

**Statement by Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Signing Ceremony of Statement of Intent
Establishing U.S.-Liberia Partnership Dialogue
United States Department of State
Tuesday, January 15, 2013**

Secretary of State Clinton;
Members of the Administration;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to be here today for several reasons.

First, I feel privileged to have been invited to the State Department this week, one of the last weeks that you, Madam Secretary, will be in office, to say thank you for all that you have done for Liberia and the Liberian people; to say thank you for always being there for Liberia.

Second, for me personally, it was important to be here today, to see that you have fully recovered from your recent illness, to embrace you, and to let you know that all of Liberia prayed for your speedy recovery.

Third, I have always seen Liberia's progress as underpinned by its special relationship with the United States. The launching today of the U.S.-Liberia Partnership is an historic achievement – one that will cement the strategic cooperation between our two countries for generations to come, regardless of the occupants of the White House or the Executive Mansion.

Dear Friends:

Today marks an historic day for the Government and people of Liberia – the fulfillment of a wish, first articulated last June, for the institutionalization of the long-standing bilateral relationship between Liberia and the United States of America.

Just seven months ago, as we made the rounds among Congressional and U.S. Government officials, we put forward proposals on how the United States could work with Liberia, as a partner, to consolidate its gains. One proposal called for the establishment of a Joint United States-Liberia Bi-National Commission, as that which pertained in the 1960s, which aimed to ensure that the partnership would endure for fifty years or more.

I recall, vividly, that when I made the case to you, Madam Secretary, your support was instantaneous. You assured me that you would figure out how to embed such a relationship in our governments and countries. And here we are today!

With the signing of this Statement of Intent, Liberia stands with the United States as a reliable partner in the region. The U.S.-Liberia Partnership Dialogue will allow our two countries to look at our relationship strategically, with a view towards the long term, and focus on those areas that encourage broad-based economic growth, including agriculture and food security, energy and power infrastructure, and human development.

We look forward to carrying out the first meeting of the U.S.-Liberia Partnership Dialogue under the leadership of Secretary of State-designate, Senator John Kerry, who also has been an essential supporter of Liberia during his long service on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, including his time as Chairman. We recognize that this will not just be a job for our two governments, but also for the business communities of both countries and other stakeholders in Liberia.

Madam Secretary:

I am especially pleased that we were recently declared eligible for Compact Status by the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Coming just two years after being awarded a Threshold Program and seven years after the re-establishment of democracy in Liberia, this is one of Liberia's proudest achievements. I would like to recognize the presence here today of MCC President Daniel Yohannes and to promise to you that we will deliver a Compact program that will be comprehensive and resulting.

I take this opportunity to thank Assistant Secretary of State Johnnie Carson for his steadfast leadership on Africa policy over the past four years. Ambassador Carson, we wish you the best and hope you will continue to find a way to stay engaged with us in Liberia.

We also congratulate President Barack Obama on his forthcoming inauguration to a second term of office. We trust that we can count on him ~~and~~ on and on America's continued support, under his leadership, to Liberia, and to Africa.

Madam Secretary – Hillary – you’ve been a true friend of Liberia and to me personally. We are pleased that, in the history of our bilateral relationship, which spans more than a century and a half, you made two trips to Liberia while in office as Secretary of State. You have supported our country’s progress, championed our political process, and pushed to settle Liberia’s external debt.

As we bid you farewell, I remain convinced that in this era of economic challenge, history will show that your support and the investment of the U.S. Government and the American people in Liberia will return significant dividends.

We will continue to guard the peace, promote reconciliation, build strong democratic institutions, ensure good governance and transparency, and encourage broad-based economic development. We will continue to strive to be a post-conflict success story for that is, Madam Secretary, America’s success also.

I thank you.