

**Address by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
at 10<sup>th</sup> Commencement Convocation  
of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion University College  
on "What about Tomorrow?"  
Po-River Vincent Town, Bomi County  
Friday, February 4, 2011**

President Mulbah Gray;

Officers and Members of the Board of Trustees and the AME  
Zion Family;

The Faculty, Administrators, and Staff of the African  
Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion University College;

The Graduating Class of 2010;

Families and Friends;

Distinguished and Special Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Graduations are special to me. That is because education, as we all know – and the reason we gather here today to celebrate – is the cornerstone of the development of any nation, most especially one emerging from decades of upheaval and self-destruction. For that reason, I very rarely turn down an invitation to address a group of bright young people, full of hopes and dreams, as they embark upon their life's journey beyond college.

Your Commencement Exercises had been scheduled for February 1<sup>st</sup>, which conflicted with my attendance at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa. You have honored me greatly, AME Zion University and the Class of 2010, by postponing this event to today. I thank you most sincerely.

My utmost thanks and deep appreciation to the Trustees, President, Faculty, Administrators and Staff of this University College for your dedication, leadership and vision in guiding this institution to where it is today, poised to graduate another 359 students.

The College has witnessed a large increase in the number of graduates under your tenure, more than doubling from 156 in 2008 to 359 today. It is also a pleasure to see more young women among the ranks – almost a third of this graduating class – a statistic which conforms to government’s objective of educating and empowering Liberia’s girls and women.

The setting for this Commencement Convocation, here in Po-River Vincent Town, Bomi County, signals a determination to relocate AME Zion University from your overcrowded Monrovia campus to a more spacious and conducive learning environment – away from the noise and hustle of the city.

This relocation plan dovetails with our government's policy for decentralizing tertiary education in all 15 counties. This conforms to our Poverty Reduction Strategy which underscored the need for a phased expansion and decentralization of the nation's higher education system. You are leading by example, and you have my strong support in this undertaking.

To reduce pressure on the state-run University of Liberia, due to its soaring student population, our government, with support from the People's Republic of China and the United States of America, has renovated and expanded the facilities of the University's Campus at Fendall. This will ease congestion and improve the learning atmosphere. The W.V.S. Tubman University, which reopened in Harper, Maryland County, a year ago, is serving students in the nation's southeast. Regional colleges have been established in Grand Bassa and Nimba Counties, and others will soon follow in Grand Gedeh and Lofa. In December, we broke ground for the construction, in Gbarnga, of a community college that will specialize in Information Technology. Additionally, the David Straz Polytechnic, in Sinje, in neighboring Cape Mount, will very shortly also serve the citizens of Bomi and Grand Cape Mount Counties.

Throughout our nation's history, the church has partnered with the state in providing quality private schools to educate Liberia's

students. This has supplemented the government's efforts and made possible the education of thousands of our young people throughout the country. Many of us are beneficiaries of church-supported education. In response to the current decline in foreign support to some of these institutions, the government has increased the level of annual subsidies to around US\$2 million directed to over 60 private schools and universities, including AME Zion U. This is a start and we know that more needs to be done.

To the Graduating Class of 2010: Today is your day; you've earned it. You have endured four years of classes, deadlines and extensions; four years of courses you really didn't like, tests you didn't want, and papers you didn't want to write. All that you withstood was necessary, and worthwhile, in shaping the person that you are, and you will reap the rewards sooner or later.

Which brings me to my question to this Graduating Class, "What about Tomorrow?" After today's celebrations of your successes, and with your Bachelor's degree in hand, what are your plans for tomorrow and beyond?

I understand that this University College is exceptional in offering a degree in Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement in the sub-region. I understand that because the program has been a "feeder" to our

civil service, military and paramilitary sub-sectors, the 97 graduates of the Wilfred E. Clarke College of Criminal Justice Administration can be assured of jobs. Likewise, the six graduates of the Alicia Smith-Lartey College of Education who, given our country's urgent need for quality teachers, will also be in high demand.

