

Armed Forces Day Keynote Address
Delivered by Dr. Amos C. Sawyer, Former President of the Interim Government
of National Unity and Chairman of the Governance Commission
February 11, 2014

Your Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia
Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives
Mr. President Pro Tempore and Members of the Liberian Senate
Mr. Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court
The Dean and Members of the Cabinet
The Commanding Officer-in-Charge and the women and men of the Armed Forces of Liberia
Former Leaders of Liberia here present
The Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations and the leadership of UNMIL
The Dean and Members of the Diplomatic Corps
The Chairman and members of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders
Prelates and Religious Leaders
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

This day was set aside by Act of Legislature to celebrate the Armed Forces of Liberia. I take this opportunity to salute all the women and men of our Armed Forces. We particularly salute our peacekeepers who are in Mali. We thank you and we celebrate you!

We are celebrating our Armed Forces at this time when we are implementing the Agenda for Transformation. One of the challenges we face is how to ensure the full integration of our security sector, especially our military into our national transformation agenda. Addressing this challenge requires the transformation of the military and security forces themselves, so they can become effective instruments integrated among the other institutions and processes that will focus and project our national vision, promote national reconciliation and healing, achieve good governance and deliver on the development agenda.

Let us recall that the Agenda for Transformation which we are now implementing was developed through years of broad consultations, sound planning and incremental and, often piloted implementation. Let us also recall that the process of developing the Security Sector, of which the military is a part, began with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2003 with the introduction of the UN peacekeeping force. The Liberian Government increased its ownership of this process when in 2007 it published a White Paper called the National Security Policy Statement laying out the vision, mission and the objectives to be pursued in our security sector policies and programs. This White Paper provided guidance in the formulation of a National Security Sector Strategy in 2009. The Strategy was formulated through extensive participatory processes of consultations held with ordinary people in local communities around the country, county leaders, leaders of civil society organizations, our elders and chiefs, women's groups, security sector experts, including experts from our regional and international partnerships, among others. Our National Security Strategy and its Implementation Matrix are among the most extensively vetted instruments of reform in our country today.

It is within the framework of these documents that our National Defense Act, our National Defense Strategy and other security-related legislation and regulations have been shaped or are being shaped. This is all part of our national security architecture which is being constructed.

Our national security architecture seeks to ensure the integration of all of the structures and institutions of our security sector in a manner that ensures the security of our people in their communities, townships and counties, of our borders and of our government. This multiple-layered and multidimensional security architecture must be implemented in a way that builds strong synergy and links to our other public sector institutions, our decentralization and local governance programs and the range of other programs, especially those designed to productively engage our youth, advance the economic empowerment of Liberians, produce human security and support development. As we all agree, at the end of the day, it is the legitimacy provided by our people and their empowerment as owners of their society and country that constitute the real bulwark of security.

Madam President, it is the challenge of how the military, as a leading security sector organization, is shaped to become a major instrument of national transformation at this critical juncture of our post-conflict history that I would like to engage for a few moments.

But allow me first, to congratulate our new military Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of Staff and wish them God's Speed.

Let me also express deep thanks and appreciation to our out-going Commanding Officer-in-Charge, General Suraj Abdurrahman. The mark of a good interim leader is his or her success in working himself or herself out of the job. General Abdurrahman has been able to do so. He is a very successful military officer. We thank him and his government profoundly.

I want to also say a word of thanks and congratulations to the Minister of Defense, the Honorable Brownie J. Samukai who has provided managerial leadership at the Ministry of Defense, having supervised the retirement of former soldiers—a process that was fraught with challenges, the building of a new Armed Forces of Liberia from scratch—and this included re-establishing the Coast Guard; handling several border-related challenges, building new military facilities and refurbishing old ones and providing professional leadership in rethinking the role of the Liberian military within the security sector.

To our regional and international partners whose support has contributed in no small measure to these achievements, we thank you on this day.

And you, Madam President, your leadership and guidance have made all of this possible. It was you as Chairperson of the Governance Reform Commission in 2004 who initiated the thinking of a new national security concept which has flowered into the institutions and architecture we have today. We thank you on this Armed Forces Day.

We all agree that Liberia's security sector should be organized with the objective of protecting and promoting human security. Human security in its full form is about the political, economic,

social and cultural rights and empowerment of all citizens and inhabitants within our country. Under normal conditions of governance, ensuring human security imposes significant challenges on the institutions of the state. These challenges are even greater in post-conflict situations such as ours.

