

**Message by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At the 2012 Flag Day Program
Monrovia City Hall
Friday, August 24, 2012**

All Protocols have been duly observed.

Dr. [Evelyn] Kandakai was the Minister. She took 50 minutes to make her statement; so, as President, I'll have to go three times more. Fasten your seatbelts!

Our Orator and the preceding speakers have impressed upon us the history and the significance of this Flag Day; I don't have to repeat anything they said. What I do want to talk about, to you high school students and students throughout our land, is the importance of education. Dr. Kandakai did get into that also.

As all of you have heard, the opening of school has been delayed until September 10th, to give the Education Ministry, on the one hand, and our educational institutions, on the other, sufficient time to sort out tuition issues.

We have been able to reach an understanding with quite a few of the institutions for the reduction in school fees.

This commitment is because government places much importance on education – education as the bedrock for anything that we are able to do. It's our commitment to continue to work for quality education. Parents have a responsibility also to ensure that their children get a good education and stay in school as we try to make education affordable and accessible.

To you, students: When we talk about the importance of education, we know that it is a right; it is also a God-given talent. Education allows you to discover what that special something is; what that God-given talent is that you have, and that you need to use in order to succeed.

Education is fundamental to everything that you do. No matter what you want to be in life – doctor, lawyer, teacher, engineer, scientist, or politician – you have to go to school and get educated in that discipline of your choice. You can't drop out of school and expect that you're going to get a good job. Getting there, holding the job, requires a process of learning, training, hard work and perseverance.

The people who you see holding high positions – all of them on the podium, as a matter of fact – are doing so because they worked for it. They didn't get there because they knew somebody; they got there by making the most of their time in school, getting an education, learning, building the experience.

While getting an education is important for your personal development and career prospects, having an educated population is equally beneficial for the overall development of our country. Our nation's future will rest with you, the youth of Liberia; it is you who must ignite and carry the torch. If you call yourself a student and you don't embrace education, if you drop out, you're failing yourself; but you are also failing your family, your community, your people, and your country.

Considering the brain drain that our country has suffered, and the lost years, when education took a backseat to conflict, we need every one of you to develop your talents, your skills and your intellect to help us solve our nation's problems and to lead Liberia to a brighter and more prosperous future.

There will be challenges; we all faced them – school fees, pocket money, jobs for families; we all have to work on those things, but the greater responsibility will rest on you. Stay out of the video clubs; go to the hatai shops only after school. Study! Do your research! Stay focused.

I am where I am today because my parents understood the importance of education, and so we call on all the parents to put importance on education. With a solid education, you can be whatever you want to be; nobody will send you away. It won't be who you know, who knows you; your qualification will speak for yourself. People will know that you deserve that job and you deserve that position because you studied hard, you paid attention, and you earned it.

I know that we can count on each and every one of you as we move forward to start the next school season – to be there, to be disciplined, to ensure that we get education enabling us to reverse the sad situation in which the older generation is more educated than the younger one.

I'm sure, as I said before, we can count on you as you return to school on September 10th. Seize the moment, and take advantage of the opportunity. Go to school. All of those on the platform are waiting to turn it over to you, if you learn.

Thank you.