

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**  
**At Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony**  
**Commemorating Delta Air Lines' Inaugural Flight**  
**Between Monrovia and Atlanta, Georgia, USA**  
**Roberts International Airport, Sunday, September 5, 2010**

Mr. Speaker;

Mr. Chief Justice;

Ministers and Officials of Government;

Ms. Mensa-Bonsu of UNMIL;

Mr. Cantarutti;

Mr. Albrecht;

Mr. Bob Johnson;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Citizens;

Special Guests;

Those in Transit;

Fellow Liberians:

Today, Delta Air Lines' inaugural direct flight from Monrovia to the United States opens the skies over Liberia for business, for commerce for tourism, for travel.

We have scores of people to acknowledge for getting to this point, for reaching this milestone. It was their diligence, determination, perseverance and focus which made this event possible.

First and foremost, we thank the Liberian people for their patience, and for their support and understanding as we introduced new procedures and airport

security became more complex. Special thanks also go to the members of our National Legislature, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the Liberia Civil Aviation Authority, and the management and staff of Roberts International Airport (RIA). To all of you we say: This is your victory, this is your success!

Yet none of this would have been possible without the unfailing support of the United States through its Ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, and her dedicated staff. We could always count on the support of Congressman Bennie Thompson, who chairs the Committee and who stayed right on top of this throughout. To other members of the Congressional Black Caucus, who were also there with him, giving him the support he needed.

To the Lockheed Martin Corporation, under whose management and vigilant eye RIA was able to meet the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

Our big thanks go to Mr. Robert Johnson, who's here on this flight. He has been a steadfast friend to Liberia in so many ways, and we know the many times he sat in Congressman's Thompson's office and called us, and brought together all of those institutions that had to make this happen. Bob, we thank you for being a good friend to Liberia.

Today marks another notch in our victory column – the achievement of one of the first goals we set for ourselves when we took office some five years ago. While the journey to this point was not always smooth sailing, or flying, we were always firm believers in the combined determination of our Government, the United States Government, Delta Air Lines, and other good friends of Liberia. Today, finally, the day has come!

Liberia's ties with the United States extend back to the founding of our nation, and generations of Liberians have felt and maintained strong bonds with the people of America. It goes without saying, therefore, that maintaining direct links with the United States is not only an economic necessity; for many Liberians it is also of psychological significance.

When the Pan Am flight lifted off from Liberia for the United States in May 1990, it was not only the end of direct services to Liberia by an American airline; that departure coincided with the beginning of a dark passage in our country's history. Less than a year after, Pan Am declared bankruptcy and ceased to exist.

It is only fitting, therefore, that Delta Air Lines, which acquired Pan Am's assets, should be the first American carrier with direct service to Monrovia. And just as that last flight coincided with the beginning of a difficult period for Liberia, today's inaugural flight coincides with the beginning of a new and better day for Liberia. In essence, we have come full circle.

The inaugural flight is only the beginning. Going forward will require continued partnership with the private sector. Delta is starting with one flight a week; it will be up to us, all of us, to give them the justification to increase the frequency of flights. This means we have to give them more passengers, more cargo.

I am aware that imports coming through RIA exceed exports by a factor of 10! This is unacceptable. As a Government, we must commit to do our part to correct this discrepancy, and we call on the business community to do their part.

In coming months, the airport will rehabilitate its storage facilities to allow for secure, high-value cargo. The airport will also be able to practice cold chain management in order to preserve temperature-sensitive products. All of these changes and improvements will count for naught, if the private sector does not take advantage of, and utilize them.

During my visits to the United States, many Liberians in the Diaspora have made repeated requests for the resumption of direct services to Monrovia, to enable them to come back and forth. Well, today, that wish has been granted. Let us all make the most, let us all take advantage, of yet another milestone.

I thank you.