How can we shape our military to become an instrument for the transformation of our country by contributing to forging reconciliation among ourselves and accelerating our development while continuing to perform its traditional role of defending our territorial integrity, assisting in maintaining domestic tranquility and managing disasters and humanitarian emergencies?

Why is this question important? Why do we want our military to become a driver of reconciliation and accelerated development? In answering this question let me first say that the institutions of our country or any country for that matter must be able to respond to new challenges if they are to be helpful. In Liberia, every historical period has required the review and revision of some institutions and the creation of new institutions to address new challenges.

With respect to the Armed Forces of Liberia, let us not forget that this is not the first time we are reshaping our Armed Forces to take on new challenges. Let us not forget that when we created the Armed Forces of Liberia (then the Liberian Frontier Force) in 1908, it was with the purpose of strengthening the authority of the Liberian state in areas where the state was weak or establishing state authority where non-existent. Along with what was called the Hinterland Administration, the Liberian Frontier Force was an instrument of state building.

As of the 1920s, the Liberian military increasingly became an instrument used to mobilize labor in the establishment and expansion of the plantation political economy. As Liberia became constrained to comply with international labor standards, the labor mobilization role of the military decreased.

In the third quarter of the 20th century, the service and semi-industrial sectors of our economy, especially the mining sector began to overtake the plantation sector. The role of the army in our political economy was changed from being an instrument for the mobilization of labor to an instrument occasionally used to prevent strikes and end industrial violence. At the same time, the military's role as an instrument of development began to emerge. This emerging role as an instrument of economic development stood in stark contrast to the role of labor recruiter and regulator. The types of soldiers required to play both roles were different and often a source of tension. Recruiting labor required what we called the "noko"; constructing bridges required the technician. Stopping strikes required the use of the baton and sometimes the firing of weapons; constructing bridges required the skills to operate a bull-dozer, among others.

This tension in the roles of the military reflected and was reinforced by the tension in state-society relations during much of the decade of the 1970s, as it had built up over preceding decades. There were pressures for greater inclusion, for wider participation, for deeper democratization and for narrowing the equity gaps, among others. As governance institutions broke down under these pressures, the military itself imploded. The tragedy of 14 years of intermittent violence and a civil war and the role of the military in the tragedy are too well known to be recounted here.

And so today, as we build post-war Liberia, our military's role should transcend the standard and conventional role. It must promote our unity, reflect the values we subscribe to, the vision we have focused and the national reconciliation we are forging. Our military must continue to be a servant of the people and a partner of other institutions of governance in accelerating the implementation of our national development programs. It must be so because our needs are acute and our resources are scarce. More importantly, because ultimately, security rests with the people themselves; so empowering them is, indeed, the best strategy for strengthening security.

This is why there has been so much discussion, planning, strategizing and piloting of security sector reform including military reform and our overall national agenda for transformation. This is why there should be no contradiction between what we call military expenditure and development expenditure. Just as we constructing the developmental state, we must construct the developmental military.

Our military today is the most educated we have ever had. It is the best ever capable of being shaped, trained and equipped to become a critical instrument of development. It can become a partner with other state institutions in advancing agriculture—especially to attain food security, engineering and construction, literacy work and health care, among other areas of development.

The idea of establishing a development-oriented military is not new. In fact our military has strong potential to ultimately become a developmental military. For example, a company of our current military has been engaged in civil works, working with UNMIL units as well as with the Ministry of Public Works and the Liberia Community Infrastructure Program. We need to adopt these activities as mainstream activities of our military along with the purely military functions it is also required to perform. We need to accelerate the military's engagement in these development activities.

There is nothing in this presentation that suggests that our military should not be prepared to play its conventional roles. A well trained and well equipped rapid deployment unit established within it can become an effective support, a back-up, for the police, when necessary, in maintaining domestic peace and tranquility. Our military can also develop the specialized capability to become an integral part of the ECOWAS Standby Force. Already, our military is proudly engaged in peacekeeping in Mali.

We need to root our security institutions more firmly within the Peace and Security Architecture of ECOWAS. This will enable us to develop the capacity for rapid response by drawing upon the collective response capacity within the Peace and Security Architecture of ECOWAS.

