you to join me in the completion of that formidable task.

I call on you, my fellow citizens, to join me in renewing our resolve to restore our country and lead it to its grand destiny. I call you today to share a healthy pride in what we have done, but a still fiercer resolve to do all that must yet be done so that all Liberians thrive in freedom, equality and friendship.

I call you, my compatriots, to a new age of patriotism!

I am asking you to join me in a rededication to the enduring values set out in our Constitution, and consistent with our deepest gratitude for the gifts the Almighty has conferred on us as individuals and on our country. It is a rediscovery of what it means to be a Liberian – a proud citizen of a country that has suffered from wars but now a dignified African nation with a simple dream of Liberty. The patriotism and resolve we summon today honors that dream.

Patriotism does not mean blind loyalty to power. Indeed, sometimes the highest demonstration of patriotism may well be seen when citizens peacefully and respectfully express their opposition to particular policies proposed by those elected to govern them.

Patriots freely and openly and even passionately disagree about what is best for the nation they love. Patriots compete for the support, and for the votes, of their fellow citizens. Patriots acknowledge that those who may not embrace their particular views are nonetheless acting out of their own understanding of what is best for their country.

Patriots believe that equality of opportunity applies to all citizens, regardless of tribe or ethnicity, regardless of geographic or economic status, and regardless of sex. My administration remains particularly committed to achieving equality for women and girls in all areas of life: education, business, and in the family itself.

Patriots believe deeply in democratic processes and institutions, and when those processes and institutions waver or fail, patriots resolve to repair them. They believe in a democracy of policies not personality, merit not money, action not words. They believe in the sacred right to free expression and the responsibility to exercise that right with care.

My fellow Liberians, we know all too well what can happen when the tenets of democracy and freedom are not jealously and vigorously defended, when the

true love of country is abandoned for narrow interest. We have suffered the years of deprivation and terror, during which democratic principles were exiled from our shores. We have looked into the vacant eyes of a generation of young Liberians whose hope for the future was stolen.

We all, together, will never allow those mistakes to be repeated. We will never again shed the mantle of democracy, of freedom, of national unity, of patriotism.

Let us go forth from this Inauguration Day to roll up our sleeves, to make the sacrifices necessary for our continued growth and development: economic, educational, moral and spiritual. Let us resolve that our pride in our Liberian nation, and in our tradition and heritage, will be manifested in a new commitment to the democratic processes that we mark on this solemn occasion.

I invite you to join me in the next steps toward restoration and the progress of our beloved Liberia. The future that has beckoned us is finally here. Let us walk along this road together, our steps enlightened by our Creator, and grateful to Him and the blessings He has bestowed upon us.

My compatriots, my brothers, my sisters, my daughters, my sons: I call on each of you to join me today and together let us forge our future in a spirit of pride, purpose and unity.

May God bless us on our journey, and bless our beloved Liberia.