

**Acceptance Speech by
Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
For the Conferment of Honorary Doctorate Degree
By the Nigerian Defence Academy**

**Kaduna, Nigeria
Saturday, September 8, 2012**

Your Excellency, Goodluck Jonathan, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces;
Distinguished Conferees;
The Chairman of the Nigerian Defence Academy Board;
The Commandant, Nigerian Defense Academy;
Faculty Members, Fellow Graduates and Cadets;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;
Families and Friends:

Let me express my sincere thanks and gratitude to His Excellency, my brother and friend, President Goodluck Jonathan, for affording me the opportunity to participate in this auspicious occasion. The level of military precision demonstrated by Graduates and Cadets reflects the level of professionalization the Nigerian Defence Academy has exhibited since its founding in 1964.

It is with great sense of honor and humility that I accept, on behalf of my colleagues, this distinctive Honorary Doctorate Degree from one of Africa's most reputable and prestigious Military Academies, the Nigerian Defence Academy. This Academy, with an outstanding history since its founding, has produced some of the very best of the Nigerian Military. The regimentation of its academic and professional military programs, and the quality of its output, has brought great pride, respect and dignity to your nation.

My colleagues and I are gratified to be a part of the history of your Academy by the distinction accorded us today. We want to assure you that our public service will continue to accentuate the foundations upon which your reputation has been built. We are proud to form part of the roll-call of those who have joined the "green and white lines" of Nigeria's finest and brightest.

Liberia salutes the bold and brave young men and women who have passed through this Academy and other military institutions, and have served in our country. They did so courageously during the period of our civil conflict, bringing peace, security and stability to our country and the sub-region. Many of them made the ultimate sacrifice of life.

Today, I come with a humble heart, on behalf of the People of Liberia, to once again express our gratitude and historical indebtedness for their service and sacrifice. Even as I speak to you today, many of your military personnel continue to serve diligently not only in Liberia, but also in countries the world over where their services are needed. Their accomplishments should forever inspire us in rendering selfless services.

To you, Graduates, as you leave these grounds, let the lessons and experiences acquired and imparted during the past five years of training inspire you to serve your country and humanity. On your shoulders rest the Colors of your country. It is your bounden duty to serve with discipline and valor. Your journey may face many uncertainties in faraway places. But I urge you to stay the course and remember those words of command from this Academy which inspire you to march on.

I am also delighted to recognize the first two Liberian Cadets, Officer Cadet J. P. Eastman and Officer Cadet B. Pewee, from the Armed Forces of Liberia, who have successfully completed the five-year regular combatant course and are graduating today. We are proud of your achievements as you begin your professional military career. Let me also congratulate another officer, Major David Forleh, of the Armed Forces of Liberia, who recently completed his Senior Command and Staff course and has obtained a Masters Degree in Strategic Studies.

We are proud of and gratified with the strategic partnership that exists between Liberia and Nigeria. Nigeria continues to support our overall reform agenda and our development goals. We have Nigerian lecturers, teachers, and medical personnel who are providing much-needed services in Liberia today. Major Nigerian banks and other investment portfolios are benefiting from our cordial and suitable environment for doing business in Liberia.

At the height of this strategic partnership, we have a Nigerian General, Major-General Suraj Abdurrahman, who is serving as Chief of Defense Staff of the Armed Forces of Liberia. Major-General Abdurrahman, who is present with us today, is a distinguished graduate of the Nigeria Defence Academy, and we are very proud of his services in bringing credibility and discipline in the restructuring of the Armed Forces of Liberia.

Let me also say how pleased I am to learn of the recent decision which allows young Nigerian women to pursue the regular combatant course at the Nigerian Defense Academy – an area, I am informed, that until last year, was an exclusive preserve of their male counterparts.

This milestone in the history of the Academy will open tangible opportunities for women pursuing a military career. It will inspire thousands of young Nigerian women who are desirous and willing to serve their nation. It will inspire Liberian women to do likewise. The day is not far away when one of them, here or in Liberia, could emerge as the next Chief of Defense Staff.

Excellency;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

We recognize Nigeria's steadfast efforts in promoting regional peace and stability through the Economic Community of West African States. ECOWAS remains a true beacon of our collective security and cooperation throughout the region.

Nigeria's leadership in the ECOWAS Standby Force is crucial in achieving the mission for which the Force is being developed.

The situation in the north of Mali creates a strategic dilemma for the region, as we strive to solidify democratic governance for improving the lives of our people. There is no place for extremism in our region or elsewhere. We must collectively ensure an environment of peace and stability for economic and social progress.

Liberia strongly supports the decision of ECOWAS regarding the situation in the north of Mali and called for concerted efforts in resolving the situation.

Excellency;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me, in closing, reiterate my deepest gratitude to my friend and brother, Goodluck Jonathan, President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, and to the people of Nigeria for their continued support of peace and security in Liberia. Our people are appreciative of this enduring partnership.

On behalf of my colleagues, on whom these Honorary Degrees have been conferred, we say thanks to the Nigerian Defence Academy for this honor. Our thanks, also, to the Commandant and Staff of this Academy for their commitment to bringing out the very best of their Cadets.

We salute the families and friends of these Cadets who are graduating today for the immense support they have given to the Graduates. Your investments of encouragement and support have yielded the desired results. Going forward, the success of their professional military career will again depend on your continued support and encouragement.

With these thoughts, I proudly but humbly stand before you to accept this Honorary Doctorate which you have so kindly bestowed upon me and my colleagues.

I thank you.