

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Celebration
In Observance of the 163rd Independence Anniversary
Of the Republic of Liberia
Sanniquellie City, Nimba County
Monday, July 26, 2010**

**Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro-Tempore, and Honorable Members of the Legislature, including the Legislative Caucus of Nimba County;
Mr. Chief Justice, Associate Justices of the Supreme Court and Members of the Judiciary;
Members of the Cabinet and Other Government Officials;
Madam Superintendent and Members of the Local Administration;
Mr. Doyen, Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Her Excellency the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations in Liberia;
Officers and Staff of the United Nations Mission in Liberia;
Our Development Partners;
The Command-Officer-In-Charge, Men and Women of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL);
Former Government Officials present;
Traditional Leaders, Chiefs and Elders;
Political and Business Leaders;
Labor and Trade Unions;
Youth and Student Organizations;
Civil Society Organizations; Members of the Press;
Our Visitors from Abroad and Liberians from the Diaspora;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:**

Let us begin by giving thanks to Almighty God for all the blessings he has bestowed on this nation. Without Him, nothing can be achieved. With Him, all things are possible. And so we give God the glory.

Liberia is blessed! We can all thank God for all his blessings in our country, to bring us to where we are today. Despite decades of problems, including civil strife that tore apart this land, we have stepped back from the abyss and are doing all we can within our power to restore our nation and to make us whole once again. Now in our seventh year of uninterrupted peace, we are showing the world that we can rise again.

We, Liberians, are a resilient lot, with an indomitable spirit. It is this strength that has enabled us to survive as a nation, and today to celebrate our 163rd Independence Day. Let us all remain committed and united. Our call to all Liberians: Backward Never! Forward Ever!

Let me take this opportunity to welcome citizens from all over our country, as well as our special guests, those who have come to join us in celebration on this day. Thank you for coming to Sanniquellie. We say a special thanks to you.

We remember when our citizens crossed borders and went to your shores and you granted them haven. We remember, and are mindful of, all of your citizens you put in harm's way to ensure that we had peace. With that, you can be assured that Liberians, as part of this global village, welcomes all of its citizens, and all of its guests, and all of its friends and partners.

Thank you, Nimba County! Nimba County, *Kabya*. Thank you, Nimba County, for the very warm reception and your gracious hospitality everywhere we have traveled. The people of this County have turned out in record numbers to welcome us, and to proudly

show all the many development projects – all solid evidence that Nimba is definitely on the move.

We don't know if it's raining somewhere else in Liberia, on this 26th Day of July, but we know that in Nimba County, the sun is up! That means that God has shined his blessings upon this County and its people.

Allow me to recognize, among all the many special guests, one who has already been gowned, Ms. Jendayi Frazer, the former United States Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. A specialist in African Affairs and International Security Affairs, Jendayi is credited for designing the Bush Administration's policy for ending the war here in Liberia. She also worked on other African countries, including neighboring Sierra Leone. She was also instrumental in the decisions that led to the establishment of the Millennium Challenge Account, under which Liberia recently received a US\$15 million grant to promote reforms in the areas of land rights and access, girls' education and trade policy.

We, Liberians, owe you a debt of gratitude for all that you did in pushing and promoting Liberia's case before the United Nations Security Council. To show our appreciation and thanks, we honored you, last Wednesday, with the distinction as Dame, Grand Commander, Humane Order of African Redemption.

Let me also express appreciation to you, the Right Monsignor Dr. Robert Tikpor, for being a part of this national celebration and for your stirring National Oration. Neither age nor frail health has dampened your fighting spirit and your talent for speaking your mind and telling it like it is. We celebrate you, as we celebrate Liberia at 163, and say a million, million thanks to you for giving yourself so selflessly in service to your people, your church, and your country.

I wish to acknowledge the Chiefs, Traditional Leaders and Superintendents and the other honorable legislators from Nimba, all of whom played a vital role that is making this 163rd Anniversary Celebration the success that it is today.

I recognize, in a special way, Paramount Chief John N. T. Strother, a son of Tappita District, who was awarded a distinction as Officer, Order of the Star of Africa at last week's Investiture Ceremony in Monrovia. Chief Strother donated the land on which the Tappita Referral Hospital, which we dedicated on Friday, has been built. We have named that edifice, that structure, the Jackson Fiah Doe Referral Hospital and Medical Center. Montserrado County has its JFK, Nimba County has its JFD. Thank you, Chief Strother, for making the dream of a modern referral hospital a reality.

