

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Dedication Ceremonies of Providence Baptist Church
Community Development & Outreach Ministry Project:
The Rich & Helen DeVos Medical Center
& the Alexander Ketter Academy
Bo-Waterside, Grand Cape Mount County
Sunday, February 27, 2011**

Pastor Reeves, Officers and Members of the Providence Baptist Church Family;

Members of the Cape Mount Legislative Caucus;

Madam Superintendent;

Mr. Unity Party Chairman and Other Party Officials;

Honored Guests;

People of Bo-Waterside Community and People of Grand Cape Mount County;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

In this place, and on this wonderful occasion, let us give thanks to Almighty God for His many blessings bestowed upon us and upon our nation. With Him, all things are possible. And so we give God the glory.

Thank you, Pastor Reeves, for inviting me to be a witness to, and participate in, these ceremonies of Providence Baptist Church's Community Development and Rural Liberia Outreach Ministry. I am pleased to be here as you unveil this multi-purpose which includes

the DeVos Medical Center, the Alexander Ketter Academy, and other structures, here in Bo-Waterside, Grand Cape Mount County.

It is both a distinct honor and a pleasure for me to do so, in light of your Church's recognition of its moral responsibility and obligation to provide affordable and accessible health care and education to poor and under-served populations in rural Liberia.

In so doing, you, too, are implementing the "Lift Liberia" Poverty Reduction Strategy in those sectors. The ultimate goal of our development agenda is to expand access to quality health care and education to every part of the country. Irrespective of where our citizens live, they deserve access to affordable quality health care and the best education for their children.

The very history of our nation, Ladies and Gentlemen, is linked with the activity of the Church, particularly this religious institution. As you know, Liberia's Declaration of Independence was signed in Providence Baptist Church in July 1847. Established in 1821 and now celebrating its 190th anniversary, Providence Baptist predates the creation of the Liberian State by a quarter of a century, and rightfully deserves the esteemed title of "Cornerstone of the Nation." We applaud not only its history, but its response to today's realities and challenges through its Outreach Ministry.

Beyond providing spiritual nourishment to its members, the Church has played a crucial role in delivering services to the people. For many years, the best schools and hospitals were operated by Church organizations. Thousands of our people would still not have

access to quality education and health services were it not for the Church. There has existed a solid partnership between Church and State.

Nevertheless, we know that Church-sponsored schools and health facilities have come under increased financial stress as support from overseas has fallen off. We are therefore heartened by the generous support from the DeVos Foundation that has made this Medical Center possible. Because of the role that Providence Baptist has played in our nation's history, it is no surprise that a facility of this value should be built by the Church. I want to assure you that our Ministry of Health and Social Welfare will remain a trusted partner as you offer quality health care to various communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Providing basic services, especially quality education, for our young people, is a core objective of our Administration. We therefore welcome the unveiling of the Alexander Ketter Academy, named for the oldest Deacon of the Church and one of the architects of its Ashmun Street edifice, and who I am very happy to see here today. I am sure that Mr. Ketter is proud that the school that will carry his name will better prepare students for college and for life, providing them with the tools and space they need in order to excel.

Throughout our nation's history, the Church has partnered with the State in providing quality private-school education for Liberia's students. Many of us are beneficiaries of church-supported education. In response to the current drop-off in overseas support to

some faith-based institutions, the Government has increased the level of annual subsidies to around US\$2 million for over 60 private schools and universities. We know that more needs to be done, but this is a good start.

Fellow Liberians:

As parents and as leaders, we invest in the future so that our children can carry on our legacy. It is important to give them the requisite training and instruction in our ways, our culture, our values, and the skills required to live a productive life in society. The Church has long recognized this, as evidenced in its extensive work in educating and healing our people.

The Government will continue to do its part in meeting the needs of our people, but this task can only be successful if it is done in concert, with every sector of our society contributing: the family, the community, the Church. The Church also has a prominent role in teaching values and ethics to our young people: dignity in honest labor, fairness and equity, honesty, and pride in their work.

While the physical destruction of our civil conflict is evident around us, an even more significant negative effect is not immediately visible. I am referring to the decay in the social norms and mores that sustained our society. The saying, that "it takes a village to raise a child," was very accurate in Liberia. The faith-based community, the neighborhood, and the family all provided instruction and mentoring to our young people. Yet, for the duration of the war, this element was missing, and it is the responsibility of all of us to restore that value system to Liberia.

I believe that through its Community Development and Rural Liberia Outreach Ministry, the Providence Baptist Church is making an important and meaningful contribution to this national undertaking.

We pray God's grace that you will continue your ministry to transform lives by renewing communities and, in so doing, transform our Liberia. Let us all work towards that goal.

I thank you.