

**ADDRESS TO THE NATION BY H.E. PRESIDENT ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF
ON EVE OF LAUNCH OF THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN PERIOD
MONDAY, JULY 4, 2011**

Fellow Liberians:

Within a few hours, in accordance with the timetable of the National Elections Commission, the official start of the 2011 Presidential and Legislative Elections Campaign will commence. Thereafter, the entire nation will be gripped by campaign and political fever. The challenge that this process devolves upon all of us, as political actors and non-actors alike, and as referees and players, and as citizens and residents of our beloved country, is therefore huge. The stakes, too, could never be higher.

I speak to you tonight because as President of this country, it is my constitutional duty to call our collective attention to the responsibility we have guaranteed that genuine democracy is kept alive in Liberia.

Fellow Liberians:

Nearly six years ago, we, as a country and people, embarked on an electoral journey that eventually set us on a path of a peaceful political transition following years of bitter conflict and destruction. We defied the pessimism of cynics who doubted our capacity and resilience to successfully hold democratic and transparent elections. And at the end of it all, we pulled off a successful electoral exercise, and thereby pulled our country away from the brink of another cycle of conflict.

Since then, we have all worked individually and collectively, as patriotic Liberians, irrespective of our political, regional and religious affiliations, to nurture and maintain our hard-won peace, security, and stability.

Yes, many a time we differed in our approaches and in our ideas of governance, as well as in our strategies for socio-economic reconstruction and development; many a time we have passionately disagreed with each other and have accordingly freely expressed our various positions and articulated our differing ideas – using the mass media.

Notwithstanding the nature of such democratic expressions, we have all reasonably endeavored to ensure a violence-free political environment. And by so doing, our country has become the better for it. This democratic tendency on our part, as a people, has in no small measure contributed to changing the perceptions of the outside world about us.

Clearly, the dividends of the peaceful state of affairs prevailing in our country are clear for all to see: negative perceptions about us by the outside world have since given way to international respectability; investors have come in numbers and have invested their resources beyond our most optimistic estimates and projections – a welcome development

that has, in turn, brought some measure of relief to our post-conflict economy; our people have been able to travel freely throughout the length and breadth of the country at any time of the day and night without fear or harassment; our schools and universities have remained opened and functioning; new higher institutions are being established both by our Government and by faith-based and other non-government institutions.

In short, we have created the enabling environment for Liberians and foreigners alike to peaceably go about their various activities.

In leading the charge to nurture and sustain such a democratic and peaceful environment, my Administration has spared no effort during this period to ensure that our people speak their minds freely, and that the healing process continues to remain one of the most important pillars of our democratic agenda.

Indeed, my Administration believes that freedom of expression, by which a people are provided the public space to vent their emotions, their anger, and their opinions on public policy and other issues, does offer an alternative to violent confrontation.

And so, even when some of our compatriots have at times exercised their right to free expression, using words that have been inflammatory and abusive of freedom of expression, we, as a tolerant leadership, have refrained from taking any actions that could undermine the free atmosphere we all are now enjoying.

As we embark on a new electoral journey, I wish to reaffirm my Government's commitment to free expression and debate on all issues.

Fellow Liberians:

The challenge that remains for us at this critical point in our post-conflict recovery period is to exert all efforts to ensure and, indeed, guarantee the sustainability of this collective effort at enhancing peace and security and stability in our beloved country now – and for succeeding generations.

Thus, as we welcome the launch of Campaign 2011 tomorrow, Tuesday, July 5, I urge all of us to take some time tonight and for the next several days, to reflect on how far we have travelled over the past nearly six years, and where our nation stands today. Let us all reflect on where we were just six short years ago – and see how far we have come today and determine where we wish to see our country several more years from now.