

Reflection on Progress in Our Community in 2016-2017

Opening Statement by

Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

President of the Republic of Liberia

Chair of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government

At the

**51st Ordinary Summit of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State
and Government**

Harbel, Margibi County, Liberia

June 4, 2016

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government of the ECOWAS Authority;
Honorable Chair and Members of the ECOWAS Council of Ministers and other Ministers;
Your Excellency Mr. Marcel de Souza, President of the ECOWAS Commission;
Your Excellency Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of the State Israel;
Your Excellency Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, Former President of Nigeria;
Your Excellency, Mr. Moussa Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission;
Your Excellency Madam Federica Mogherini, Vice-President of the European Commission;
Your Excellency Dr. Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for West Africa;
Mr. Vice President, Honorable Speaker of the Houses;
Your Honor, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Liberia;
Officials of the Government of Liberia;
Political and Business leaders of Liberia;
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps;
Representatives of Civil Society;
Commissioners and Heads of ECOWAS Institutions;
Members of the Press;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Your Excellencies, exactly one year ago, on June 4, 2016, in Dakar, Senegal, on the occasion of the 49th Ordinary Summit of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, the Authority entrusted me with the leadership of our Community. I was honored to take over the mantle from His Excellency, President MackySall, who had worked and continues to work tirelessly on Community matters.

Let me express my profound gratitude for the confidence bestowed on me and the opportunity to serve our Community during the last couple of months. This was a recognition of the progress made by Liberia, my

country, which was considered a pariah state just fifteen years ago. It took the sacrifices and the solidarity of members of this community to bring us to this day, when we can lead the sub-regional organization and be able to receive you all, in a peaceful and trending Liberia.

I want to recognize the great work accomplished by those who held this mantle before me and have ensured that our community work in the interest of our people, putting our unity and solidarity above all other consideration.

Excellencies, Upon assuming the chairmanship, I immediately prioritized a four-point agenda with the main thrust on ***Consolidation of Democracy, Strengthening our Peace and Security Architecture; Improving Financial Stability and Promoting Institutional Reform, including the Review and Restructuring of the Community Institutions; Promoting Regional Integration through Agriculture; and Infrastructure Development.***

In the area of democracy, our region recorded impressive gains. Peaceful transition through elections were achieved in Cabo Verde and Ghana. We applaud Ghana for being the leader in this regard on the Continent. Under the able leadership of our ECOWAS Mediator, President Buhari of Nigeria, a 22-year political domination in The Gambia ended in a peaceful transition. This was accomplished through several diplomatic and mediatory missions by the Mediation Team – Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Pivotal roles were played by Senegal, Guinea and Mauritania. This success, through full solidarity and firm resolve by all of you to implement the decision taken at the 50th Summit, has received world acclaim and established ECOWAS as a model of decisive leadership in defense of regional democracy in Africa.

In a similar manner, diplomatic and mediatory missions were taken to Guinea Bissau under the leadership of President Condé of Guinea as

Mediator. A historic gathering of representatives of all the political parties of Guinea Bissau assembled in Conakry in October 2016. Their discussions culminated in the Conakry Agreement which outlined the road map to a resolution of the long standing political impasse in that country. We have yet to achieve the implementation of the Agreement as we note the deteriorating political environment in the country. It is important that this mediation effort is continued and similar solidarity and resolve is made to ensure that the decisions of the Authority are carried out in the interest of peace and democracy.

Let me, at this juncture acknowledge that these achievements would not have been possible without the support and collaboration of the African Union, United Nations, European Union, as well as other friendly bilateral partners outside our region.

Efforts to consolidate peace and security in our region continue, with the realization that in the absence of peace, there can be no development. Terrorism has brought instability, death and destruction to many member states of our Community. What started a few years ago as a dispute about autonomy in northern Mali is now spreading. Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria have all been victims of terrorist attacks. In this regard, we acknowledge the gallant efforts of the Nigerian Government in degrading the capability of Boko Haram and support the spirited efforts of the Government of Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire, together with other countries of the Lake Chad Region. We can stem terrorism only if we strengthen intelligence capacity, improve information sharing and enhance coordination with the African Union and other regional organizations on the continent. While extending sympathy to our citizens victimized by these disastrous attacks, we must implement, with urgency, our regional counter-terrorism strategy to curb any further expansion of terrorism in our sub-region.

Your Excellencies, good progress has been made in the restructuring of the Community institutions. Early December 2016, I undertook a working visit to ECOWAS Institutions in Abuja and met with the President and Judges of the Community Court of Justice, and the Speaker and Bureau of the ECOWAS Parliament at their respective headquarters. The visit provided me an opportunity to better understand the internal workings and the pace of the implementation of reforms, including fast tracking of the work of the Maxwell Stamp Consultants in restructuring Community institutions. I wish to thank the leaders of those institutions for the opportunity granted to me to visit with them.

