

Remarks By:

**The Standard Bearer
Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at Unity Party (UP) National Convention**

**Gbarnga, Bong County
July 7, 2016**

Mr. Vice President
Mr. Chairman and Members of the National Executive Committee
Visiting Guests from the ANC-South Africa
Invited Political Parties
Fellow Partisans
Civil Society Organizations
Members of the Press
Ladies and gentlemen

We are present here today, looking forward to tomorrow's event that will go down in the annals of history as we witness the passing of the torch.

The history and formation of Unity Party is rich. Old Unity and New Unity have all combined to give us a good history, a history of hills and valleys, failures and successes, sorrows and joys.

Where we were yesterday, when Gabriel Kpolleh formed the ***Liberia Unification Party (UP)***; Jackson Doe, the ***Liberia Action Party (LAP)*** and Jabaru Carlon, Joseph Koffa and Edward B Kesselly, the ***Unity Party (UP)***. It was over three decades ago and it seems like just yester years.

In 1997, as the first post war elections were held to herald peace, Unity Party and Liberia Unification Party combined effort along with other-broadminded nationalists who to came together to make us runners up in the elections of 1997.

Fellow partisans, we came close to the finish lines in spite of the odds of war because of courage and conviction of our leaders and the people who were united behind a cause. We did not have much money but what we boasted of then and now was the commitment to see democracy at the ballot box. We were friends and believed and trusted each other.

Today many of those leaders are here while some have taken the great leap into eternity and have joined the saints in heaven who continue to watch over Liberia in its stride to embrace democracy and bring peace to its people.

The elections of 1997, some scholars might say represented a false ray of hope amidst the social frustration in the period of interregnum between war and peace. But platform of courage, that audacity of hope, (to use President Obama's phrase) ushered in the famous and remarkable historic moment that will be detailed in history long after today. One thing is

certain that place in history in the 2005 elections belongs to Unity Party as we broke the glass ceiling and ushered in Liberia's and Africa's first elected woman president.

This journey, if I were to ask Nelson Mandela, he would say it's a long walk to freedom for Unity Party it was the democratic freedom we needed to search for peace and work to rebuild our country. The 2005 elections gave hope to the Liberian people and brought out women, first time voters, the young and the old. We changed despair into hope.

The first term of our government was not without its challenges. If we look back at where we came from, a shattered economy, broken and severely devastated infrastructure, bad roads low and unpaid salaries for government employees, very low wages for the few in the private sector; dysfunctional school systems at various levels, lack of basic services and on and on from where we were in 2005, we could go down the rough edges of memories. Precisely because we as a Party a people and a government have all worked to change it. Today, it is easy to forget that sad past, but we know as a party and a people we have persevered and we have overcome. We restored Liberia's credit worthiness and reputation today and we can be very proud once again to be called Liberians. At the international level, we transfigured a pariah nation into a place that the young could see a future in which the pen and the voice replaced the guns.

We are of the firm conviction that it was the rugged path which we chiseled smoothly that saw us through from the first term to our reelection in the second term. In doing so, we witness the coming together of all those whose path the rivers of history joined at various tributaries. The confluence took place in Ganta in 2010 when the three legs of our political future were once again firmly united into what is today the new Unity Party. The proud red roaster of LAP, the firmly clasped hand shake of LUP merged into the earth green white and brown colors of peoples of various persuasion blended together to lift up Liberia. We dared to thread on that path of our very challenging past into a future we did not fully anticipate yet we walked proudly together as the unity party.

At all levels party, government and people to people we have been challenged. It has been rough. We have persevered through tough time and we have overcome. There were times when it seemed like hell was breaking loose and the gutter could not hold, but the great African America poet of sainted Memory would say. And still we rise.

We won our second term. We have come out stronger. Thus over the last decade or nearly a dozen straight years we can proudly say with God above, we have done much in a short time, given from where we came. It is always with a brush of history and philosophy that we are reminded that those who are not guided by their history, do not know their past will see no path to the future for they only live for today. I urge us all to be proud of our collective efforts and the commonality of our achievements. We can enumerate them by one and erect them as building blocks to claim the future around and secure the victory we must work to achieve.

We have expanded the democratic space, we have worked with all Liberians we have been able to show tolerance as a very rare gem to be maintained and kept in the public glare. Peace, freedom, integrity democratic values are intangibles we hold not and can and must carry on.

We have a government that shows respect for the rule of law, and over the years the judiciary and the entire justice system is active and everywhere to give confidence to the people.

We need to look at our track record, look at our ability to mobilize and organize to look at our history of working with a broad spectrum of people.

Go tell it to the mountains, over hills and everywhere that we have a record as a nation and a people that unity party put it together, brought so many other people from other parties to make it happen. This record is a record you can be proud of, you can work on with so many others to bring so many people together and around it to win elections and once again win and warm the hearts and minds of the Liberian people yet again around the symbols and ideals of Unity.

As we embark on yet another historic journey in our democratic development process, let me thank all hands for being on deck since our long walk started in 2003 following the forces that united in the 1997.

We are reminded that the “Ellen-Joe Team” resolved to be responsive and responsible, determined in collective commitment to an all-encompassing aspiration for the betterment of our country and people. We resolved that with Joe Boakai as our running-mate – victory was indeed assured as manifested in 2005 and 2011 respectively.

I wish to pay homage to you, Mr. Vice President, for your loyalty and unqualified support throughout this herculean journey to contribute to the

growth and development of the Party and our nation. It is a result of that loyalty that we have pledged our support to your candidacy to lead our party in the 2017 polls.

Fellow partisans, the Unity Party, like any human institution cannot be divorced of the politics of disagreements in order to finally agree for the greater good. We call this creative tension that does not degenerate into acrimony or bitter exchanges.

But what must always remain clear is our collective commitment to put the interest of the Party above all other considerations. If in our actions or inactions – we took certain decisions that might have affected some of our partisans in our line of national duty – we say for the greater good – let us recommit to work together and unite in a strong and unwavering support to Vice President Joseph Nyuma Boakai.

The battle for 2017 is likely to be tumultuous! We cannot fold our hands, let alone take anything for granted. We must reach across the political aisles to break new grounds, cover more territory, forge new alliances, make new acquaintances, re-calibrate previous strategies and align and amalgamate our forces if victory must be ours.

Let us collectively stand behind our chosen leader Joe Boakai to take us beyond where our gains thus far have brought us amid this turbulent milestone. Let us work to ensure that the Party becomes the bridge of continuity, sustainability, progress and development for our country and its people.

Let us be proud of the achievements of our Party and Nation. Let us boast of the progress for that will be the vehicle to take us to victory in 2017.

May God continue to give us the strength and courage to put Liberia first.

Thank you.