

**Special Remarks by H. E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
at Swearing-in Ceremony of U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers  
C. Cecil Dennis, Jr. Auditorium  
Monday, August 12, 2013**

We're all excited every time we have to participate in a swearing-in ceremony of Peace Corps Volunteers. That's because we are keenly aware of the big quality difference you Volunteers make in our nation's education sector. With Volunteers now being assigned to all of our 15 counties, our excitement knows no bounds!

On behalf of all Liberians, I warmly welcome you. I thank you for the sacrifices you are making as you fulfill the two-year teaching assignment and as you continue to serve our country. As mentioned by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, you leave the comfort of home, your family, your loved ones, your associates, to come to this tiny corner of the world, to serve. We highly appreciate your humanitarianism.

Today's swearing-in of 40 more Peace Corps Volunteers is significant and timely, because of the urgent need for qualified instructional staff in our classrooms. School enrolment is the highest it has been in the past decade; but the quality of education has not kept pace. Inadequately trained teachers, the lack of appropriate educational materials and facilities - such as laboratories, libraries - have all contributed to falling short of the quality that we seek.

However, since the Peace Corps resumed its activities in October 2008, the numbers have been steadily improving, as evidenced by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) results. The Ministry of Education has reported that of the 26,736 candidates that sat the 2013 junior and senior high school WAEC tests, 18,523 or 69.3 percent passed - not enough, but a big improvement. The same pertains in 2012, when just under 72 percent also were successful. This is directly attributable to improvement in our own teachers' capacity and the deployment of trained Mathematics, Science and English teachers - where we've been solely lacking. You, Volunteers, have reduced this gap for us in all major public high schools.

We expect to see our students fare even better starting this academic year because, for the first time since the Peace Corps Program was suspended in 1990, as I mentioned before, because of the civil conflict, there will be Volunteers living and working in each of our 15 counties. This final expansion, to the southeastern counties of Grand Kru, Maryland, River Cess, River Gee and Sinoe, has been a major focus of Country Director [Vince] Groh and his team over the past two years.

The impact of the presence of 80 Peace Corps Volunteers serving at 40 public high schools and 5 universities and teacher training institutes will be immeasurable. Thanks to the Peace Corps, our teachers are becoming better trained, at Cuttington University, the University of Liberia, Tubman University [I think I see Elizabeth Davis there; there she is, from Tubman University, coming to give a personal handshake to her incoming teachers], Kakata and Zorzor Rural Teacher Training Institutes. Thanks, also, to you, our students who are performing better in the areas of Science, Math and English.

In addition to teaching, you Volunteers are active in improving school management, initiating new training procedures to interested counterparts, facilitating library creation, encouraging

student and parent organizations, and promoting career opportunities, among other activities. We commend you for these many initiatives; in effect, for going the extra mile!

In the 14 months since I visited the Peace Corps Headquarters in Washington, D.C., and proposed another way in which the Program could help Liberia's educational system, great things have happened. I am delighted, as mentioned by Country Director Groh, that beginning next month, under the Peace Corps Program, in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and UNICEF, we will have 120 newly trained National Volunteers who will work alongside Peace Corps Volunteers in our public high schools for a year to develop their skills, engage in volunteer service, as you Peace Corps Volunteers are doing, on behalf of the Liberian people. [Any of our National Volunteers here?] To our National Volunteers wherever you are, Bravo!

Time marches on, and I understand that some of you who have been directing the Liberia program will be moving on, having successfully completed your tour of duty. The memories of your service will remain with us as you look forward to your return in other professional capacities or for rest and relaxation as a friend of Liberia.

Thank you, Director Groh, for being so passionate about Liberia, and for always being there to support our requests. You didn't say it, but I will say it: As you take up your new position, as Chief of Operations for the African Region, responsible for all 25 Peace Corps countries in sub-Saharan Africa, we know that this comes from the quality of your service and that Liberia has helped you a little bit along the way, but we also know that Liberia will retain a special place in your heart. After all, you've traveled across our country for the past 2½ years – learning more about our country than many Liberians themselves – you became one of us, you were given Liberian names, wherever you went, with your favorites being “Sumo” in Kpelle, “Dorbolah” in Kru, and “Narmu” in Grebo. On behalf of the Liberian people, we express heartfelt thanks to you and our appreciation for a job well done.

We thank all other members of the Peace Corps Country Office who have departed, and welcome the new arrivals, including your successor, Mr. Brewer, and look forward to working with him and his team.

Thanks to Ambassador Malac, and all of the U.S. Embassy Staff; you have been real champions in promoting this program. Our own Ministers of Education, Youth and Sports, and Foreign Affairs have also played their part in the success of this program.

Our special thanks to the 38 host families [if they are here, I'll ask them to stand so we can applaud them] because you opened your homes, and your hearts, to our friends from America. This is the essence of what the Peace Corps Volunteer stands for – giving back to society.

To you, the Peace Corps Volunteers, who've come here from all over the United States of America, we say welcome to your home for the next two years. Over eight weeks of technical training, you've learned about our history, our culture, our tradition, and our food. As the Director said, you can light a coal pot in one minute; you've learned that by living with our host families. We know that you are now familiar with our cuisine. I also understand that you've learned to wash clothes the old-fashioned way, using a washboard. Some of you have already adopted your Liberian name!

Be assured that as the dry season approaches, I will be in the counties. We shall light those coal pots together and be able to share the cuisines that you've learned so well to manage. We want you to know that your service is invaluable and a precious gift to the Liberian people. We look forward to learning from you, helping you also to improve your capacities, to broaden your horizon and your interaction with us. We know we will build lasting friendships so that when your tenure comes to an end, you, too, will be able to consider Liberia your home to which you can return. Thank you for giving this wonderful service.

Now, as I close, I'll like to do it for everyone but you're too many, but I'll ask Mr. Groh, to come and give me a Liberian handshake. That's the Liberian way.

Thank you.