

Special Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
At Swearing-in Ceremony of Peace Corps Volunteers  
C. Cecil Dennis Auditorium  
11 a.m., Friday, 27 August 2010

A year ago, on August 25<sup>th</sup> to be exact, I had the pleasing duty to commission a second group of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers – dedicated and committed Americans who, having served in Liberia previously, were eager, following years of our civil conflict, to return to do their part to “Lift Liberia” through education, including teacher training.

Until today, the Volunteers that have come to Liberia since 2008 have stayed less than a year, leaving us long before we wanted them to. They, nevertheless, provided much-needed assistance, engaging in quick-impact humanitarian projects when our nation, and our educational system, were at the crisis stage, and required all the help that we could get, however short. The Volunteers’ months of committed service constituted a precious gift to the Liberian people. We thank all of those who have come, and gone, for their invaluable contributions – many of them in this room today, whom we just applauded.

What makes today’s swearing-in ceremony so satisfying, is that you, the new Corps of Volunteers, all 14 of you who have taken the Oath of Office, will be with us for a full two years – not just a few months – and that you have agreed to be deployed in our schools throughout the country; in our rural areas, where you will bring your expertise in Math, Science, English – all those areas so desperately needed.

The lack of qualified teachers in our secondary schools resulted in the abysmal showing and mass failures of our students in the West

African Examination Council (WAEC) examinations. We are all disturbed by that, and know that we have to do everything we can to correct this. Your arrival is most opportune and appreciated.

With the new school year starting on September 6th, you will be assigned to schools where you will instruct in your respective areas of expertise. With you in our classrooms, together with the volunteer teachers that have come from Nigeria to help us as well, I am confident that next year's WAEC exam results will show marked improvements, and we are challenging our Ministers and officials in the Ministry of Education to ensure that they work with you and give you all the support that's needed to achieve these results.

I welcome you most heartily. I thank you for the sacrifice that you will be making as you move out to carry out this assignment. You've left your comfortable homes in America, and we recognize that. There will be times when the lights will go out and the pipes won't have water and we will recognize how much of a sacrifice you'll be making as you undertake what, in effect, can also be called a humanitarian assignment.

I thank the Government of the United States; I thank the Peace Corps Director who has been so instrumental in helping us to achieve this, to move this program from short-term to long-term. We thank you.

It wasn't very long ago when we made this request, two years ago, for the return of the Peace Corps. We recognized that this, to us, sent one of the most important signals of Liberia having returned to the path of peace, the path of stability, the path of the pursuit of development. We are so thankful that this has happened so quickly and that today we can proudly say that Liberia now has its Peace Corps Volunteers and can say to the world, "If they can come, so can you."

Education is the cornerstone of our nation; when the people are educated, the nation prospers. Thus, if Liberia is to progress, that process must start in the classroom! Which is why your support and presence here are so essential.

Let me thank the many families that are present here that are playing host to our Peace Corps Volunteers. You have made space in your homes for them; you have talked to them; you have interacted with them; you have shared with them in the same way that they made the special place in their hearts for the Liberian people.

We are elated! We just feel so energized that the Peace Corps is back, and that things will be like they used to be. This signals the very strong bond of friendship and enduring partnership which the American people have for the Liberian people.

Thank you all for the service, and thank you for being here.