

**Remarks by The Visitor of the University of Liberia
Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
At the University's 91st Commencement Ceremony
SKD Sports Complex, Paynesville
December 21, 2011**

All Protocols have been amply observed!

The Vice President asked you to give him three hours; as President, fasten your seat belts.

I congratulate the Class of 2011, on behalf of our Government and the people of Liberia, for making it to the finish line! We look forward, over the next six years, to seeing you use your newly acquired skills to make contributions to our country's national development.

Thank you, parents, guardians, sponsors, educators of this institution, and all who have been instrumental in getting these graduates to this day.

This year's Commencement Speaker, Vice President Joseph Boakai, has been at my side for these past six years, as my loyal and trusted partner and friend. I congratulate him on being awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters. We look forward to working together for another six years as we try to lift our people and our country to the heights we know are possible.

For the past several years, when speaking at Commencement Exercises, I have felt as if mine were a lone voice crying in the wilderness. My message has been: We have plenty of political scientists and sociologists; what our country needs urgently are engineers, scientists, agriculturalists, teachers!

Finally, it appears that our message is getting through! There is a change in the wind, judging from the number of students, especially women, now venturing into these desperately needed disciplines. These numbers, while

still not sufficient, constitute important first steps that bring cheers to our hearts.

Among the 1,866 graduates, 119 are scientists and engineers. What is especially pleasing is that the figure shows more females are entering engineering than ever before – 159 this year compared with 74 in 2010; and female enrolment in the sciences went from 593 last year to 825 this year. There are more students entering agriculture, with a record number of females, from 228 last year to 386 in 2011. No doubt, having a female Minister of Agriculture as a role model has encouraged more young women to venture into that field, no longer seeing it as a man's area for study.

The figures also show an increase in the number of new graduating teachers, 48 this year compared to only 21 in 2010. You may recall that, upon seeing the abysmally small number of students enrolled in teaching –which meant we would never have enough qualified teachers to educate the large numbers of students – we immediately introduced a Financial Aid Program to pay the tuition and fees for all students enrolled in the Teachers College of the University of Liberia and the College of Education at Tubman University. The result has been a dramatic increase in the number of people now entering Teachers College, from 873 last year to 1,193 this year. So, the future is bright, and we expect great things from the University and its 25,000 students.

1,866. That's the number of students graduating from this institution. Add to that the graduates from other colleges and universities all over the country, and the looming question is that of jobs. Where will all these graduates be placed? We are asking some of you to be prepared to take positions in rural areas, to be prepared to expand your horizons, to help us enhance our national capacity at levels that may not be the very top. We need you as district commissioners, as acting mayors, as project planners, as superintendents, assistant superintendents; we need you as directors, assistant directors, chief of units, if, indeed, we will have the capacity to begin to expand the quality of our output at all levels throughout government.

In terms of job opportunities, I also want to encourage the concessionaires – more than encourage, demand that the concessionaires and other large companies organize job fairs on college campuses to inform the students of where the jobs are, what they can do, enabling them to change course, if necessary, to enable them to be assured of an opportunity.

Let me say to that brave, lone graduate who has an Associate Degree in Library Science, to report to the Chairman of the Liberia Education Trust (LET), to work with that institution, under my personal sponsorship, as we embark on a program of introducing libraries in our communities as a means of enhancing the quality of education of our students.

Let me also say to those two brave persons that graduated in French, that they should report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to be enrolled in the Foreign Service Institute where you can prepare yourself for diplomatic service of your country.

I won't talk about the thousand others in the sciences and engineering and teaching, which we applaud. We will make sure that the different companies, as well as our ministers, begin to work with you to make sure you are placed. That goes also for you, the graduates in Management and Business Administration and Economics. We'll see what we can do.

With this achievement comes new and greater responsibility to your personal life, as well as to your nation. The Government will do its part to ensure that you have the opportunity to achieve your goals, but this will require your active participation, your commitment to duty, your commitment to success.

We are developing a National Youth Service Program in which graduates will be posted to jobs throughout the country, where they will gain experience and exposure while contributing to our national agenda for development.

We have committed to creating 20,000 jobs each year in the various sectors for the next six years – a total of 120,000 jobs. To take advantage of these job opportunities, you must commit to work wherever the jobs are. I challenge you to consciously seek employment, when possible, in a county other than your own. This will ensure the process of national healing and reconciliation, and you will gain knowledge and appreciation of all that is Liberia.

I challenge you to reach out and share your knowledge by mentoring and tutoring. Create afterschool programs. Get involved in your community. Develop community service projects, creating safe and clean public places.

I also challenge you create your own opportunities, individually or collectively. Start ventures, business ventures that will lead to success for you personally and for the nation as a whole. Our Government will commit to work with public and private sectors to ensure that entrepreneurs have more access to resources to enable them to create businesses which, in turn, provide additional jobs.

Dear Graduates: You've already started. Let me commend you. Let me say to you that we need your service in the rebuilding of our nation. I congratulate you. We will be monitoring your progress, and we look forward to your contribution, as we work together for the development of our nation.

Thank you, congratulations, and God bless you.