

Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's  
July 26, 2010 Video Message to the Liberian Diaspora

Greetings to you, Fellow Liberians all over the world.

I think you will agree when I say, with clarity of purpose, that we have much to celebrate this July 26.

I am sure most of you have heard that our US\$4.9 billion debt, which hung like an albatross around the country's neck, has been wiped clean. We have reached the Completion Point for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) due in part to the level of international cooperation we garnered from multilateral institutions.

Reaching HIPC was also due in part to the lobbying efforts of many of you who advocated for a return to normalcy. As a result of tireless efforts, we have managed to fast-track our national development agenda, the "Lift Liberia" Poverty Reduction Strategy, averaging 80 percent in implementation. We have even begun the process of a national visioning exercise that will outline what we hope to achieve in the next 15 years, incorporating the aspirations and commitments of Liberians nationwide.

We have refurbished more roads; built more schools and clinics; signed multi-billion-dollar concession agreements for mining, agriculture, and forestry – our traditional economic power blocks – and sustained donor support and international goodwill even in the midst of a global economic meltdown.

But we cannot rest on our laurels.

Significant challenges remain, and we must reflect on how to surpass these hurdles. We intend to use your potential to make stronger inroads. Your accumulated strategic financial, intellectual, human, and technical capital has the potential to catapult us into prominence once again. And the only way we can achieve success is through institutional cooperation with you, our Diaspora.

It will be important in the next few years to develop a structured, coordinated plan for the Government to engage you for maximum impact, as migration and development research points to Diasporas as important partners in progress, matching even the impact of donor assistance.

We are beginning to think strategically about how to collaborate with you, because we know that from Accra to Brussels, Minneapolis to Toronto, Beijing to Moscow, you are making strides to support our development efforts.

Having already observed that the Liberian Diaspora represents vast wealth potential through private sector development, middle-class entrenchment, and public sector capacity-building, we seek to formalize our relationship with you as partners in development. We have begun collecting data, through a strategic questionnaire, in order to devise a Liberian Diaspora profile that will allow us to continue to create an enabling environment for your return, institutional engagement, and/or investments in infrastructure, education, health, and agriculture.

A number of reforms for cooperation have already gained traction. Our Embassy in Washington, D.C. has established a Diaspora Advisory Board to assist in harnessing your potential. Here at home, the Ministry of State is formalizing a proposal to establish an Office of Diaspora Affairs that will serve as an institutional link from Government to the Diaspora at large.

This Administration sympathizes with your calls for dual citizenship and supports the idea, and we are committed to working with the Legislature to ensure that those who fled the civil war and took on other nationalities are not deterred from coming back home to contribute meaningfully. For your information, the past week or so, a bill on dual citizenship was introduced, and it is important for Liberia's development. With that said, the absence of a dual citizenship bill has not hindered your eagerness to make an impact, nor do we expect it to.

We have also endeavored to work with our foreign missions to ensure that you are kept abreast of major development hurdles and achievements in-country. In that connection, the Government recently held town hall meetings in high-population centers in the United States to hear your voices and views on issues of national concern. We used that venue to discuss what has been achieved thus far in lifting Liberia. We endeavor to host similar forums in Europe, the far Diaspora, and within the region, the near Diaspora.

We are committed to making the Liberian Diaspora our "16th County," with all the rights, privileges, and attention that befits a sub-political division. You are an extension of us. Our challenges are your challenges; our achievements are also your own.

As you, too, celebrate 163 years of our nation's existence, we ask that you answer a clarion call to continue to lift Liberia in your spheres of influence. We look forward to future collaboration, and wish you all the best.

Happy 26.