For the remaining 256 graduates, I ask, what about tomorrow? Let us be honest and acknowledge that you are entering the workforce at a time of high unemployment among university graduates. That being the case, what will you do when you leave this campus which has served as a beacon for higher learning and expanded horizons, which has prepared you for service to your country?

Realistically, government does not have the resources to hire everyone, including every college graduate. This means the majority of you will have to look to the private sector for jobs. I therefore encourage you to look into employment with the many concessions and business entities that are starting to operate throughout the country.

In the Bomi area, there is Sime Darby Berhad, a Malaysian company, which took charge of the Guthrie Rubber Plantation a year ago, beginning a US\$847 million investment in the cultivation of rubber and oil palm here in Bomi and in Cape Mount, Gbarpolu and Bong

Counties. Over the next decade, the company will cultivate 550,000 acres of these tree crops, and will employ 22,000 Liberians. Sime Darby will also assist out-growers, with measurable social benefits in education, health, and housing. To date, the company has hired 2,500 employees; it has already invested US\$13 million, rehabilitated 80 kilometers of feeder roads, and established oil palm nurseries in Bomi and Cape Mount. This is where some of you can turn for employment.

Our Administration is proud of how we have attracted and spread investment of over US\$16 billion among all 15 counties. They cover every possible field of industry and trade, including agriculture, forestry, mining, and construction. It takes time to reach prime targets but our foreign investors are hiring and training Liberians, and working with Liberian businesses to meet their local needs. They are creating jobs and improving infrastructure across the country. Please take advantage of this. With a well-paying job, you will be able to support yourself and your family, and make your vital contribution to our national development agenda.

There are also job opportunities in community development, health and social welfare, security, environmental protection, and eco-tourism. Or, you could start your own small or medium enterprise. The National Investment Commission (NIC) has been given a new

mandate, to focus its activities on the domestic private sector to help Liberian businesses.

Some of you may decide to further your education. If so, I encourage you to look into our overseas scholarships program, which has undergone major reforms to ensure that the process is merit-based, gender-balanced, and aligned with our capacity needs. Scholarship offers are now advertised on the Executive Mansion Website Scholarships Link ([www.emansion.gov.lr](http://www.emansion.gov.lr)), on radio programs, on the message boards at various ministries and tertiary institutions, and are also available from Cabinet officials and County Superintendents. As a result of the transparent measures being implemented, the public has regained confidence in the bilateral scholarships process.

Let me congratulate you, the Class of 2010, on behalf of our Government, and in my own right, for your academic achievements. You stayed the course, and reached this significant milestone, and I want to join your family, well-wishers, and the AME Zion University family in applauding and celebrating you.

Graduation is a time of promise, of looking to the future. We are striving to create in our country an environment where qualified individuals can apply what they've learned in school, an

environment where college graduates, like yourselves, can participate in building a new Liberia. But I caution you that it is not the degree you've earned that matters, but what you do with it. So, go forth with humility, with service orientation, with a sense of nationalism, with an entrepreneurial spirit, and a commitment to contribute to the betterment of our nation.

We must also say thank you to your parents, guardians and other sponsors who provided the financial, emotional and moral support throughout your years of studies. This, too, is their occasion to share and celebrate, and we acknowledge their selfless efforts.

To the Faculty and Administrators who trained and guided you, this Class of 2010 owes a big debt of gratitude!

A final word, not only to the graduates, but to all eligible Liberians: The voter registration campaign will end in a few days. I urge everyone, irrespective of your political affiliation, to take the time register and get your I.D. card, so that you will be able to exercise your right to vote in the general and presidential elections later this year. I came to Bomi a few Saturdays ago and registered in Fehfeh Town, near my ancestral village of Julejuah. I call upon everyone who has not yet done so, to register and make your vote count.

I salute you, the 2010 Graduates of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion University College. Well done! Now go forward and do your best, for our people and our country. Congratulations!

I thank you.