

**Speech by H.E. Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Liberia
on the 57th Armed Forces Day
February 11, 2014
(As Delivered)**

Special Guests;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;
Fellow Liberians:

Today marks Liberia's 57th Armed Forces Day, observed in recognition of the immense sacrifices and dedication of the gallant men and women in the Armed Forces of Liberia. On this Day, we take time to celebrate, appreciate and honor all of those who have served this nation with distinction and humility.

Let me welcome, and recognize, Major General Gregory J. Vadnais, Adjutant General, Michigan National Guard; Brigadier General Charles Charioti, Acting Director for Plans and Strategy, along with other officers of the U.S. Africa Command, Operation Onward Liberty, and our ECOWAS partners. Thank you for joining us today.

Sadly, it was a year ago today when a tragic plane accident resulted in the death of Lieutenant General Souleymane Diallo, Chief of Defense Staff of the Guinean Military, and other high-ranking officers who were on their way to join us in celebrating this Day. Their death was a blow to the region, and their passing saddened us. We again offer our condolences to their loved ones and the people of Guinea.

Once again, please join me in observing a moment of silence in their memory. It is our prayers that their souls may forever rest in peace. Thank you!

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

On this Day, as in previous years, we recognize contributions of outstanding individuals for their invaluable service to our nation. As Commander-in-Chief, I am pleased to award them with the Armed Forces of Liberia's Distinguished Service Order Award.

Let me congratulate those we have so honored: Dr. Amos C. Sawyer, Chairman of the Governance Commission; Retired Major General Jehu J. Brandy, of the Armed Forces of Liberia; Colonel Abdulsalam Abubakar, of the Nigerian Armed Forces; Lieutenant Colonel Adams G. Audu, of the Ghanaian Armed Forces; Colonel Daniel M. Thompson, of the United States Military; and Lieutenant Colonel Henry Joynson, of the United Kingdom Military, for their immeasurable services rendered the AFL. In so doing, they brought honor and credit to their respective countries.

Let me thank you, Dr. Sawyer, for your excellent speech. Your long-standing commitment to public service stems from your love of country and your vast knowledge and understanding of Liberia's socio-political and economic realities. We take due note of the analysis and recommendations you have made in respect of not only improving and enhancing our military service but also human security. Thank you, Amos.

Every Armed Forces Day is celebrated under a theme that captures the status, spirit and vision of the men and women in our Armed Forces and, at the same time reminds us of our role as citizens. This year's theme, "*Enhancing the Capabilities of the AFL to Meet Contemporary Challenges*," underscores the need for our Armed Forces to be robustly trained, disciplined and equipped to carry on their mission. I have faith and confidence in your ability to carry on this mission. I have faith, as evidenced by your successful execution of the mission to our southeastern and northeastern borders during Operation Restore Hope I, II, and III. Today we look to the future with optimism that our restructured military will continue their professional development within the context of our overall defense strategy.

True to my commitment last year that a Liberian would take command of the Armed Forces, with the advice and consent of the Liberian Senate, we have today just appointed Brigadier General Daniel Dee Ziankhan as the new Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of Liberia. Brigadier General Ziankhan is an outstanding Officer with quality leadership potential. He is an Airborne Qualified Officer and a recent graduate of the United States Army Command and General Staff College, with a Master's Degree in Military Science and Strategy. He replaces Major General Suraj A. Abdurrahman who served diligently as the Command Officer-in-Charge during the past seven years.

General Abdurrahman's leadership and commitment to the transformation of our Armed Forces were truly exemplary. He is a brilliant Officer with impeccable credentials and track record of excellence. I want to, once again, personally thank you, General Abdurrahman, for all that you have done for the Armed Forces of Liberia and our country. I ask Madam Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Nigeria accredited to Liberia, to kindly convey our sincere gratitude to the people of Nigeria for their innumerable contributions to the sustenance of peace and security in Liberia.

Let us remember the late Major General Lucas Yusuf, also of Nigeria, who started the journey with us. General Yusuf's support to our vision of building a professional military was immense. May his soul rest in peace!

I also have inducted into office, with the advice and consent of the Liberian Senate, Colonel Eric Wamu Dennis as the new Deputy Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. Colonel Dennis, we thank you as you replace Colonel Daniel Moore. We look to you to carry out the functions. Colonel Dennis is a graduate of the Ghana Army Command and Staff College, and he holds two Master's Degrees. Colonel Dennis brings to the job a credible wealth of experience.

We also announce the appointment of Colonel Prince C. Johnson, III, as the new Brigade Commander of the 23rd Infantry Brigade of the Armed Forces of Liberia. Colonel Johnson, a

recent graduate of the United States Army Command and Staff College, is also an outstanding Officer, disciplined and well trained.

Fellow Liberians:

Today we have made a transition in the Armed Forces of Liberia based on a very credible vetting process and on the Order of Merit. We have been able to appoint a cadre of well-trained, experienced, and disciplined Liberian Officers as the new dedicated leaders of our Armed Forces. I have full confidence that the training imparted into them will go a long way in guiding them in the discharge of their new responsibilities.

I challenge all of you to maintain the regimentation and discipline of a professional military. Your leadership must exhibit commitment to duties and obedience to constituted authority. You must demonstrate that you are ready, willing and capable to lead. You must exhibit good leadership qualities and lead by example. You cannot afford to fail yourselves, your compatriots, your mentors. Much has been sacrificed and invested in bringing you this far; I challenge you to perform your duty as leaders of our new military.

