

Special Statement By

**Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia**

At The Induction of Officers of the

Press Union of Liberia (PUL)

Monrovia City Hall

Thursday, December 29, 2016

Mr. Keynote Speaker
Officials of Government
Mr. President and the Newly Inducted Team
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I thank all of you, Members of the Press Union of Liberia for having organized free, fair and transparent elections thereby continuing the example of a process by which choice is successfully exercised in a competitive environment.

As the Watchdog of Society, the Press, you will agree has a special responsibility to ensure that society is duly informed on activities in both the private and public sector, the latter subjected to more rigorous examination as keeper of the public purse.

At the same time, the Press has a sacred responsibility to cross-check and publish the facts, to tell the truth, bearing in mind that a false accusation, a politically motivate story can cause lasting damage, even if subsequently corrected, to one who is innocent. Above all, there is a responsibility to protect the greater good.

As we move into the New Year, your role will be even more critical as our nation faces its greatest test, a peaceful democratic transition.

Mr. PUL President, you and your team have set upon yourselves a new role that will challenge you to match words with deed, that will call upon you to be the new leaders of the umbrella group of professional journalists in our country, that will judge if the quality of your leadership

promotes shared values of fairness, equity, patriotism and ethical standards.

The Government wishes to achieve an even greater partnership with the Media. Our commitment to uphold the rights of journalists as manifested by the signing of the Table Mountain Declaration was not a political ploy. Although there have been unintended infringement from time to time in which rights may have been violated, we stand on the record of a free press. Although we find ourselves facing obligations for billings in respect of press coverage, we stand on the record of working with you to settle those obligations.

It has been long in coming, with the responsibility left elsewhere but I assure you today in keeping with the commitment made when we signed the Table Mountain Declaration that a draft Bill of Repeal of those laws which criminalize speech and related offenses (Sedition, Libel Per Se, Criminal Malevolence, Slander, etc.) is being finalized by the Administration for submission to the National Legislature as a part of our final proposed Legislative Agenda.

As we work to repeal these libelous laws, it is important to note that the Table Mountain Declaration imposes mutual responsibilities on both the government and the media. Therefore as the government does its part, it is incumbent upon the media to do its share by reporting ethically and responsibly.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this occasion with you. As you exercise the Power of the Pen, please remember that Liberia Comes First, that what you do and what you say will define the outcome and the destiny of our country in the coming historic year.