

**Remarks by Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
On the Occasion of the 160th Independence Anniversary
of the Republic of Liberia
Held in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County,
26th July 2007**

Mr. Vice President & Mrs. Boakai,
Mr. Speaker,
Honorable Members of the House of Representatives,
Mr. Acting President Pro-Tempore and Members of the Senate,
Mr. Chief Justice, Associate Justices and Members of the Judiciary,
Mr. National Orator,
Special Guests,
Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, SE Issifou Nidour,
Minister of Defense and Representative of the President of Benin,
Ministers, Officials of Government,
Chiefs, Traditional Leaders,
Former President and Mrs. Blah & Former Speaker & Government Officials,
Doyen, Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
The SRSG, United Nations Family,
Bishops, Prelates, Members of the Clergy,
Representatives,
Development Partners,
Superintendent, Local Government Officials,
Political Leaders, Business Leaders, NGO Leaders, Media, Marketers, Students:

We are pleased to restart the precedence of moving the festivities of our Nation's Independence out of Monrovia and we are equally pleased that we selected Grand Bassa County for the 160th Anniversary.

The history of Grand Bassa County is a history that is synonymous with the history of the founding of Liberia. In 1863, barely 14 years following the arrival on Bushrod Island of the Pioneers, the vessel Ninus arrived bearing 126 immigrants who were destined for settlement in their new home called Bassa Cove. Your first Governor, Thomas Buchanan, in whose honor this capital city is named, established the settlement at the mouth of the St. John's River.

More significantly, the President of the Constitution Convention (held at the Providence Baptist Church) John Day, became our country's first Chief Justice. In education, Grand Bassa has distinguished itself as a national leader, producing prominent and erudite lawyers and public servants. Your chiefs and traditional leaders are renowned for their influence and leadership in politics. Grand Bassa is known and recognized for its astuteness. We are therefore to recognize and give prominence to Grand Bassa in this precedence.

My Fellow Liberians, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, today we celebrate 160 years of our country's existence as an independent nation. In 40 short years we will celebrate the Bicentennial, the 200th birthday of Liberia.

At last year's Independence Day Celebrations I asked "What nation do we want to be when our 200th anniversary comes?" What Liberia do we want and what can we do to build the Liberia we wish for ourselves as a people?

Our answer as a Government remains the same - to continue on the path of nation renewal. Our answer is to continue the process of reconciling and healing our nation – to continue to build, nurture and strengthen democracy in our land.

This is why we have an inclusive cabinet. That is why we have an unrestrained free press. This is why we respect the independence and processes of the Judiciary and the Legislature. That is why in political battles we win the big ones from those who claim it and concede the small ones when they win it.

Our answer is to ensure that our people, all of our people, benefit from the fruits of our economic recovery.

That is why we have renegotiated the Mittal Steel Concession Agreement whose operations formally opened yesterday to bring benefits to the people of Grand Bassa, Nimba and Bong Counties and to Liberia as a whole.

That is why we have encouraged and expect Buchanan Renewal Energies to start operations of a rubber chip export in Grand Bassa and Margibi Counties at the end of August. That is why we expect Iron Ore Mining Operations in Bong, Bomi and Gbarpolu Counties to resume before year end and exploration to transform to operations in River Gee, Sinoe and Cape Mount shortly thereafter. That is why we will see the resumption of forestry operations in Grand Gedeh, Rivercess, Nimba, Maryland and Gbarpolu during the coming dry season. That is why long inactive Rubber and Oil Palm Concessions in Grand Bassa, Sinoe, Maryland, Nimba, Bomi and Montserrado will be resuscitated through renegotiated or new concession agreements before year end. That is why we are exploring the establishment of a Free Zone connected to the Buchanan Port and the reestablishment of the Buchanan Flour Mill. That is why after 14 years we have some lights in our capital city and water flowing in hundreds of houses. Also, that is why Administrative Buildings in five counties will be rehabilitated by USAID before year end and the one in Buchanan is already started. That is why the roads from Ganta to Sanniquellie, from Saclepea to Tappita and from Zorzor to Voinjama and to Foya are today all weather and the same will be done during the dry season for roads throughout the country including the repavement of the Monrovia–RIA-Buchanan road. That is why the Rubber Industry throughout the counties will be supported in the plans for replanting and expansion, consistent with the established policy of this Government on that issue. That is why we are adopting economic policies, tackling our debt problem to facilitate access to non- concessional flows, to attract private capital and investment, to settling the huge arrears left by at least four successive governments, to continue the campaign against the impunity of corruption, and restore our nation’s creditworthiness, credibility and reputation.

Our answer to where we want Liberia 40 years from now is to make education available to all people and make education relevant to our development agenda.

That is why we are enforcing Free Primary Education which has resulted in a 40 percent increase in enrollment. That is why we are renovating schools throughout the country. That is why plans are in place to renovate the University of Liberia, the Kakata, Zorzor and Webbo Rural Teachers Training Institutes and similar plans for Voinjama Multilateral which is now ongoing with others

to follow. That is why Private Academic Institutions and individuals support (LET) Liberia Education Trust/scholarship.

Our answer to where we want to be is to improve our healthcare delivery system to decrease infant mortality rate, and make our nation healthy again.

That is why we rejuvenated the JFK Hospital which is now the city's No.1 health facility and supported the Phebe Hospital as a rural health referral center are renovating with support from the Swiss Development Corporation, the Telewoyan Hospital in Voinjama to be followed by a similar hospital in Tappita. This is why we have plans to renovate and build clinics in all counties and to do all we can to take responsibility for those health facilities managed by departing INGOs.

Our answer to where we want to be is to keep the peace and strengthen the instruments of security and stability. That is why we have secured the promise of UNMIL to be here until our security forces can assume the responsibility for our security. That is why we are building a new professional army and security forces with support from the United States, Nigeria, Ghana and China. That is why we handle with caution those against whom there is evidence of subversion, mindful that they are perceived to be innocent until proven guilty, ensuring their safety and dignity and their prompt trial in keeping with the Rule of Law. That is why we regret any attempt by anyone to introduce ethnicity or collective guilt in a matter related strictly to those accused and charged.

Strategic Partnership represented in this room;

As I close, my question and challenge to you, our citizens, is what is your answer to the question as to where our nation should be 40 years from now. Are you sitting down disgruntled, searching for the basis to criticize, mourning your political loss or are you part of this reconstruction, national renewal, and emerging renaissance? Are you reliving the past, and its ugliness? Are your failures consuming you or are you embracing the bountiful opportunities of the present? Do you see the glass half empty or half full?

I hope as we celebrate this 160th Anniversary of Independence, each of us will find the answer to this question: If I may paraphrase the great world leader, John F. Kennedy, Jr., “ALL THIS WILL NOT BE FINISHED IN THE FIRST ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY DAYS NOR WILL IT BE FINISHED IN THE FIRST ONE THOUSAND AND FIFTY DAYS NOR PERHAPS IN THE LIFE OF THIS ADMINISTRATION, NOR EVEN PERHAPS IN OUR LIFETIME ON THIS PLANET. BUT LET US BEGIN.

Indeed we have begun. The majority of our citizens are part of the process that is on. They are “reclaiming the future”, a future of hope and promise. They know that the darkest hour is just before dawn.

Apo Glaypor zuo!