Since coming to office, we have chosen to celebrate our nation's Independence in counties with large populations, to enable greater numbers of our citizens to participate. In 2006, it was Montserrado, followed by Grand Bassa, then Margibi and Bong. This is Nimba's year, and from the wonderful welcome we've received everywhere, I believe the choice was the right one!

And now I say to you: Lofa, get ready for next year!

NIMBA TOUR

Being in Sanniquellie brings back memories to 1959, when the leaders of Ghana, Guinea, and Liberia, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, and William V.S. Tubman, gathered in this city along with other leaders, and made history, as they discussed the formation of the Organization of African Unity, now the African Union. Three Palava Huts, on the grounds of the Presidential Palace, commemorate that

historic event which changed Africa forever. Please take some time and walk through those huts, if you can.

What an amazing week we have had here in Nimba. We've gone to places, and talked to people, and dedicated development projects which you, the people of Nimba, are working to make it happen.

Let me take you on our journey through Nimba, which began last Thursday, as we crossed the border at Sokopa, receiving a hero's welcome from the citizens of this great County.

On Friday, we commenced a series of dedications of development projects up and down the county. And as I speak to you today, we are still not done.

We dedicated the Liberia International Christian College, where I expressed my satisfaction in seeing a public-private partnership at work, in which citizens have taken that first step to be able to deliver education to their people and others all over the country. Next, we went to the Ganta Elementary Junior High School, an innovative and specialized project for cross-border education, supported by UNICEF.

En route to Tappita City, it was the turn of Flumpa Market, a building with such functionality that it can serve as the model for other markets we want to build. At the Cocopa Rubber Plantation, a company that has been in Liberia since the 1940s, we dedicated the Cocopa Administrative Building, and plan to hold discussions with its management. We also dedicated the Kpatuo Health Center, which, too, will serve as a model for the construction of future clinics.

Under a beautiful moonlit sky, we dedicated Tappita Hospital on Friday, a US\$10 million state-of-the-art comprehensive and referral hospital that will serve the health needs of citizens from all over Nimba and beyond.

Let me express particular thanks and appreciation of the Liberian people for what has been done by the People's Republic of China. Last week, we started out by dedicating a modern new campus, at Fendall, for the University of Liberia. We moved on to the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Center at the Central Agricultural Technology Institute (CARI), at Suakoko, in Bong County. And, then, the Tappita Hospital, which we dedicated last Friday.

This humanitarian gift will provide access to quality healthcare for the people of this region and save the lives of thousands of Liberians in the years to come. As I noted on that occasion, this "26" celebration is China's to share, for its invaluable birthday gifts to the people of Liberia – first, the University of Liberia's Fendall Campus; then, the and, finally, the Tappita Hospital – all hallmarks of a true friendship and partnership.

In Tappita, we also dedicated the Bangla-Nimba Capacity Building Center, a project initiated by the Bangladesh Contingent. This new vocational training facility will train Liberians, particularly the youth, to develop their skills and build their capacity for employment opportunities. When fully operational, it will offer training in computer education; tailoring; healthcare, hygiene and sanitation; generator repair and maintenance; carpentry; plumbing; repair and maintenance of mechanical transport vehicles; and cosmetology.

We also had a most fruitful meeting, in Tappita, with chiefs, local officials, concerned women and other community leaders in a Palava Hut, airing key issues of interest and concern.

Still other dedications included: the Commissioner's Compound in Gbonquoi and the Johnnie Voker High School Science Laboratory in Saclepea.

Back in Sanniquellie, on Saturday, it was a distinct pleasure for me to cut the ribbon at the Liberia National Red Cross Society's Disaster Management and Guest Center. What is remarkable about this facility is that the Red Cross has found a way to generate income for its activities by operating a guest house, rather than waiting for funding to come from donors. I applaud the President of the Liberia National Red Cross, Theresa Leigh-Sherman, and her colleagues, for this entrepreneurial spirit.

At the launch of the Agricultural Fair, also on Saturday, it was great to see Liberian farmers in action, demonstrating, with pride, how they process rice and cassava and palm oil, and to have the opportunity to purchase what they themselves had grown.

Throughout our time here, we participated in "symbolic" dedications of the Gayea Elementary School; Glan's Town Clinic; and Zekepa Radio Station.

On our journey, we joined our Muslim brothers and sisters for a Thanksgiving and Intercessory Prayer at the Ganta Mosque. Yesterday, at the United Liberia Inland Church, we participated in an uplifting Thanksgiving and Intercessory Service to commemorate Liberia's 163rd Independence Anniversary. We will long remember the sermon delivered by the Very Rev. Dr. Herman Browne who, at such a young age, is wise beyond his years, and like a prophet, sought to show the kingdom called Liberia, and its people, the way forward to a brighter future.

