

**Special Address by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
At Swearing-in Ceremony of U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers  
C. Cecil Dennis Auditorium  
Tuesday, January 24, 2012**

Thank you, and good afternoon to all!

Ambassador [Linda Thomas-Greenfield], I listened to the Oath as you administered it, and I think we have to change ours. Lots of good things in that one that we could use as a commitment, like “I take this obligation freely...”

Five months ago, I spoke at the swearing-in ceremony of 14 Peace Corps Volunteers – dedicated and committed Americans who took a similar Oath of Office and also pledged to do their part to lift Liberia through education, with the emphasis on teacher training -- a precious gift to the Liberian people, given where our educational system has been, whence it has come.

Before then, the Volunteers who came to Liberia stayed less than a year, leaving us long before we wanted them to go. That has changed, thanks to all of you. Last year’s Volunteers, plus you 13 who have just taken the Oath, will be with us for a full two years. For that the Liberian people are grateful.

And like the Ambassador said, we asked for you, we want you, we want you to be with us.

Today, 13 of you Peace Corps Response Volunteers come from 11 states in the United States -- California, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Washington, Wisconsin, Utah.

Some of these states have also hosted Liberians; some of them have opened their educational institutions to Liberians. You are coming from there, you will meet some of them here who have returned home from training in those places, and I hope you find a way to bond with those as you share some of the culture of those states in which they studied.

Your interest, your decision to serve in Liberia, signals to us that we, too, as a nation have made important strides in the security of our nation, in promoting good governance, promoting education, economic growth and health.

As I stated in the State of the Nation Address on yesterday, education is the cornerstone of our nation. When the people are educated, the nation prospers. Thus, if Liberia is to continue on the path of progress, that progress must start in the classroom! The lack of qualified teachers in our secondary schools has resulted in the abysmal showing and mass failures of our students in the West African Examination Council (WAEC).

We place emphasis on education and we pointed to the fact that our high school students continue to perform poorly, below average in math, below average in the sciences. It showed that our sixth and ninth graders are below average in math and reading, and our twelfth graders read at the elementary school level. Many of our students graduating from school are writing at the junior school level.

That's our challenge. We have the primary responsibility as a government and people to address this problem. Your contribution and your support will enhance our efforts to address this. With your support we hope we will improve these standards for our public schools, focusing quality education. As I pointed out, many of our teachers do a good job; many of them were volunteers in those difficult days when most of our trained teachers had left the country. They served well, but they just don't have the qualifications, and we have to help them, through training, to enable them to perform better and thereby improve our own educational standards.

The impact of the presence of Peace Corps Volunteers cannot be overemphasized.

Thanks to you, the teachers; thanks to the host families, if some of them are here, who enabled you to assist us. As I said to the last group of volunteers, quoting President Barack Obama, he said "the Peace Corps remains an enduring symbol of U.S. commitment to encouraging progress, creating

opportunities, and fostering a better world.” Let me thank all of you for being here.

This is the dry season; that means I’ll be going around the country, from county to county. In Bassa, when you hear I’m there, please join me for Dumboy; in Lofa, when you hear I’m there, join me for tugborgee; in Nimba, when I’m there, join me for gaykpah – all of those great foods that were mentioned.

I want to thank the U.S. Government, thank you Ambassador! You’ve been a champion in promoting this. Thank you, Director [Mr. Vincent Groh] for all you’ve done to bring them here. And thanks to those from our own system – our Minister of Education, our Ministry of Foreign Affairs – who have been supportive to be able to get them here.

We look forward to your wonderful two-year stay in Liberia. We look forward to your sharing and also learning from us, from our people some of their attributes, some of their culture, and that you will build great friendships so that when you leave, you will always consider Liberia your second home.

Thank you for being here.