I commend you the Authority of heads of State and Government in supporting reforms in all our community institutions aimed at reducing operational and administrative costs, inefficiency and mismanagement of resources. The reallocation of resources from administration to programs will improve services to our people. I also wish to commend, particularly, the exceptional support and commitment made to this effort by the President of the Commission, Mr. Marcel de Souza, who will be submitting relevant proposals for the consideration of this Summit.

We note that 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 for the relief brought by his recent expressed commitment to continue Nigeria's support to the community levy. Yet, we can and must do more. There is space for cost saving through

continued rationalization and reduction in the multiple activities and high benefits of community institutions.

Excellencies, the road to regional integration is likely to be long and require consistency. Economies of several of our countries have progressed tremendously in the past years but are now plagued by the sharp decline in commodity prices on the world market. If there is a lesson to be learned from this situation which affects all our exports, from oil to iron ore and to cocoa, it is that we must diversify our economies and invest in small transformative industries. With a population of more than 300 million people, we have the potential to establish an internal market place that will create jobs and sustain our progress.

We note that regional integration plans continue on course as a result of our Community's collective resolve to implement the Protocols on Free Movement of People and Goods, particularly the Common Internal Tariff (CET), the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA).

Yet our community has achieved considerable progress in the last four decades, including harmonization of macroeconomic policies, trade integration, regional infrastructure, all resting on the pillars of peace and security, democracy and rule of law. We applaud the free movement of people throughout our sub-region as the greatest achievement of all, because it provides to our people the freedom of cross border movement, without having to stand in line for visas.

We can still do more. To reach our objective of total integration, we owe it to our people to make cross border trade and travel as easy as possible for our people by eliminating harassment and imposition of personal fees by those many border posts. We must recognize that most of our people who travel across borders for trade, seasonal work or family visits do so by road. Small business and migrant workers constitute the backbone of our economic development and integration.

Commerce will greatly be enhanced if we have a seamless cross border movement. A true borderless, peaceful, prosperous and cohesive region is key to our success towards a community of the people. I therefore challenge each one of us to put efforts in raising awareness at border crossing points by educating our security personnel about our policies and our people about their rights.

Regional integration programs designed for the benefit of our Community citizens, depend on regular payment of the Community Levy to the ECOWAS Commission.

The Commission has taken action to solidify the ongoing review of Community Levy payments by Member States, which were delinquent. Today, I am pleased to say that an increasing number of Member States, including Liberia, has liquidated their accounts, and are current in their payment of Levy proceeds. Our gratitude is due to the Federal Republic of Nigeria for making payments on its arrears. Plans have been put in place for resource mobilization, to increase the level of compliance by Member States by setting up a Community Levy Committee to work for the full implementation of the Community levy Protocol.

Dear Colleagues, We have determined that agriculture and infrastructure will enable us to achieve transformation in the implementation of our Vision 2020. The 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.

We note the progress made in meeting Infrastructure challenges in the Region, especially the development of road networks and energy generation and distribution. We commend the Heads of State of Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire and the Ministers for Public Works, Road Infrastructure and Justice for launching the critical Lagos-Abidjan Corridor. Today, we will be breaking ground, leading to finalization of the treaty on the second phase, the Dakar-Abidjan Corridor (DAC). We look forward to signing the DAT phase to meet the challenges to all of us including our development partners for rapid implementation of these important projects.

Excellencies: The development of our region is primarily our responsibility. The progress we have made through implementation of the various action plans confirms our political will to fully assume our responsibility. However, economic realities and the interdependence of nations make partnerships desirable and necessary in the achievement of all of our goals. Already, our Organization enjoys a very healthy partnership with the European Union, to which the EU Vice President has already attested in her remarks. The invitation to Prime Minister Nethanyahu can also be seen in this same light: an expression of interest in cooperation and partnership.

Excellencies, I cannot close these remarks without welcoming in our ranks His Excellency Mr. Adama Barrow, in whom the people of the Gambia reposed their faith by electing him to lead their nation. We and all parties must now help to ensure this peace is maintained by supporting the development of the country.

Finally, Your Excellencies, there was no better way to end my tenure at the helm of my country than chairing the Authority of Community. In a few months, Liberians will go to the polls to elect a new leader. This will be the first time in 73 years that an elected president, through general elections, turns over to an elected president – a historic event for our country. Thank you for agreeing to witness the signing of a commitment to peaceful elections and the rule of law this afternoon by

political party leaders. I look forward to receiving you all again in Monrovia when, in January 2018, I will pass the leadership of the nation to my successor.

I thank everyone of you, for your friendship, solidarity and guidance through my tenure in office.

Thank You, Merci, Obrigado.