

**Statement by H.E President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
At the Official Launch of National Deconcentration Platform  
Gbarnga, Bong County,  
Wednesday, February 18, 2015**

Colleagues;  
Traditional Leaders;  
Partners;  
Special Guests;  
Citizens:

Three years ago, in Salala, Bong County, many of us gathered to launch the National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance to actualize the pledge that our government made in 2006, to bring the Government closer to the people. Today, we reaffirm that commitment by this launch of the Deconcentration Programme.

The Deconcentration Platform details sector specific services to be immediately moved from Monrovia to the Counties to bring real and tangible improvements in the lives and environments of our people. The Platform is a fast-moving process to improve the quality and access to services.

This launch sends a strong signal and message to the Liberian people of our determination to ensure that they are active partners in the delivery of services and in the governance of their communities and counties. It is also meant to send a clear and strong message that our country is on course and bouncing back, mighty and strong, in spite of the ravages that faced us from the Ebola enemy.

In successive years of this administration, we have taken numerous important initiatives to enhance decentralization and local area development. We established, for the first time in the history of the country, the County Development Funds, which are directly under the control of the county authorities for development purposes. We have also gone one step further, to the Social Development Fund contributed by concessions to augment the County Development Fund. In the area of security, law and order without which no development can take place, we have erected security hub here in Gbarnga and plan to erect, along with our partners, four more around the country to provide equal access to justice. In the area of education, local school boards are already established in school districts across the country. To promote small farmers, County Agriculture Offices are being established. The Ministry of Gender and Development has already embarked upon a program to erect safe houses in counties and, similarly, postal and banking services have been established in several counties. In the delivery of health care, considerable progress has been made in restoring and establishing health facilities and strengthening county- based health care capacity although the Ebola pandemic and our responses indicated that we have not done enough. A critical element that we did not factor into these responses was community capacity and preparedness.

Decentralization is a long process. In many countries, decentralization reforms have required decades to unfold. We have laid out our Decentralization Reform Agenda to be pursued in phases. Our first phase is to continue to move the delivery of public services out of Monrovia to county centers and to do so in an efficient and coordinated manner to ensure that at the county level we build synergies among the service delivery ministries and agencies of government so that our people can be served more effectively.

We all listened carefully to the Minister of Internal Affairs, as he enumerated the contents of the Deconcentration Platform. We look to the day, very soon, when teachers will no longer be told to come to Monrovia to attend educational matters; when our local business people will meet all the requirements for starting up and running their businesses from the counties and will not have to come to Monrovia to register or to do other businesses to carry on; when civil servants will not be told that the processing of their personnel action notices and other documents related

to their employment are delayed due to the fact that their paperwork requires approval from Monrovia. With the recent enactment of the Liberia Revenue Authority and its anticipated advent to the counties, we look to the day, very soon, when local administrators will have certain amount of fiscal authority in raising revenues to finance local development activities. That first phase is what we have started with the Deconcentration Platform.

The second phase of this program will involve the sharing of limited political authority with local governance institutions. This will involve the election of superintendents, local councils, some sub-county officials and vesting them with authority, thereby encouraging them to do what is necessary, at the local level, without fragmentation that will retard development.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Governance Commission, with support from the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning have already undertaken relevant studies and have crafted a draft Local Governance Bill that will be submitted to the Legislature after proper vetting and Executive approval. Our legislators, we will then appeal to, you will have an important role to play if we are to achieve this objective.

The Law Reform Commission will also play an important role in crafting the amendments to the Constitution, because that will also be required for us to carry out some of our local governance goals. We plan to have these amendments prepared for submission to the public through a referendum after passage by the Legislature so that, the Constitution, as amended by the people, will allow for the elections of superintendents and local councils.

Let me say here that the efforts to decentralize the delivery of public services in Liberia are not new. Previous administrations have initiated programs of decentralization before. Our determination is to build on these ideas and these early initiatives and to learn lessons from them and from similar programs elsewhere in the world.

One of the lessons we have learned is that it is important to ensure that local capacity is adequate to support the transfer of public services to local jurisdictions. Failure to have adequate local capacity is often a basis for recentralization. We are endeavoring to avoid this pitfall by exploring and seeking innovative ways that can respond directly to our national developmental needs, especially our capacity needs to manage a system of government that is decentralized.