Early Sunday, we proudly dedicated the Nimba County Community College. By opening this college, we are ensuring that we make higher education accessible to the people of Nimba. We will surely need this college to accommodate the growing number of students

that are enrolling in Nimba schools – a figure that has surged from 151,352 in 2006/2007 to a total of 258,475 students today.

We also presented the Annual African Inventors & Entrepreneur Award to four Liberians for their inventions in the areas of aviation, agro-processing and furniture-making from bamboo, showing us how one can push back the frontiers of possibilities.

Also, on Sunday, we visited with the community of Karnplay, keeping a promise to visit that district on this trip to Nimba, and we dedicated the science facilities and a library at Karn High School. We ended Sunday in Sehyikimpa, where we dedicated the Administrative Building, and symbolically dedicated projects in Duo Tiayee.

Tomorrow, we will continue our journey by dedicating the Administrative Building in Bahn, and symbolically dedicating projects in Zoe-Geh District. We will go to Yekepa to dedicate the African Bible College University; return here to dedicate the newly constructed Prison Compound, which we hope will not be used; the Gender & Development Building, and the G. W. Harley Hospital Operating Theatre; and, as we depart Nimba, the Radio Station in Ganta.

Another duty, as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Liberia, was the inspection of the troops, our newly trained, goose-stepping Armed Forces of Liberia, this morning.

And in keeping with our tradition, we hope all Liberians, wherever they are, in their communities, will join tomorrow in administering to the children. The 27th of July is the time when we recognize our children and have the chance to give them some enjoyment. Please join them wherever you are. Here in Sanniquellie and throughout the

country, the National Children's Party will be held at City Halls in all 15 Counties.

Throughout our travels in Nimba, and wherever I go in this country, I make it my duty to stop in small towns and villages to meet and greet the people who live there. We bring gifts of candies and clothing for the children, footballs and jerseys for the youth, and rice for everyone. When I can do that, I believe I am fulfilling a promise I made, to make our children smile once more.

And so, in addition to the places already mentioned, we stopped to talk to the people in Kitoma, and Towee, and Gbedin, and Zodeewe, and Soplay Farm, and Tondee, and Dengamu, and Gbahesala, and Gbahn, and Yarcenun, and Karnwee, and Loyee.

We also made stops at Howard Village, and Lorseh, and Graie, and Zuolay, and Dan Village, and Korlay, and Zeoghein, and Volay, and Miller's Town, and Duopu Village, and Harris Town, and Yreah's Town.

Still going, we stopped at Vonney Village, and Payne Town, and Gbehyi, and Payne Town, and Suakarzue, and Gbobayee, and Veleegale, and Zorgowee, and Kiale, and Samuel Deeme Village, and Lepula, and Nanplay. And we're not done yet!

ABOUT NIMBA

In the decades, starting in the 1950s, this county contributed mightily to Liberia's healthy economy when the Liberian American Swedish Company (LAMCO) operated here, when iron ore was discovered in the mountains. Today, ArcelorMittal is breathing new life into the region: it has brought in a Brazilian company, Oderbrecht, to build the railway from Buchanan to Yekepa, and all along the rail line,

communities are being established, with schools, clinics and marketplaces, with all the signs of a vibrant, re-energized society. With roads as one of our top development priorities, it is reassuring that the company has already engaged the leadership of this county in helping to build the roads. And I personally look forward to Mr. Mittal keeping his commitments to pave the road from Ganta to Yekepa, because we know that if we build our infrastructure, more investors will come to Nimba and to the rest of Liberia.

Let me also highlight some of the improvements which this Government has brought to Nimba. As a result of a harmonious arrangement between ArcelorMittal and BHP Billiton, an Australian mining company, Nimba will provide vital access by BHP to move the ore it mines in Guinea to the port of Buchanan. In addition, Buchanan Renewables (BRE), a renewable resources and power-generating operation, is in the process of mapping out redundant rubber trees in Nimba in order to rehabilitate rubber plantations and bring more jobs to the area.

Of the 18 infrastructure projects initiated since last September with the 2008/2009 County Development Funds, 12 have been completed, with the rest nearing completion. There have been complaints on how some of the CDF money was spent, so we are fixing it through a system of checks and balances, for maximum accountability.

