

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity's Re-Chartering Program
& Martin Luther King, Jr. Peace Award Dinner
Paynesville Town Hall
Thursday, January 19, 2012**

Mr. Vice President;
President Pro-Tempore;
Officials of Government;
Special Guests;
Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Fellow Liberians;
Friends of Liberia:

This is a very special evening for me, as I stand to welcome back to Liberia the Brothers of Alpha Phi Alpha, after a long absence, which has come with an impressive 25-member delegation; and by you, dear Brothers, to witness the re-chartering of the local chapter, Eta Epsilon Lambda, among whose past and present members have been some of the most prominent professional men in the Liberian society; and to receive from this distinguished organization not one, but two esteemed awards. What a great way to spend this evening, right after my Inauguration!

Thank you for planning your visit to be able to join the ceremonies of that Inauguration, as you saw myself and Vice President Boakai take the oath, committing ourselves to move our country forward. We are touched by your presence at these ceremonies.

Alpha Phi Alpha represents a fraternity that, since 1906, develops leaders, promotes brotherhood and academic excellence, while providing service and advocacy for your communities. It supported legal battles against segregation, exemplified by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.; addresses social issues; undertakes philanthropic initiatives; and spearheaded the campaign to erect the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, in Washington, D. C., which was formally

dedicated in September 2011 – the first on the National Mall to honor an African American.

Thank you, Alpha Men, for having always been a part of the fabric that is Liberia, since the first Alpha chapter in Africa, Eta Epsilon Lambda, was established in Monrovia, in 1958, followed by the establishment of a second chapter, Kappa Phi Chapter, at the University of Liberia and Cuttington, in 1976.

Tonight, also, following the re-chartering, you have made me the first recipient of the **Martin Luther King, Jr. Peace Medal**, named after our icon and Civil Rights Activist and Nobel Peace Laureate, representing an award to men and women who “embody the same selfless causes of justice, equal rights, civil rights, women’s rights and peace building.” You have selected me, as stated in your letter, for my courageous leadership as President of Liberia – believe me, in Liberia you have to be courageous! -- and for my non-violent struggle for women’s rights in Liberia.

You have also honored me, Dear Brothers, with the **Alpha Award of Honor** – the highest honor your Fraternity gives to non-members – making me the third Liberian President to receive this award, along with President William V.S. Tubman, in 1959, and President William R. Tolbert, Jr., in 1976. I am humbled and thank you most sincerely.

I am proud that tonight, this chapter has been reactivated. While awaiting the re-chartering, Eta Epsilon Lambda actively contributed to the betterment of Liberia, especially through education. As you mentioned, dear Brothers, last year you sponsored 43 girls through the Liberian Education Trust (LET), a charity which I founded in 2006. This year, under the new leadership of Executive Director Hester Catakaw, whom you acknowledged, the chapter plans to increase that number to 100 girls. Thank you for permitting the proceeds of this evening’s Dinner toward that effort.

We are pleased that you are supporting the Liberian Education Trust, which began operations in 2006, as I stated. LET’s original mandate called for what we call the “50-500-5,000” – to build 50 schools, to train 500 teachers, and to give 5,000 scholarships to young girls. We achieved that goal.

LET has recently been reactivated, and is working with stakeholders, in Liberia, to continue to provide access to quality learning and to expand our scope to the promotion of the building of libraries – something woefully lacking in most of our schools. By doing so, empowering young girls, we hope to help to break the chain of poverty, disempowerment and inequalities that have traditionally followed a preponderance of Liberian women from childhood. The vision is to create an educated and prosperous Liberian population who, with education, can support their families and their nation.

During 2011, through the reactivated LET, US\$239,000 has been raised through partnerships and bilateral support, which provides 940 scholarships for disadvantaged girls. We have funded capacity-building workshops, the piloting of three libraries, and a Saturday reading program at three schools in Monrovia and environs. LET is currently collaborating with 17 partners to implement its program.

Also this year, Eta Epsilon Lambda Chapter will launch the Aaron B. Milton, Sr. Engineering Scholarship at the University of Liberia. I understand that you have already committed to work with the Ministry of Gender and Development and United Nations Women to fight violence against women and children. More importantly, Eta Epsilon Lambda will start a program to mentor young men to be gentlemen and leaders. In mentoring them to be gentlemen and leaders, they will be following in your footsteps.

Brothers of Alpha Phi Alpha, the Sorors of Alpha Kappa Alpha – from one Alpha to another – with so many of them in the house, stand up, Alpha women! I stand before you, a proud Lifetime Member of AKA, and recipient of its highest honor, the International Service Award, granted to people deemed to have made a positive difference in the lives of others.

By the lives Alpha Kappa Alpha women lead, and the example we set, we remain true, to this day, to the purpose of our Founders to be of service to mankind, and most especially to help women and girls of color. Everywhere, the men of Alpha Phi Alpha and the sisters of Alpha Kappa Alpha are leaving their mark on the world in almost every profession.

I am pleased to inform you that our local chapter, Eta Beta Omega Chapter, has been reactivated. I will have to go back to our Basileus and tell them that we need a ceremony like this. This has happened after years of civil strife. AKA, through the leaders and the former President who visited, have now committed to fund the construction of a strategically needed marketplace, here in Paynesville, to be called the Omega Market. While not named for the chapter, we could not have planned it a better way. It represented the Omega Tower, installed by the United States to be able to monitor submarine movements in the world. Liberia happened to be one of at least three sites in the world, and it was called Omega. So, today, it is on that site that that market construction, which has now started, that we hope will provide a modern marketplace for many of our women in the Paynesville suburb. We believe that this is just another example of the Alpha culture, the Alpha spirit.

I applaud you for gracing our occasions. We thank you for this demonstration of support for Liberia. We thank you for all that you have done to continue to demonstrate the spirit of our fraternity and sorority. The people of Liberia extend to you their deepest appreciation.

Let me say a big thank you to all of those in this room who have supported this event, and who will continue to support Alpha Phi Alpha in its work, in Liberia and the world. Thank you. I wanted to test your strength by going on for another 10 minutes, but as I look around, for John Woods, I will say thank you all.