

**“The State of Education in Liberia: 2006 to Today”
Remarks by The Visitor of the University of Liberia
Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
At the University’s 90th Commencement Convocation
SKD Complex, Paynesville
May 4, 2011**

Honored and Special Guests;
Trustees, Faculty and Staff;
Graduates of this 90th Commencement Convocation;
Families and Friends of the Class of 2011;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Again we gather for what is the sixth Commencement Exercise since I became President in 2006. As The Visitor of this University, I am always delighted to join in Graduation Ceremonies, to celebrate the achievements of our bright young men and women who desire to further their dreams in careers beyond university. I congratulate you, Class of 2011, on behalf of our Government and people, for what you have done and will accomplish in the New Liberia.

We thank your parents, guardians and other sponsors, as well as the faculty, administrators and others who have played a major part in getting you to where you are today. You are deeply indebted to all of them.

Special thanks go to our Commencement Speaker, a daughter of Africa and of the United States of America, who has never wavered in her steadfast support of Liberia. This Graduating Class could not have chosen a more appropriate and inspiring speaker than Liberia’s friend, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, and to confer upon her an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters in International Relations. We applaud you, Linda, and thank you, and your great country, for all that you have done and continue to do for us, in so many aspects of our reconstruction and development. Liberia’s

ties with the United States, as everyone here knows, extend back to the founding of our nation, and generations of Liberians have maintained strong bonds with the people of America. These bonds are stronger today because of your efforts, Madam Ambassador!

Class of 2011:

Many of you graduating today were here at the start of this Administration, in 2006. You therefore know, first-hand, the state of education back then, compared to where and what it is today.

Like most everything else, we inherited an educational system broken by years of civil war. There was, and to a certain extent still is, a glaring need for overall systemic reform – from the Ministry of Education on down to the classroom.

The problems we faced included: lack of funding; poor allocation and use of meager resources; a school system heavily centralized in Monrovia, with the rest of the country receiving little or no attention; a lack of reliable data to make informed decisions; a massive brain drain of skilled and professional educators; and lack of access to education for a generation of young people.

We recognized the imperative for change, and reform of the educational system became one of three top priorities. We set about implementing the Education Act of 2001, with particular focus on primary education and a policy of free and compulsory primary education. We also conducted an assessment of various components of the education sector, and the 2007/2008 National School Census produced, for the first time, the most comprehensive and reliable data on education, giving Government a tool to appropriately address problems in the sector.

Today, primary education has recovered rapidly in terms of gross enrolment, and greater support will be required for the secondary and tertiary levels to accommodate the high primary school population now advancing to the higher levels.

Last year, we commenced a program of granting tuition-free education and other incentives to students enrolled in the University's Teachers College and Tubman University's College of Education, to encourage students to serve their country by pursuing teaching careers. We had established a precedence when, in response to the urgent need for medical personnel, we made education at the Dogliotti College of Medicine free.

Since 2006, the allotment in the National Budget for this University has grown from a mere US\$1.3 million in 2006 to US\$9.8 million in 2011, representing 58.3% of the University's budget. For fiscal year 2011/2012, we are requesting US\$19 million for the operation of the University's four campuses.

The 2011/2012 National Budget, which we are submitting to the Legislature, once again prioritizes education in order to expand and increase the competitive advantage of our labor force. Recognizing that significant segments of our youth population are better suited for vocational and technical education, more funding is included for institutions that build the capacity for our youths to acquire marketable skills needed to benefit from new employment opportunities to contribute to reducing poverty.

Our Government has made quantitative improvements in the education sector; we must now work towards achieving qualitative results. Reforms include an Education Management Information System, which enables Government to make data-based management decisions. We are also developing and implementing a new decentralized operational system at the county and district levels.

A draft Education Reform Act of 2011 will be presented to the Legislature this month. It represents the most comprehensive reform of the educational law and, consequently, of the educational system in decades. The Act will, among many reform measures:

- Decentralize education in Liberia by establishing County School Boards and giving them considerable autonomy;
- Restructure the Ministry of Education for more effective delivery of educational services;
- Restructure the education system itself;
- Provide for a National Education Advisory Board;
- Provide for the protection of students and administrators from various offenses;
- Strengthen patriotism by making the hoisting of the National Flag and giving the Pledge of Allegiance part of school activities; and
- Set the student-teacher ratio regarding class sizes.

This Government is definitely keeping the promise on education. We have come a long way since 2006, but we're not done yet. We are laying the foundation for quality education in Liberia, and that work must continue onward.

Once again, we congratulate and commend this Graduating Class of 2011, and call upon you to answer the call to duty in service to our nation.

I thank you.