

DRAFT STATEMENT
BY
H.E. MRS. ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 49TH INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA
OCTOBER 1, 2009

MR. AMBASSADOR
MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORP
OFFICIALS OF GOVERNMENT
DISTINGUISHED LADIES & GENTLEMEN

Mr. Ambassador:

On the joyous occasion of the 49th Independence Anniversary of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, I am immensely pleased to convey on behalf of the Government and people of Liberia, and in my own name, sincere congratulations to you, Mr. Ambassador, and through you to my dear brother His Excellency President Umaru Yar' Adua and to the Government and brotherly people of Nigeria.

As the people of Liberia join the people of Nigeria in celebrating this momentous occasion, we wish to assure you that we are committed to expanding the cordial and

harmonious ties as well as the strong bonds of friendship and cooperation subsisting between our two countries.

Mr. Ambassador:

Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria's conduct of its foreign relations has earned the admiration and respect of many countries. Its steadfast commitment to Africa Unity, peaceful co-existence and economic cooperation through the United Nations, African Union and other international bodies has made it both a responsible and respected member of the international community. Nigeria's policy has continued to evolve and today, it is playing a primary role in the West African sub-region in promoting regional peace and security as well as regional economic and social development.

In this connection, the people of Liberia, recall with deep gratitude the pivotal role Nigeria played in ending our civil war and its continued assistance to Liberia's transition from war to peace and socio-economic development. Nigeria's presence in the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) as well as its assistance in the restructuring and professionalization of our military continue to have a most beneficial impact.

Under the Agreement on Technical and Manpower Assistance between our two countries, Nigeria has granted approval for the assignment of instructors to teach in our schools and Universities. Under the same program, Nigerian medical doctors will shortly be deployed to several hospitals in the country to assist us meet urgent capacity needs. With

our encouragement Nigeria is becoming an important player in our private sector – in banking, trading, consultant services.

Mr. Ambassador:

I have just recounted acts of African brotherhood and solidarity which Nigeria has continued to exemplify in its relationship with Liberia. And this should not surprise anyone because our relations have been longstanding and far-reaching. Before Nigeria's independence, Liberia maintained a legation in Lagos to facilitate the movement of nationals between our two countries. Following Nigeria's independence October 1, 1960, Liberia immediately recognized Nigeria as a sovereign state. Since then our two countries have solidified the bonds of friendship and cooperated on many issues of mutual interest.

During the Nigerian struggle for self-determination and thereafter, some of its outstanding sons such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obofomi Awolowo, Abubakar Tafawa Bellewa and Amadu Bello paid frequent visits to Liberia. In more recent times President Babangida, after whom the school of International Studies at the University of Liberia is named, and President Obasanjo have visited.

Mr. Ambassador:

In spite of the tremendous gains that have been made to advance peace and security in our sub-region, we are still

confronting major challenges. Specifically, I refer with grave concern, to the volatile situation in the neighboring Republic of Guinea. As a post conflict country, Liberia and other countries of the Mano River Union, have deep concerns about any acts in a neighboring state that could adversely impact the peace which we enjoy. This is also true for the entire West African sub-region.

It is in this context that my Government has expressed grave concern about the recent situation in the Republic of Guinea which led to many deaths. We have called on the Guinean Authorities and the Guinean people to exercise restraint and fully adhere to the previous agreement for the holding of democratic elections in that country early next year.

As the current head of the Mano River Union, Liberia will remain engaged in the peace process through the International Contact Group on Guinea and any other sub-regional and regional initiative. It was in this context that recently, in furtherance of the desire of the ICG-G that Heads of State of the sub-region use their good offices in support of encouraging a smooth transition to democratic rule, I along with President Wade of Senegal visited Guinea. In private discussions following an unexpected public event, with the leadership of the CNDD, we call on the authorities to respect the AU and ECOWAS positions on Guinea, cooperate with the ICG-G and engage civil society in the political process. It is a source of considerable regrets that these desired objectives are not being pursued and therefore call on both the ECOWAS and the ICG-G to meet urgently to discuss the situation.

Mr. Ambassador, today, marks a significant milestone in your country's existence and I deem it appropriate to join you, your many guests and the Nigerian community in celebrating this occasion. Let me once again assure you that Liberia will stand by the Federal Republic of Nigeria just as it has stood with us in up-holding those shared principles which form the basis for our friendship and solidarity. May Liberia-Nigeria continue to grow stronger in the years ahead.

I thank you.

TOAST:

Mr. Ambassasdor, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Please raise your glasses and join me in a toast to the good health and prosperity of President Yar'Adua and the Government and brotherly People of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.