We extend our thanks and appreciation to our partners whose support for the rebuilding of our Armed Forces has made it what it is today. Our major partners are: the United States, Nigeria, Ghana, the People's Republic of China, the United Kingdom, Rwanda, Benin, and Sierra Leone. We also thank UNMIL for their support to the AFL.

The security challenges we face, as a nation, require a clear assessment of the strategic environment and the resources necessary to construct a durable, flexible, and dynamic strategy that emphasizes human security. I have today approved the National Defense Strategy, which focuses on our national defense imperatives and regional peace and security, and have asked the Minister of National Defense to ensure that copies of this Strategy are provided to the leadership of both Houses of the National Legislature, and made available for public scrutiny.

We also look forward to a National Military Strategy that can and will be supported with improvements in our economic situation. I will consult with the leadership of the Legislature to review positively the annual budgetary appropriations to the Armed Forces of Liberia, to prepare them for their expanding missions and tasks.

The reconstruction and rehabilitation of infrastructures remain key challenges to our government. It is therefore pleasing to note that the AFL Engineering Company is demonstrating its preparedness to support this endeavor of national reconstruction. Recently, I dedicated the Todee Military Barracks, which were credibly rehabilitated by the Engineering Company. This Todee rehabilitation and reconstruction project will enable the Armed Forces to conduct a wide array of military training, as well as provide Headquarters for the Armed Forces Training Command and other units of the Armed Forces of Liberia. It will lead to the economic vitality of Todee District when this process is completed.

Fellow Liberians:

We thank the United States Government for their contribution and continuous support and generosity, especially the commitment of US\$3.5 million worth of equipment to the AFL Engineering Company.

While we wait for that commitment to turn to reality, we applaud the People's Republic of China for their tangible donation of US\$4 million worth of much needed engineering equipment, spare parts, and training to the AFL. I am told that after the program, one will be able to see the set of equipment that is already on the ground. The Minister of National Defense informs me that he has them ready. The Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Liberia, I duly accepted his Letters of Credence yesterday to enable him personally make this donation.

The donations and anticipated training by the Governments of the United States and the People's Republic of China will further strengthen the capability and capacity of the Engineering Company to support our reconstruction efforts. We expect the Engineering Company to collaborate with the Ministry of Public Works on strategic intervention on our roads and infrastructure.

The emerging threat of piracy and illegal and unregulated fishing along our coast, and the threat it poses to Liberia's future offshore hydrocarbon exploration, requires specialized training and equipment to enable our Coast Guard to protect our maritime domain.

Once again, the United States Government has generously provided two additional boats with spare parts and training for our Coast Guard, which were commissioned yesterday. This will enhance their capacity to extend their patrol activities. Thank you, Ambassador Malac, for your leadership. We ask that you kindly convey to your Government and people our heartfelt appreciation for the continuous support and assistance to the Armed Forces of Liberia.

Terrorism and extremism remain a global concern. We see these threats within a geostrategic context in which Liberia and its bilateral partners must collaborate in ways that provide security and further our mutual interests. The nexus between the ability of the AFL and the support it may obtain will help develop capabilities and operational readiness to combat the spread of terrorism, extremism, narco-trafficking, and transnational crimes. Developing such capabilities will clearly create a strategic synergy of partnership that may be available in times of need. The support of our partners in positioning the AFL to deal with these strategic challenges is required.

The recent experience in Mali, where international peacekeeping operations averted a near state collapse and threat to regional peace and security, makes it necessary to build the capability of the AFL to participate in future peace support operations.

We seek an enduring relationship with our bilateral partners towards an effective and efficient defense sector reform and the building of the AFL as a "Force for Good". In that connection, we also thank the United States for enabling the participation of our troops in the MINUSMA peacekeeping operations through pre-deployment training and logistical support. We count on the support of the U.S. and other bilateral partners in providing the required logistical support as

we anticipate increasing our troop's contribution to MINUSMA to a Company size. Our intention to do so has been conveyed to UN Headquarters in New York, and we look forward to a favorable response.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Last year we celebrated a decade of uninterrupted peace in Liberia. The peace dividends that we've enjoyed could not have come without the support of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). We express our nation's gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Madam Karin Landgren, and the Force Commander, Major General Leonard Ngondi, for their leadership in maintaining the peace and security of our country, and for implementing a responsible transition in collaboration with the Government.

The AFL's success is shared by their families, and we express our appreciation to the wives, husbands and families of AFL personnel for their constant support to our men and women in uniform. We recognize your significant contribution and efforts in stabilizing the home front while your loved ones contribute to the peace and stability in our country. You – the wives, the husbands, the families – are the pillars of our military. Your continual support has helped boost the morale of our soldiers as they serve their nation and people.

Some of our soldiers pay the ultimate sacrifice for love of country, and we extend our deepest sympathies to the families of service members who lost their lives while serving our country. We value their service to our nation.

We also thank the Minister of National Defense, Brownie J. Samukai, Jr., and the entire staff of the Ministry of National Defense for their leadership in promoting the professional Armed Forces of Liberia which we have today.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Bravo! to the gallant men and women of our Armed Forces for your discipline, dedication and commitment to duty. We are proud of you. May your service to the nation be remembered as you protect our territorial integrity, as you carry our Flag. As Commander-in-Chief, I call upon you to remain a "Force for Good", and I challenge you to "Dare to Defend" our democracy.

Happy Armed Forces Day!