

**Message by Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
President of the Republic of Liberia  
On Launching a Monthly Broadcast on the Theme:  
“Vision for Education in Liberia”  
Delivered on September 12, 2012**

Fellow Liberians: This is a Message to the Nation on the subject of Education.

School has reopened, and many of you are returning to classrooms. I hope the break provided a chance to set your goals for this new school year. I hope you will meet these goals, and that you will make yourselves proud and make your parents or guardians even prouder by what I know you can achieve. I wish for all of you God’s guidance and blessings over the course of this school year.

I also welcome back to the classrooms all of our teachers, principals and school administrators. My hope is that the vacation afforded many of you a chance to reflect upon your much-needed contributions to our society and how, together, we can continue to improve upon the quality of education we intend to give to our children.

In 2006, we announced that Education would be our Number One Priority, recognizing that the majority of our young people had not had an opportunity to go to school. Toward this objective over the past six years, we constructed or renovated over 500 schools all over the country, with 96 still ongoing. We tried to enforce compulsory education and directed that primary and middle-level education would be free in all public schools. We significantly increased the level of support to the University of Liberia and provided subsidy to private institutions. We reformed and expanded the domestic and external scholarship program. We introduced the Education Reform Act of 2011, which provides the new vision for the Ministry of Education.

Today, the experience shows that building schools, making them tuition free and providing increased financial support was not enough. The quality of

education was lacking, leaving our students far below the standard of students in the West African Examinations Council (WAEC).

We sought to remedy the situation, brought about by the lack of qualified teachers, by reactivating the Rural Teachers Training Institutes and granting incentives to those specializing in education. We increased teachers' salaries and brought back the Peace Corps. We gave certain responsibilities for the schools to local authorities by establishing local schools boards.

Although much progress has been made from these measures, and we can boast of a tripling in enrolment and spending in the education sector now stands at 12 percent of budgetary appropriation, we are still not satisfied with the results.

Parents continue to send their young children into the streets to sell when they should be taking them to school.

Youths, particularly girls, drop out of school too early due to a high level of teenage pregnancy, early marriages, poverty and high incidence of rape. Traditional cultural practices also take young girls away from school.

The increase in and regularity of payment of teachers' salaries led to large numbers of "ghosts" and duplicated names. Private schools suffered as a result because they were denied their subsidies. Students, more interested in a degree than an education, entered the workforce unprepared.

We must now address these problems with one clear objective in mind: improvement in the quality of education and training. If we do not do so, you, our youths, will blame us because you will not be able to compete in this increasingly globalized world.

I will be holding consultations with all the institutions and entities that have responsibility for the education of our children. I will listen to their suggestions, even as we carry out our responsibility to fix things as the people elected us to do.

Students must be students, pursuing a good education to enable them to get a good paying job at home and abroad. The minority of those who insist on

disturbing the peace of those willing to learn will be denied the opportunity for placement in public schools.

Teachers are expected to serve, earning the respect and confidence of students by their deportment. We offer gratitude to the many who volunteered their service in those difficult years, but they must now be prepared for redeployment and training, thus providing our students with better qualified teachers.

Efforts are under way to settle teachers' arrears, and we ask them for patience; but the payroll clean-up exercise must be pursued rigorously as this is the only way we can produce the savings that will enable us to increase the salaries of all civil servants, including teachers.

Stronger Parent/Teacher Associations (PTAs), with increased interest in the activities of students and school administrators, will help us achieve our objective of better quality education.

The proliferation of low-quality private schools is undermining quality education, and fooling those young people who attend them. More attention and regulation will be ensured, including subsidy withdrawal where such applies.

Our institutions of higher learning, particularly those which are State-owned, must do their part to improve the quality of education. Low admission standards condone poor-quality high school education and produce unqualified job seekers. A degree holder who cannot write a good letter or professional paper speaks volumes of the institution from whence they graduated. Institutions of higher education need a campus environment where it is more conducive for their learning.

The Government can and must do more in the exercise of its responsibility to make quality education available and affordable to all, young and old. The introduction and expansion of quality vocational and technical training will provide an opportunity to those not able to pursue full academic training. Continued literacy training for our market women will produce a larger pool of informed citizens.

Increase in the remuneration for teachers and professors will attract those most qualified. Rapid and forceful action against contractors and their official collaborators will serve as a deterrent to those who violate the public trust. An appropriate level of subsidy for those institutions that meet our quality standards will lead to better educational training for the larger number of people that cannot be accommodated in public schools.

Our churches, which have been strong partners to government over many years, must be given particular preference in this regard.

Improvement in the quality of teachers in public schools must be matched by improved teaching facilities and materials such as science laboratories. Appropriation in the current fiscal year budget will address the lack of a public library, even as we launch a major partnership appeal to seek support for smaller community libraries.

Community colleges are good to improve access to education, particularly for our rural youths. However, a poor-quality community college, on account of a lack of qualified instructors and proper training materials, takes us away from the objective we seek. Regionalizing such institutions may be a better intermediate step.

Reading is the key to education, requiring major effort to address the situation reported by the Early Grade Reading Assessment Liberia Plus Baseline Report, which shows that the majority of our second graders could not read. We appeal to all officials of Government to consider donating a half hour of their time each week to a reading session in one of our schools.

Expansion in electricity will provide the opportunity for distance learning, particularly for those pursuing training in technical areas such as medicine, engineering and agriculture.

My Fellow Liberians:

Ultimately, the greatest legacy we can leave our children is a solid foundation of quality education. Our intention is to build an educational system in which every Liberian child gets an education that is equal to their inherent potential.

Much of what Government does will depend on the cooperation of parents, teachers, school functionaries, community leaders and those public institutions which have responsibility for educating and teaching our young people. You can count on us to continue to do our part to transform our country and make educational opportunities available to all Liberians.

May God continue to bless Liberia!