

**Accelerated Community Priorities for the
Transformation to an ECOWAS of Peoples**

Acceptance Speech

By

**Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
Chairperson, ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and
Government**

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Government**

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Colleagues of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government;

Excellencies Speaker of ECOWAS Parliament and President of the Community Court of Justice;

Excellency President of the Commission;

Special Representative of the Secretary General for West Africa and Sahel;

Honorable Ministers;

Distinguished Delegates:

I would like to express heartfelt thanks for your vote of confidence in providing me an opportunity to serve our Community as Chairperson of the Authority for the 2016 -2017 period. I take this as a significant demonstration of your continuing commitment to the participation and empowerment of women of our continent. My selection is also an indication of the progress and peace Liberia enjoys which would not have been possible without the tremendous sacrifices and solidarity of our brothers and sisters of ECOWAS. I wish to extend my salutary commendation to His Excellency President Macky Sall whose extraordinary leadership guided the work of our organization in the past year. Our thanks also go to Dr. Kadre Désiré Ouadraogo for the able manner in which he managed the affairs of the Community as President of the ECOWAS Commission, and we extend congratulations to his successor, His Excellency Marcel Alain de Souza and his team as they assume their responsibilities.

During the 48th Summit held in Abuja, we celebrated the 40th Anniversary of ECOWAS. Much has been achieved during those four decades across all sectors- the harmonization of macroeconomic policies, trade integration,

regional infrastructure; peace and security, regional institution development, democracy and rule of law.

There is still more to be done if we are to achieve the ECOWAS Vision 2020, to create a borderless, peaceful, prosperous and cohesive region that transitions from ECOWAS of States to ECOWAS of peoples. As we move towards the achievement of that lofty goal, we are reminded that our Community faces both challenges and opportunities. The sharp reduction in commodity prices and the effect of epidemiological outbreaks have resulted in a decline in investment and growth. Beyond financial difficulties, growth is affected by terrorism, drug and human trafficking, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and the impact of climate change.

Yet opportunities abound. We can take pride in the high potential of our Community for a vibrant integrated market which is currently estimated at the equivalent of US\$1.3 trillion produced by a wide-range of activities in agriculture, commerce, industry and services.

In this context, let me propose four continuing priorities on which we could consolidate progress during the next year, through cooperation and collaboration of our Community institutions and the support of our development partners.

- 1) **First**, consolidation of our peace and security architecture. Guided by the Mechanism and other Protocols, we should work even harder as Member States to stem terrorism, strengthen intelligence capacity and enhance coordination with the African Union, the United Nations and other partner institutions. While extending sympathy to our citizens victimized by these disastrous attacks, we must ensure that there will be no expansion of terrorism in our sub-region, as recently experienced in Burkina Faso, Mali and Cote D'Ivoire and last night in Niger. We must also, through collective and determined efforts, ensure that Boko Haram is totally defeated.

- 2) **Second**, conclude negotiations and legal actions to enhance trade integration. For the past decade, we have grappled, refined, debated and negotiated the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). During this period, our economies have grown, the quality of our manufactures has become competitive, and our trade integration has scaled. However, time runs out this year. Failure to close the negotiations could lead to differentiation among Member States. We note the continued concern of the business entities of our largest market and thank the Vice President of Nigeria for his stated commitment to continue the consultation that will address this issue. In like vein, we call upon the remaining countries, which have not done so to ratify and enforce the Common External Tariff (CET) thereby deepening the potential for trade and productive integration in our Community.
- 3) **Third**, achieving transformation of Vision 2020 through agriculture and infrastructure. The impressive success of several of our countries in value addition in agriculture can be expanded and our trade integration enhanced through acceleration of the several ongoing regional projects in roads, energy, and railroads. Agricultural programs should consider innovative ways of integrating young people to minimize youth unemployment. A strong case also exists for air services connectivity to provide cost effective movement of citizens, increased trade, and tourism, as called for by the Yamoussoukro Declaration and Decision.
- 4) **Fourth**, improving Financial Stability. Existing protocols and mechanism call for financing our Community through contribution of the Community levy by Member States, which is the principal means of meeting the operational costs of our institutions and responding to security emergencies such as those faced by our peacekeeping troops in Mali and Guinea Bissau. Recent financial difficulties imposed by global conditions have affected our ability to meet commitments despite tremendous efforts. In this regard, I wish to join others in commending His Excellency President Muhammadu Buhari, through you, Mr. Vice President, for the relief brought by his recent expressed commitment to continue Nigeria's support to the community levy. Yet, we can do more. There is space for cost saving through continued rationalization and reduction in the multiple activities and high benefits of community institutions. In this regard, we commend President de Souza for the important steps he has taken to achieve this objective. We also must institute A Call to Action to finalize the ongoing review of the

restructuring of Community institutions. Beyond our internal measures, there is potential for collaborative support from bilateral and regional entities and for joint ventures and partnership with the private sector proved very effective during our battle against the Ebola virus. Regarding the Ebola fight, I wish to thank President Faure Gnassingbe for his support as ECOWAS Special Representative.

Excellencies, Colleagues, the programs and priorities, which I have outlined represent an effort to consolidate the successes of our community efforts under the mandates of past Authority Chairpersons. I look forward to your guidance and I stand ready to give the required support to President de Souza of the Commission and his team, and to the Community entities to carry out our common agenda, which you have endorsed. I commend them for the manner in which they have proceeded with our Agenda and urge our ECOWAS Parliament to do more in their interaction with Civil Society to make our progress and objectives better known in the region.

Une fois encore, je vous remercie pour l'occasion que vous me donnez pour servir nos peuples à travers cette marque de confiance.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to serve our people through this preferment.

Thank you, Merci, Obrigado.