

**Keynote Address by  
H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
At Launch of the National Standards Laboratory  
Ministry of Public Works Grounds  
September 9, 2011**

Minister Miata Beysolow, Minister of Commerce,  
Acting Dean, Members of the Cabinet and other Official of Government;  
The Doyen and members of the Diplomatic Corps;  
Mr. Attilio Pacifici, Representative of the EU;  
Heads of International Organizations;  
Members of the Business and Consumer Associations;  
Members of the Fourth Estate;  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is an exciting day for Liberia. We are here to launch our National Standards Laboratory, adding to the list of institutions that are helping to bring Liberia into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Over the past six years, our Government has worked closely with development partners and the community to give our people access to new technologies and state-of-the-art facilities that can improve their lives, no matter where they reside. These accomplishments include our newest health facility, the Jackson F. Doe Memorial Regional Referral Hospital, in Tappita, Nimba County, which serves our citizens in the southeast; our investment in the revitalization of the Central Agricultural Research Institute (CARI), in Bong County, to increase research and development in the agricultural sector and improve food security and productivity; and our investment in the underwater Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) fibre-optic cable which will bring high-speed Internet to Liberia by 2012.

This National Standards Laboratory complements Government's overall plan to improve the standards of goods entering and leaving the country. In the past six years, we have made significant gains in restoring peace and stability, to set our nation on the path to economic prosperity. As a result,

more and more people want to do business here, and Liberians have even greater freedom of choice in the goods they can buy and the markets in which they can sell their products.

Along with greater choice, competition and opportunities lurks the danger of unfair trade practices. We have witnessed the increase in counterfeit and sub-standard goods coming into Liberia, unchecked. Sadly, our very porous borders create opportunities for unscrupulous individuals to smuggle in and sell goods that have been rejected by other countries.

Unsuspecting consumers, many of them uneducated and poor, buy these products, and because they lack the information or the power to enforce their rights, they are victimized. Many local businesses, too, are prey. The cost to our economy is incalculable. Our people need greater protection, but to do so we need the instrument to investigate economic crimes in a scientific, rigorous way. From today, we will have that capacity.

Additionally, global pressures for bigger and bigger yields have resulted in the use of more aggressive and dangerous pesticides or chemical supplements. The globalized nature of the trade in food, and the interconnectedness of the food chain, means that Liberia is not immune.

This National Standards Laboratory is so important because it can verify, test and confirm the quality and the safety of products, right here in Liberia.

Both the public and private businesses will be able to utilize the microbiology, chemistry and metrology laboratories to test their products, goods, equipment and appliances, to ensure that they meet internationally acceptable standards. For example, a market woman will be able to bring her scales to the Lab to verify that it is calibrated correctly; consumers will be able to bring goods they have purchased for testing if they have concerns regarding the purity or chemical content; and business people will be able to ask the Lab to confirm that the goods they have purchased meet the standards or specifications they requested. The quality and safety of the goods that are traded will be a concern of not only the producers and the buyers but also the consumers.

The potential for the Standards Laboratory to enhance our ability to trade should be emphasized. As Liberia further integrates into the Mano River Union and ECOWAS, cross-border trade will increase significantly. Our Government has also initiated the process for membership of the World

Trade Organization (WTO), according Liberian goods greater access to global markets.

For Liberia to take advantage of these new trading opportunities – for our local products to find markets in Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Europe or the United States – both the products and the production process must meet the relevant standards set by these countries and economic groupings.

Currently, many of our locally produced products, such as cocoa, peppers and cassava, cannot be exported or, when exported, are sold at greatly reduced prices. One reason this occurs is because we have lacked facilities that can issue the required internationally accepted standards certificates. From today, that too will change.

This Standards Laboratory will make sure that our farmers and producers get the best prices for their goods, through its testing and certification service. This, in turn, will help our country's development and bring more money into the economy. At the same time, this will require an understanding from the private sector that existing farming and production practices must change, as well as a commitment from the sector to invest in those changes.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The project to build a modern laboratory for Liberia began in 2006 when the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and our Government, through the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, signed a Memorandum of Understanding for trade capacity building, specifically the establishment of a standards laboratory and quality assurance capacity building.

Let me extend, on behalf of the whole country, our gratitude to UNIDO for supporting this excellent initiative and for being a committed partner to the Government all these years.

Special thanks, also, to the West Africa Quality Programme, financed by the European Union for ECOWAS and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) countries, for funding the equipment and training Laboratory staff, and for their commitment to lifting the level of standards testing of not just Liberia, but throughout West Africa.

We say thank you to our other partners – the Ghana Standard Board, the Standard Organization of Nigeria, and SGS Corporation – who provided the technical assistance and training to make this program possible.

Also deserving of mention are: our Ministry of Commerce and Industry; the National Steering Committee of the West Africa Quality Programme for Liberia, which is comprised of both public and private sector representatives; and UNIDO staff in Liberia for their support of the project.

Our heartfelt thanks to all of you.

Finally, a word to the Liberian people: The institutions and infrastructure our Government is building, the reforms that are taking place, and all the laws that we are working with our Legislature to enact – all these measures are being done with an eye to the future, a future where a mother can buy powder milk and be confident that it is safe for her children to consume; a future where a Liberian farmer will know that when he sells his cocoa beans to a buyer, he will get the best price.

This is an opportunity for all of us, and so I challenge you: Producers, see what quality standards apply to the goods you make, and use the Lab to help you bring them up to standards. Business people, use the Lab to test the goods you sell, to confirm their quality and safety. Liberians, use the Lab to help you enforce your rights as consumers. If all of us play our critical part, I know that this National Standards Laboratory will be one of our greatest investments for the future. Let's get started.

I thank you.