The effective delivery of public services in a coordinated manner that builds synergies require adequate public facilities, especially a government center where offices and other facilities are located in easy proximity to each other so that their operations and maintenance can benefit from economies of scale while making their services more accessible to the local population. In this respect, an important part of our decentralization program is to establish government centers in all counties as our resources will allow. We already have one or two, including Maryland and Grand Bassa. This will be a major undertaking to which we will commit our resources. We will also need the support of our development partners, and with the support of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning and all of our ministries and agencies with development functions will be required to work together to come up with a strategy that will enable us to carry out this objective.

As we today launch our National Deconcentration Platform, we thank all of you, the development partners who have contributed to this work and to our development agenda in general. More importantly, our thanks go to the Liberian people for their guidance, their support, their patience and their participation. It is only through the involvement of people, through their ownership of the processes of development and decentralization, can this become an historic undertaking.

To actualize the visions, I hereby announce the following directives to the responsible units of my government:

**Deconcentration Implementation Executive Directives:**

Administrative Directives:

- a. County superintendents, from this day, are conferred with the authority to coordinate and manage the delivery of services in their county. All ministries and agencies staff deployed to the counties, while continuing to be employed by their line ministries and agencies, fall under the coordination of the County Superintendent administratively, and get technical guidance from the line ministry in Monrovia.
- b. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), in coordination and collaboration with all Ministries and Agencies, shall immediately coordinate a process to harmonize the finance, procurement, human resource, audit and monitoring and evaluation of services in the County to avoid the multiplication of these services in each ministry and agency.
- c. The MIA is directed to begin the process of developing a professional local government civil service with support from the Civil Service Agency.
- d. The line ministries and agencies shall delegate authority for the implementation of agreed county-based projects to heads of line ministry's county-based implementation units who will then operate within the local coordinating mechanism.

Fiscal Directives:

To achieve the above administrative reforms which will only be successful if they are complimented by the fiscal measures. Ministry of Finance and Development Plan will therefore be called upon:

- a. Expedite the establishment of County Treasuries, beginning with the 4 already identified and proceeding quickly to rest of the Counties.
- b. To make it possible for all government employees to receive their salaries in their County Headquarters. This directive is intended to provide support to Ministries like Education and Health who have to a large extent already deconcentrated, but whose quality of services hampered by the movement of staff to and from Monrovia in pursuit of their salaries.

Political Directives:

- a. Our final goal is a Liberia that is decentralized and therefore deconcentration should not become the end product. Implementing decentralization requires the establishment of a legal and regulatory framework. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Governance Commission are already working to finalize the few outstanding details on the draft Local Government Act. Our aim is to get this to the Legislature as quickly as possible.

To my colleagues, members of the Legislative Caucuses:

This is an opportunity for you to be the torch bearers of the transformation of our nation and people. For those of you who are newly elected – everything about deconcentration and decentralization is what you promised in your campaigns. I know that all of you are already on-board and will do everything in your power to actualize this reform. We will need you to make the right decisions about budgetary allocation but the streamlining of resources to make deconcentration possible to allow the autonomy and independence of the coordinating mechanisms through the superintendents will take place without interference.

To the ministers and all functionaries of Government:

What you have crafted and I have launched today, the National Deconcentration Platform, is a monitoring and evaluation tool to follow your implementation progress which as chairperson of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Decentralization, I will follow and monitor day by day.

To the Superintendents, Mayors, Commissioners, and Traditional Leaders

To you Superintendents, it is really you that are on the spot. If we get it wrong we are in serious trouble [because it will be recentralization]. If we get it right the credit will be taken by you and the people. The executive is entrusting you with increased responsibility so as to be the bridge to the people. We promise you that we will make every effort to adequately prepare and capacitate you for this new role.

To the custodians of our traditions and cultures, we count on you to lead us in this process and confer it with the legitimacy, dignity and honor that you symbolize in our communities.

To our Partners:

We proffer our thanks for your relentless and continual support to our effort to achieve our developmental goals and objectives. We implore you to continue especially for our Decentralization Reform Agenda.

To Dr. Sawyer, the architect of decentralization, the power pressure of governance reform, thank you for your persistence and patriotism.

To all of us, it is my pleasure to officially launch our National Deconcentration Platform, which is our call to duty, and social contract with our people.

Thank you!