

**Remarks by The Visitor of the University of Liberia
Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
At the University's 92nd Commencement Ceremony
SKD Sports Complex, Paynesville
May 9, 2012**

Thank you, all Protocols having been duly observed!

I congratulate this Class of 2012, on behalf of our Government and people, and applaud your family, sponsors, the educators and all who have been instrumental in getting you to where you are today. You, graduates, owe to these people, and many more, a huge debt of gratitude!

Heartfelt congratulations to you, this year's Commencement Speaker, Mr. Alexander B. Cummings, Jr., of Coca-Cola International, upon whom this institution has conferred the Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters (LHD), Honoris Causa, in International Studies. I recall, Mr. Commencement Speaker, that as part of last year's Independence Day celebrations, we conferred upon you the distinction of Knight Great Band in the Humane Order of African Redemption recognizing your many achievements. We hope that the graduates of today will see you as a role model, will see you as an example, will recognize that their attitudes will determine their altitude.

It pleases me greatly, as President of the Republic and as The Visitor of this University, to see that 142 – almost a quarter! -- of today's 576 graduates are receiving their degrees in disciplines our country needs so desperately: 16 new doctors; 12 pharmacists; 39 scientists and engineers; 40 agriculturists and foresters; and 35 new teachers. I understand that enrollment in these disciplines has tripled over the last five years. This means that our message to you, of the skills that are required to carry your country forward, is getting through.

At the same time, we recognize that the need for reaching the critical mass of the technical skills needed in our country still leaves a big gap. If we are to forge ahead with our reconstruction agenda, the number of graduates in these essential disciplines must be far higher. Freshmen, sophomores, juniors: please take heed! It is never too late to switch majors and to gain expertise in areas that your country desperately needs. That, indeed, is patriotism. Do this, and you'll never, ever, have to look for a job. The job will look for you!

To compete and survive in a world in which technological advances are occurring daily, we need more trained citizens with advanced skills, the ability to think strategically, and the capacity to deliver effectively. I urge you to have an open mind to the many possibilities that await you.

When we came to office in 2006, we rightfully placed emphasis on primary and secondary education. As we constructed more schools, in almost all areas of the country, it is time now to expand our vocational, technical, and tertiary education.

We depend on tertiary education to provide the leadership and research necessary to sustain a viable economy. We depend upon vocational and technical education to run the engines of development, realizing the goals of our Vision 2030 will depend on the quality of products from these tertiary educational institutions.

My preoccupation has always been not only to access tertiary education, but the quality and relevance of the curriculum to national development. As we have pointed out, too many of our young people continue to be enrolled in most disciplines that do not meet our development needs. We ask you again to reconsider and enter those areas where your country needs you.

Patriotism was the topic of our Inaugural Address. Education also focuses on patriotism. Patriotism goes hand in hand with discipline: applying yourselves to your studies; respecting the laws of the land; showing respect for authority. Look around, the examples are there to see. Wherever people speak well of their country, wherever people show commitment to their country, wherever people join hands to move their country forward, wherever people abide by the rules, those countries do prosper.

Class of 2012: You have an opportunity, when you leave here today, to join the ranks of those who build, those who construct. Graduation is merely the beginning of your journey for self-improvement. Continue to seek knowledge, as you step boldly into the future and do your part in fulfilling our dream for our beloved Liberia, for all people, for peace, stability and prosperity.

Mr. Matthews, I heard you, about the transportation problem of the University. We have an obligation to work with you in that regard. But let me say we have a greater calling. Our calling is to build a University of Liberia Campus that compares to other universities in Africa and the world.

While we want to see the headquarters and you moving from Monrovia to Fendall, we want to see Fendall accommodate a larger number of students where they will have an academic environment in which they can study and become the scholars and the technicians that the country needs.

Bravo, Class of 2012! Bravo for your achievement! Go out into the world and claim your future!

Thank you.