

**Remarks by
H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of Liberia
at the
Commissioning Ceremony of
Officials of Government
C. Cecil Dennis, Jr. Auditorium
(As Delivered)**

Wednesday, March 26, 2014

Members of the Legislature here present;
Doyen and members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Ministers, and Officials of Government;
Political, Business and Civil Society Members;
Families and Friends of those to be commissioned;
Fellow Citizens:

Once again, we gather to finalize another important process in our ongoing fight against corruption. Today, we commission a new frontline to continue and intensify our fight against an ingrained system of dependency and dishonesty – against the misuse and abuse of the public trust.

On assuming the leadership of our country in 2006, despite the depth and pervasiveness of the systemic problem, our administration pledged and dedicated itself to fight corruption not because it is politically correct but because it is a fight whose time has come. We took on this fight not because it is easy but because it is necessary. Quite simply, we took on this fight because our society can no longer continue to accept the varying manifestations of corruption as a normal way of doing business.

We knew the fight would ask a lot from all of us. It would require that we do things differently – that we alter the way we previously governed, managed our resources and attended to our governing responsibilities. It also means that we will redefine the duties each citizen owes to the State and to each other. Importantly also, the fight required us to shift the moral compass of the society

requiring all of us to be more honest, more diligent, more dutiful and more caring about and accountable for the public good as well as the things we own together. As with deep sea changes, we also knew that while the progress we seek would be gradual, and in some instances, the results would seem slow in coming – while our efforts would be initially resisted and political criticisms would be loud, we would remain firm in our resolve and faithful to the purpose.

This is why, amongst many things, we opted to adopt the most sustainable measures of prevention through thoughtful reforms of laws, policies and strategies. We have also continued to attend to the building, and in some cases, the rebuilding of stronger institutions of integrity, as well as integrating international best practices and procedures, some of which we are bold to admit are too sophisticated, if not too advanced for our post-conflict experiences.

Notwithstanding, we believe we can adapt; we can learn, and over a relatively short time, we can perfect these procedures and practices as we deepen the new systems of transparency and accountability across the public bureaucracy.

However, experience reminds us that systems are as good as the humans who man them. And so we have sought and will continue to diminish individual vulnerabilities by providing better compensations and improvements in the working conditions of public servants as our means permit.

Important as prevention is, we recognize punishment as a powerful exemplar and a compelling deterrent. A robust prosecutorial team at the Ministry of Justice combined with ongoing reforms including the passage of a new jury law, enforcements of a number of ethical and administrative standards and practices across the Judiciary, as well as the actions of the Public Accounts Committees of the Legislature have convinced us to believe that not only are the various branches of our government enjoined in this fight but also that we are best positioned to meaningfully and sustainably address long-standing issues of impunity. Today, we can say with increasing confidence that if we find you to be corrupt, you will definitely answer to the law. This is real progress.

We recall that in the first year of this effort, we risked losing the battle even before we could actually begin when a key integrity institution pronounced unsubstantiated comparisons of the level of corruption in the present to the past.

If the comparisons were intended to distract and discourage us, it mistakenly underestimated our resolve.

We have boldly continued the battle, achieving even more progress and an appreciable level of success. The evidence is not found in the rampaging vilifications of our political critics but in the numerous objective appraisals contained in the international indices which track such performances.

Since 2006, our country has proudly held its own even against countries which have not shared our difficult and most challenging post-conflict experiences. We submit that we are not where we wish to be but even by the most lopsided accounts; we are not where we used to be.

Despite the challenges in moving the fight against corruption forward, for me, and for this administration, there will be no turning back. We must continue to fight not for ourselves but for our children and grandchildren. And we must continue to fight not for personal gains but for the collective benefits of our society.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today, I am especially hopeful that our fight against corruption will be won. As we have already begun, we must continue to involve everyone – to challenge impropriety wherever it exists, to expose perpetrators whoever they are, and to blow the whistle whenever we see a wrong. We must all be ready to stand in line, to wait for our turn, to respect the rule and encourage others to do the same. And we must all take on the added courage not to offer a bribe or to accept one.

As we continue to see, and as our success will continue to be measured, the fight against corruption is not only a fight for elected officials and political appointees. This is also a fight for service men and women, health workers, business owners and operators, teachers, parents, students and court officers – every Liberian has an important role to play in winning this important fight against corruption.

And as we continue to fight against corruption, rather than by noisy character assassinations and unsubstantiated accusations against perceived political opponents because either our freedoms or our politics permit us to do so, we will

win our fight against corruption by our continued collective commitments to the reforms and adopted measures which are already proving to be successful.

I challenge each of you who are today assuming the responsibility of leading the nation's struggle for integrity, as well as all those who are already similarly engaged, to always act without fear or favor; to be bold in upholding the law; to afford all accused persons the rights and dignity to which they are justly entitled; to commit to punish the guilty without restraint; and by your own conduct and action, to change the long-held public perception that every public official is guilty of corruption only because he or she is an official of government.

Furthermore, to enable you and all other public officials to continue to distinguish yourselves as well as change this unfortunate public perception, I am pleased to announce that I am confident that in a matter of couple of days, that I will sign the Code of Conduct into law and wish to thank the Honorable Members of the Legislature for their diligence in concluding the process of its passage.

Please use the provisions of this new law to help us win this important battle against corruption for the good of our country.

May God continue to bless our Republic.