

**Special Statement by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at Official Launch of ‘Kick-Start’ Implementation
of the National Reconciliation Roadmap for Liberia &
National Dialogue Conference on Peace and Reconciliation
Centennial Pavilion
Thursday, June 20, 2013**

Colleagues;
Fellow Liberians;
Friends of Liberia:

Let me first say a hearty welcome to our special guests. Your visit to our country is not only in response to the invitation you received from our colleague, but also we see it as an expression of confidence in Liberia’s future. Thank you for being here.

Speaker after speaker today has called upon us, as Liberians, to set aside past differences and hurt, to embrace peace and reconciliation for a united Liberia. I unreservedly add my voice to this appeal, as I have always done. Our commitment is genuine, for we truly believe that our country, which belongs to all of us, can and will be a better place, and better off, when our people are truly reconciled.

At the National Vision 2030 Conference, in Gbarnga, last December, we adopted three documents – *The National Vision 2030*, *The Agenda for Transformation*, and *The Strategic Roadmap on National Peacebuilding, Healing and Reconciliation* – which, together, are charting the path to the future we desire. Our journey of national healing is now gathering momentum; it’s not yet complete, for to claim the future, we must all come together to reflect and heal the past.

With today’s program, officially kicking off implementation of the National Reconciliation Roadmap for Liberia and the National Dialogue Conference on Peace and Reconciliation, I am convinced that all Liberians will take this to heart and will be a part of that process.

The National Roadmap, with its 18-year timeframe, is “a multi-dimensional process of overcoming social, political, and religious cleavages; mending and transforming relationships; healing the physical and psychological wounds from the civil war, as well as confronting and addressing historical wrongs including the structural root causes of and potential areas of conflicts in our country.” Through it, we seek to account for the past; address present challenges; and collectively aspire for a better and shared future, and our Administration – your government, our government – is committed to achieving this transformative agenda.

Let me thank Liberia’s own Peace Ambassador, George Manneh Weah, most sincerely, for taking on this assignment, and urge and encourage him to give it his fullest commitment to help all of us in building a better nation.

In accepting his appointment as Peace Ambassador last December, at the National Vision 2030 National Conference, in Gbarnga, Ambassador Weah expressed his unwavering commitment to Liberia's youth and to the reconciliation process. As a long-time advocate of peace and unity, he pledged to seek the full cooperation of all Liberians and the support of the international community in search of common ground. And from the presence here today, and the level of participation of Liberians and our international partners, I can say, categorically, Ambassador Weah, you are a true patriot, as you are doing this for the utmost peace and prosperity of our common patrimony.

This morning, I had the occasion to bid goodbye to Liberia's Platoon of 46 persons, who are on their way to Mali to participate in the peacekeeping force that will bring peace and democracy to that country. It is a pay-back, by Liberia, to the many West African, African and international groups from countries that have enabled us to now come close to our tenth consecutive year of peace. And we want to thank all Liberians for having contributed to this, because we would not have had this peace if every group, represented in this hall, had not done their little bit to make sure that it happened.

A couple of days ago, after months of fear of the unknown, we finally decided to open a safe that had been stuck away in the Old Executive Mansion, since the passing of President Tubman. It had been stored there, at what is now the headquarters of the General Auditing Commission. We were reluctant to open it because we did not know what we would find in it. Once opened, we found that it contains documents of historical importance to our nation, such as the original Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, as well as very important memorabilia. We believe that these documents will also contribute to our efforts to understand the root causes of our cleavages and our differences, and that we can use those as instruments of peacebuilding, national healing and reconciliation.

We have constituted a four-member task force to inventory the contents of the safe, which has been placed under 24-hour surveillance. The members of the task force are: the Director General of the Center for National Documents and Records Agency (CNDRA); the Advisor to the President on Foreign Affairs, Ambassador George Wallace; the Director of the Executive Protection Service; and a representative from the Ministry of Justice.

While the full inventory is ongoing, we believe that we could release several of these most important documents, and a complete inventory of the contents of the safe will be published after the task force completes its work.

Another important event, mentioned by the representative of the True Whig Party who spoke, when he said that it had given back to the people that which belongs to the people. I want to thank the Minister of Justice and her team. We've been negotiating on that for several months, and indeed we can say that the True Whig Party Building belongs to the people, and the Government will seek its restoration for the use of the people.

In my Annual Message to the National Legislature in January, I defined true reconciliation as a process of national healing, and learning the lessons of the past to perfect our democracy; as a question of justice, in dealing with the past, in our processes of government and law, and in our

economic development; as ensuring gender equity and the promotion of women; as creating jobs and opportunity, empowering our youth by giving them the skills they need to prosper; and as spreading development to all of our people, so that progress belongs to everyone.

With today's official start in implementing the National Reconciliation Roadmap, our journey of national healing moves into full swing. Through reconciliation we will reduce, if not completely remove, the obstacles in our paths. We must muster the courage to let bygones be bygones, and embrace one another with a new mind, a new spirit and a new attitude.

We must be successful in this undertaking, with Liberia, a nation at peace, becoming a nation that is at peace with itself. Let us continue to demonstrate the immense resilience and resolve for which we, Liberians, are renowned. Together, let us find common ground, rediscover what unites us, and build an inspiring vision for the future.

We have a history of cleavage; we have a history of disunity; we have a history of confrontation. But we also have a history of a resilient people who have, time and time again, risen above the odds, able to stand tall in the midst of adversity to reach across the divide and promote a united country.

At an event, in the margins of the recently ended G8 Summit, President Obama said, "Peace is about attitude, not just politics." Let me repeat: "Peace is about attitude, not just politics." To further paraphrase him: When peace is challenged, you have to choose whether to show the courage to resist, in the interest of sustained peace, or succumb to the fear that leads to destruction and despair.

As Liberians, let's seize the opportunity to reclaim our future. We face many challenges, but every Liberian deserves a better tomorrow – for themselves, and for their children. Let us join hands as we move toward this new and reconciled Liberia, filled with hope, filled with promise and prosperity.

I will close by doing something that I would not have done any other day. I am going to walk over and shake the hand of Representative Bhofal Chambers....

Thank you. This may not stop the criticisms of Representative Chambers, but he will know that we owe each other no ill, and we can work together for the good of Liberia.