

Remarks

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

At the

41st Annual Conference of the Liberian
Studies Association

Wednesday, May 13, 2009

University of Liberia Auditorium

Mr. President of the Liberian Studies Association

Officers and Members of the Liberian Studies

Association

Members of Government

Members of the Diplomatic Corp

Our Development Partners

Heads of institutions of higher learning

Members of the Association of Liberian Universities

Friends of Liberia

Staff and Students of North Carolina Central University

Fellow Liberians:

**Let me first blend my own voice in welcoming all of you
the Annual Conference of the Liberia Studies
Association to your country and to our country as your
host for the first time in forty-one years. For those of you**

visiting Liberia for the very first time, I say a special welcome.

Your decision to hold your meeting here this year adds reassurance to our message to the world that Liberia is indeed back and open for business. In this instance, you are helping us to signal to the international community that a Renaissance is taking place in Liberia as regards the rekindling of intellectual life, learning and research. It is also a signal that Liberians are keen to return home, even if for short periods of time.

History would recall that during the period of our prolonged conflict, the Liberian Studies Association was one of those groups in the Diasporas that kept the candle of intellectual discourse burning. Despite the war, you continued to publish the *Liberian Studies*

Journal uninterrupted. You met annually and shared your research on social, political, economic, scientific and other issues about Liberia or with implications for Liberia.

On behalf of the people of Liberia, I would like to take this opportunity to thank your organization for your fortitude in this regard and to encourage you to keep up the spirit of research and scholarship in our post-conflict era.

Let me take a few minutes to reflect on the theme of this conference, "RESEARCHING LIBERIA: Experiences of the Past, Challenges of the Present and Prospect for the Future."

It is common knowledge that a nation that neglects the lessons of its past will repeat the mistakes in the present and is doomed to fail in the future. In this connection, our nation's history has as rich, diverse and complex past. I urge you in your research to help separate the facts from fiction, decipher the merits from the myths, and help to tell the true story of Liberia and its people. This is a daunting task and will require the type of intellectual discourse and debate that most of you are masters of. Our children need to know the truth of how we got here, what we are doing here now, and what they, the children, are expected to do to sustain our core values and preserve our Nationalism.

Our Constitution provides for the free exchange of ideas. In the days ahead, have no fear; do not hold back on your thoughts and utterances. As a country

that respect the rule of law you are protected in what you say to help foster the cross fertilization of ideas that we need to stimulate the growth of intellectual life in our country. I urge you to be limited only by your imagination and sense of responsibility. Most of all, please think outside of the box and take the risks of sounding out what others might consider unpopular ideas and concepts.

As we turn to the present, I urge you to focus also on Applied Research. Research is good, but it is even better when the methodology and findings are targeted at solving real life problems that can improve the quality of life of our people.

In this connection, I am pleased to present to the Liberian Studies Association one hundred copies of our

Poverty Reduction Strategy, a document that is truly homegrown and presents a roadmap for our future. It was produced based on inputs of citizens from all of Liberia's 15 counties, from market sellers in Ganta to government ministers in Monrovia, from women and men, boys and girls, members of every political party, every age group, every tribe and every sector. Use it as a guide as to how you can use your research skills to help us move our country forward.

Reducing poverty is not something this government can do alone. It is something we all must do. The private sector—businesses small and large—will increasingly be the engine of growth and jobs. We ask you intellectuals to join in making your contribution through applied research to help us reduce poverty and achieve our Millennium Development Goals.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Liberia's future is in all of our hands. You can use your research in ways that help to point us in the right direction on how we as a people can maintain Peace and Security; strengthen Governance and the Rule of Law; promote Economic Revitalization; and provide infrastructure and Basic Services to our People. This is my challenge to you. In other words, challenge conventional wisdom, join us in our collective challenge to make Liberia better.

As we look toward the future, it is our hope that this conference will lead to the development and more sister university relationships between our institutions of higher learning here in Liberia and your various centers of intellectual life from whence you have come. We

look forward to more student and faculty exchanges as a result of your presence here.

It is very significant that you have included students from the various institutions of higher learning as part of this conference for they are the ones who will bare the torch of intellectual life in the future. Your goal as professionals should be to build the capacity of these students through sustainable knowledge transfer as they prepare to take on leadership roles in our country's future. I like to extend a special welcome and encouragement to the 17 graduate students from the Executive Masters of Public Administration Program at North Carolina Central University. This is the second visit of this group to Liberia. I met with the group last year when they visited. I invite you to make this an annual pilgrimage to Liberia.

For those Liberians who are still living and working abroad, we admonish you to spend part of your time during the next few days exploring the possibilities of coming home to join in the task nation building, national renewal and strengthening our process of national reconciliation.

Mr. President, Officers and Members of the Liberian Studies Association, once again welcome to Liberia. I wish you well in your deliberations.

It is now my pleasing duty to declare open, this Forty-first Annual Conference of the Liberian Studies Association.