

**Address to the Nation  
By President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**

**April 1, 2015**

***[As Delivered]***

My fellow Liberians:

About a year ago, we were invaded by an enemy we did not know and were not prepared to confront. The deadly Ebola Virus Disease caused the deaths of many of our fellow citizens and robbed many more of their livelihoods. It overwhelmed our recovering health care system and threatened to reverse our economic recovery gains. There were terrifying projections of more deaths and the possible collapse of the Liberian State.

In response, I asked you, my fellow citizens, to join in efforts to fight back. I counted on you to stand up with me in combating the disease and facing down the horrifying projections.

Across superficial and perhaps historic divisions of our nation, we stood together. We came together – Christians and Muslims; youths and elders; religious, political, traditional and community leaders; ordinary folks; teachers and students; drivers and passengers; public and private enterprises – we who have felt compelled to be suspicious of each other came to appreciate the commonality of our fate. Each, especially our brave health care workers, played important roles with some going beyond the requirements of their duties to assist and save the lives of their countrymen and women.

We adapted new behaviors some of which run counter to long-held traditional beliefs and religious practices. By the end of the year – on December 31, 2014 – across the country, we met an important goal. We reported no new case on that day

confirming to ourselves and to the world that it is really possible to fight this disease and to eliminate it from our country, and from our region.

We went on to do better. On March 5, we had counted at least 28 days – only 14 short of the required 42 – without a new case. We did this because of your trust and confidence as well as your vigilance and fortitude. I thank all of you for this, and especially for standing with me, even as our situation at one point seemed hopeless. This experience should convince all of us that when we face common problems together, like we confronted Ebola, together, we will always overcome the challenges – we will always prevail.

Unfortunately, we faced a small setback in our progression. On March 25, one of our citizens tested positive. Sadly, she has passed away. We continue to grieve with all those who have lost loved ones and celebrate all of our survivors. Because to date, there have been no new cases reported, and we are continuing our vigorous contact tracing and support for all those under observation, we have started a new countdown. I am confident that the Incidence Management System team which was set up to coordinate our response and their local and international partners have the experience and expertise to contain and bring this outbreak to an end.

The truth also is that we continue to learn and may still not know everything about this virus. I therefore call on all of you to continue to play your role – to adhere seriously to all of the preventive measures with which we are all very familiar, and to remain vigilant.

Fellow citizens, as you may recall, we asked the world to join us in the fight against this virus. They continue to respond, and we are most grateful. We have also engaged world partnership to support a regional effort that would set all three of our affected Mano River Union countries free of this disease. Accordingly, on March 3, the three leaders met with partners in Brussels, and will meet with more partners again in Washington, DC this month to present our regional recovery program, and seek their support.

Although we are pushing for support for a truly regional recovery effort because we understand the inescapable social, political and economic linkage that exist especially among our three countries; here at home, we continue to position our country to take advantage of the enormous outpouring of international goodwill toward our country. We continue to ask our partners to join us as we undertake the implementation of our Post-Ebola Recovery Program. This, on our part, will call for more concerted efforts to reform our service delivery systems and transform the structures of our economy through national development plans and

strategies that not only specifically respond to the epidemic but are consistent with the goals and aspirations of Liberia's development agenda – the Agenda for Transformation and Liberia Rising 2030.

With vulnerabilities exposed at the height of the outbreak, we continue to lift the rebuilding of the health system as a primary concern. Toward this end, we are implementing a ten-year program of training of health care professionals, improving and expanding services at primary and secondary healthcare centers, upgrading county hospitals and establishing three regional hospitals. We are emphasizing the repositioning of JFK to meet its envisioned role as a national referral center.

It remains an open secret: that I am a critic – perhaps too harsh a critic – of our educational system. The truth, however, is that while we admit the scarcity of resources and the fact that rebuilding the educational system after years of decline cannot simply be a quick-fix. We are determined to address deficiencies in qualified instructors and inadequacies in facilities and instructional materials. We intend to achieve this through consistency in effort, holding all stakeholders including parents, students, teachers and administrators accountable, as well as increase resources and support to the educational sector.

We are also continuing the expansion of youth empowerment programs especially through technical vocational education and training by which we continue to change the challenging statistics of youth unemployability. In this regard, we are strengthening the linkage between concessions and technical and vocational training centers so that we train our people for available jobs.

Notwithstanding the setback of Ebola which saw the departure of contractors, technicians and stoppage of concession operations, I am pleased with the progress in our infrastructure development. Our programs for road, power, ports and water and sanitation improvements are now restarted. These programs are the backbone for expanding the economy and improving the lives of our people. They are therefore critical to achieving our goal of social transformation through inclusive growth.

As an agrarian nation, our economic vision must increasingly shift to agriculture to ensure that we move away from the old system of enclave extractive industries. We must aim at a higher potential for impact and export diversification through stimulation of production in a select few of our traditional tree crops such as rubber, oil palm and cocoa. While continuing to support small farmers, food security can only be achieved through large scale mechanized operations and agro-

industrial operations which focus on our nascent small and medium sized entities, including agro-processing operations that are largely dominated by women.

We are determined that in all that we do the private sector must become the driving force of the economy and that Liberia entrepreneurship must play its rightful role. This can only be achieved with your support in promoting and buying products made in Liberia, in maintaining a good credit rating, in paying your rightful taxes.

The Administration will continue to also do its part in making it easier to do business by reducing the bureaucratic hurdles thereby creating a more conducive and friendly business environment, by ensuring that the tax regime is fair and allows businesses to expand. We will also continue to improve the infrastructure required for business success.

Without a doubt, all of these plans and efforts will require a stable environment of peace and security achieved through higher levels of support for ongoing security sector reforms, and for a stronger open and democratic society that helps us to continue the fight against corruption and injustice.

As we continue to consolidate our democratic governance to guarantee our continued peace and security so that as UNMIL draws down – and indeed they must – we can stand up, – and we salute all of our partners who have continued to support us in maintaining the peace.

We especially applaud our Nigerian partners who in their recently concluded exemplary and history-setting elections have strengthened the resolve of all African nations to continue on the democratic path that ensures long lasting peace and sustainable development across the African continent.

We, too, are in the processes of deepening our own democratic credentials. In Gbarnga, Bong County, at a conference to review issues of possible amendment to our Constitution, we are poised to take another important step toward our quest to deepen the ongoing transformation of the country. It is not often that the Constitution gets reviewed or amended. I therefore urge all Liberians to be fully engaged with the process and to keep our engagements constructive and respectful of the rights of others.

As we work to achieve these objectives, the administration over the remaining years will need to be made stronger to underpin our determination for more timely and effective implementation of our overall development objective.

Dear Citizens, as your leader, I will remain true to our cherished ideals. I therefore ask for your continued trust and confidence to help me get these important things done. I ask for the same unity of purpose across the useful diversities of our government and our society – the diversities which improves governance and make our society stronger. I ask all of you for the same spirit of community ownership and collective urgency as we embark on the road for Post-Ebola Recovery.

May God bless Liberia and save the State.