The Social Development Funds, negotiated with the various concessions, are under new management, and a host of projects – electrification, roads, bridges, public latrines, as well as other rehabilitation – have been completed.

In the health sector, it is this administration that a new, modern, and well-equipped Tappita Hospital is ready for operation, in keeping

with a commitment I made to the people of this county. We also note, with satisfaction, that agricultural activities are up, with the support of our development partners, and there are over 50 communal and cooperative farms, with women taking the lead in such activities.

One such operation is the Dokodan Farmers Cooperative in Gbedin, right here in Nimba. It processes and bags "Made in Liberia" rice. The rice is of such high quality that the World Food Programme is now purchasing rice from the cooperative for its school feeding program. It is, I believe, one of the best projects that we have going. My last visit to Gbedin, back in March, brought back memories of the time, in the 1970s, when I spent a lot of time there with my family and my husband who worked in the Agricultural Extension Program.

RECONCILING NIMBA

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Except for Montserrado, which hosts our Capital, Nimba, with a population of 482, 028, is Liberia's most populous county. All 16 tribes are found here, the five largest being the Gios, Manos, Krahn, Gbis and Mandingos.

Nimba is blessed with ample natural resources, all of which are crucial to economic growth, investment and job creation. In this place one finds minerals of iron ore, gold and diamonds, agriculture and forestry, with timber and rubber being the most important cash crops.

The theme of this year's Independence Celebrations is "Utilizing our Diversity to Enhance National Unity and Harmony." The issues that

divide the people of Nimba are the same ones that divide us as a nation: ethnic and other social tensions related to land disputes, and, sometimes, religious schisms. It is these tensions which have prevented us from finding sustainable solutions to pertinent political, economic, and social problems.

Yet, I believe that this county can take a lead in promoting diversity, given the number of tribes that are found here.

What the people of Nimba need most is to reconcile themselves by overcoming divisions over ethnicity and land. On the land issue, I set up a Special Presidential Nimba Land Commission nearly two years ago to look into the land dispute in the county, with the aim of achieving peace and fostering reconciliation. The 14-member Commission, chaired by Mr. Musa Bility and comprised of Liberians who hail from Nimba, presented its report to me on June 30th.

I stated, at the presentation, that the land dispute here has dragged on for too long, sometimes creating constraints for some of the things we know we can do. I reminded the people of Nimba that the Government can facilitate the process, but peace cannot be legislated or commanded. Peace must come from inside oneself and one's willingness to accept things, to mediate, collaborate, reconcile and compromise. As I did on that occasion, let me again thank the residents of Nimba who have demonstrated their commitment to peace, and appeal to the aggrieved parties for their cooperation and patience.

The report is the beginning of a big step forward in reconciling the people of the area. Although there are some who disagree with the Commission's report, we believe that it represents a first best effort in finding a solution towards settling the land dispute and reconciling the people. We ask you, the people of Nimba, to give your full support as we try to address some of the issues.

The area that forms the market, and which is the source of tension, remained unaddressed by the Commission's report. We will, therefore, exercise the right of eminent domain so that the area becomes public property, with public facilities, so that it will be available for all the citizens.

Let me seize this auspicious occasion to summon all of us, as Liberians, to find solutions to the problems we have; to put together our collective energies in caring for one another, to overcome the greatest threat to national unity. Let us address our common challenges, such as education for our children, healthcare, food security, housing, and job creation for our thousands of our unemployed youth.

As Nimba goes, so goes the rest of our nation. Remember the heavy responsibility you bear. Serve your country well; lead; blaze your path; show them all that, after the "26" celebration in Nimba County, Nimba County remains the soil of the reconciled. God bless you.

CONCLUSION

Good People of Nimba County;

Fellow Liberians;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Liberia, today, is undergoing a renaissance, a renewal, a rebirth. It is transforming the resilient spirit, of which I spoke, into empowerment

of its people. Our people are beginning to share and capture and join in pushing back the frontiers of possibility. I can feel and see it in Nimba and in the rest of the country.

Liberia has come a long way. In less than five years, we have gone from being labeled a pariah state – a country even Liberians were ashamed to claim – into a nation where our international status and creditworthiness have improved immensely. In less than five years, we have restored hope, credibility, reputation and image, and today we are respected all over the world, and can look towards a brighter and more prosperous future for all our citizens.

To everyone here today, to Liberians and residents throughout this land, and to our fellow Liberians all over the world, in the Diaspora, I extend heartfelt greetings and say to one and all: “Happy 26.”

I thank you.