

Remarks

by The Visitor of the University of Liberia

Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

President of the Republic Of Liberia

At the University's 88th Commencement Convocation

December 16, 2009

SKD Complex, Paynesville

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me first express my congratulations and felicitations to you, the Graduates of this 88th Commencement Convocation of the University of Liberia, on behalf of the Government, and in my own name, for your individual achievements. Let me also commend the University for holding three convocations in a year – the inauguration of a new president, and two graduations.

As your Visitor, I take pride in sharing your joys and accomplishments, and wish you God speed in achieving your dreams. As the name “Commencement” implies, you have just completed meaningful laps in your career life cycles – vocations that should prove meaningful and rewarding to you, your families, your communities, your country, even the world.

Let me say a big thank you to our friend and Commencement Speaker, Ambassador David Straz, not only for that excellent speech but for the extraordinary philanthropic contributions he continues to make to Liberia, particularly in education.

Graduates: today, the University of Liberia alone is graduating some 1,500 students – almost a third of them women, I’m pleased to note.

For those receiving a first degree, you can opt to further your education and do graduate studies. The country desperately needs engineers – civil, electrical, and mechanical – scientists (e.g., geologists), doctors, nurses, and teachers to push forward the development agenda. Yet the numbers of graduates in these disciplines fall far short of what Liberia requires. Liberia also needs entrepreneurs, managers, organizers, and inventors – not only job seekers and employees. In that context, we also need highly trained lab technologists, masons, electricians, carpenters, welders, and other craftsmen.

Government does not have the resources to hire everyone, at least not in type of job where you will be behind a desk. The opportunities that exist are those where you go back to the land – in agriculture, forestry, mining, construction, or community development – where you will work hard, and get your hands dirty. Or you can choose to work for yourself by starting your own small or medium enterprise.

Here, then, are some areas where you can use your degree right here at home and make a huge contribution to our nation-building: in agriculture, through “back to the soil” and food security programs; in the forestry or mining sectors; in education, by teaching, particularly in the rural areas; in rural community development; in the health and

social welfare sectors; in the security sector, as police, immigration or border patrol officers, or joining the military; in construction, to expand our network of roads and bridges, reaching into Liberia's hinterland; as a maritime officer; in environmental protection and/or eco-tourism.

Or you can choose, as past graduates of this institution have done, to devote time to serving your country by becoming a National Youth Volunteer, or a Peace Ambassador, or the like, and to play a role in nation-building. Volunteers are involved in education, health, agriculture, and community development, and they are working today in the various counties.

If you're more inclined to be your own boss, link up with the Ministry of Commerce and this University's "Grooming Liberia Future Entrepreneurs" program, and take advantage of the "seed money" on offer to get started.

If your outlook is more global, there's the possibility of becoming a Foreign Service Officer. However, before you can be sent into the field to represent Liberia abroad, you will have to hone your skills here at home.

The Government of Liberia is largely responsible for the budget of this state-run University in recognition of the important role of education for the achievement of the critical strategic objectives in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. While not nearly enough, the Government has increased the percentage of its financial contributions to the University. Its current subsidy is US\$7.5 million for FY 2009/2010, or 60 percent of the University's budget, a significant increment from US\$2.3 million in FY 2007/2008¹.

Total enrollment for the recognized seven undergraduate degree-granting institutions, is now about 30,000, up from 16,289 in 2008 with the University of Liberia alone hosting close to 19,000 students. I want to assure you that Government will remain steadfast in its budgetary subsidies to accredited, public and privately run institutions of higher education.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me conclude on a positive note. While more is required, Government's financial investment in tertiary education will be real and competitive with other sectors. Our commitment and appreciation of

¹ 2008 Annual Message

the role of the University of Liberia in national redevelopment are unequivocal.

Today we celebrate you, our Graduates, for this milestone of accomplishment in your lives. Let me caution you, though, that it is what you do with your accomplishments that will bring benefits to you and society of the degrees you have earned. Go forth with humility, a service orientation, nationalism, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a commitment to contribute to the investment of human capital in our country.

I salute you, the 2009 Graduates of the University of Liberia. I wish you a successful and productive life in your chosen career path. Congratulations!

Thank you.