This brings us to the importance of training. Now that we have raised the bar for entry into the military, we must improve our training facilities and curricula. We must strive to upgrade our Military Academy, and until we are able to develop our own technical training institutions for the military, we must take full advantage of current institutions of learning and technical training, upgrade them and let our military personnel attend them in larger numbers. I am talking about our agricultural training institutions and other polytechnic institutes and our universities and

colleges. We can see here where military expenditure can dovetail with education expenditure to enhance capacity building and accelerate development.

With support from our West African brothers and sisters and from our international partners, we can endeavor to increase the number of military personnel trained abroad in technical areas in addition to the standard or conventional military training.

We applaud the fact that at least 103 members of the officer corps of the AFL hold BA degrees in various disciplines. Capacity building in the military must be viewed as capacity building for national development and taken just as seriously.

While we focus on the transformation of the armed forces, we must not forget that the armed forces are an important part of the larger security sector which includes the police, immigration bureau and other agencies which themselves are undergoing transformation or need to.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tempore, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, a development-oriented military or security sector by itself is not the solution to addressing our security challenges nor can it be the center piece of our development. We need to press forward a bit more vigorously with the other complementary programs of the development agenda. Let me mention decentralization and land reform as two vital areas among others which have enormous potential to strengthen security, forge reconciliation and accelerate development.

With the drawdown and ultimate withdrawal of UNMIL, the need for establishing effective participatory local government structures cannot be overemphasized. A priority at this time is the deconcentration of the provision of public services from Monrovia to county and district centers in a manner that ensures complementarity and proper sequencing, among other factors that will make for smooth and successful service delivery at the level of local governance. We must not underestimate the impact of the provision of public services at local levels of governance. The provision of public services at local levels of governance increases local people's sense of inclusion, sense of ownership of our system of governance, and therefore, their sense of greater responsibility for local security. Services such as the issuance of drivers' licenses and passports, and business registration should by now be available in every county seat in accordance with our deconcentration implementation framework.

Those who say that decentralization is an affront to presidential authority are mistaken—and are certainly not on the same page as our President. At the end of the day, one of the legacies of this government can be its success in advancing the transformation of our governance system from a highly centralized, sometimes personalized system—as it was, to a system in which the local people are not simply the recipients of largess from the state but co-producers with their government of public goods and services. Yes, this is an incremental process but it must be implemented in earnest as the President has often asserted.

Land issues are also critical to security. Ongoing issues in the land sector pose threats to peace and security that revolve around continuing insecurity of tenure for most Liberians and for foreign and national investors. In recent years, conflicts among concessions, the State and

citizens of rural communities with historical claims to land are creating major threats to security and to economic growth and development.

Several activities are in process to address our land-related issues and challenges. The new Land Rights Policy which was approved in May 2013 presents a major game-changer or paradigm shift in the thinking about land rights in our country. A draft Land Rights Law is to be forwarded to the Legislature from the President's office. When enacted, this law will provide the legal foundation for resolving many of the issues in the land sector. Also pending in the Legislature is the draft Criminal Conveyance of Land Law which when passed will enable criminal charges to be brought against those involved in fraudulent land transactions. The Ministry of Justice and the Land Commission are currently developing Alternative Disputes Resolution procedures which when formalized will provide a mechanism by which many land disputes can be resolved without going to court. The category of disputes which has not been fully addressed is the one involving concessions. It is critical that we turn to addressing concessions-related land challenges without delay.

I could also mention the challenges of Liberian economic empowerment, especially the employment situation and the weakness of Liberian presence in the small and medium enterprises sector among the economic governance challenges that have the potential of posing threats to our security; and therefore, the need to align our monetary, fiscal, trade and investment policies and effectively coordinate their implementation to enhance Liberian economic empowerment. Time, unfortunately will not permit me to explore this and other issues as they relate to our security.

Some of the other issues are to be addressed in the constitution review process which is now underway and which we must support, the Palava Hut reconciliation discussions, the national history project, the national symbols review project and the perennial effort to improve the integrity of governance, including the passage of the Code of Conduct. All of which are designed to strengthen our security by forging reconciliation, strengthening our sense of a common identity, promoting justice, equity and transparency, and making our system of governance more participatory and inclusive.

And so Madam President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tempore, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, let me close by again recognizing the invaluable services that are being rendered by our women and men in arms. Let me say to you Madam President, please continue to soldier on as we confront our security and development challenges.

**LONG LIVE THE ARMED FORCES OF LIBERIA
LONG LIVE THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA
THANK YOU AND GOD BLESS!**