

**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY
VICE PRESIDENT JOSEPH NYUMA BOKAI, SR.
AT THE OFFICIAL END OF THE REPATRIATION PROCESS
AT THE SALALA IDP CAMP
IN BONG COUNTY**

April 20, 2006

We want to thank God for bringing you here and keeping you safe to his day. (Observe a moment of silence for all who lost their lives at the Camp). I bring you greetings from President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who attaches great importance to this program. She would have personally loved to come but urgent official duties could not allow her.

Today's ceremony signifies the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end.

We gather here today to end and close return process for our brothers and sisters who must now go home to restart their lives, till the soil, build new homes and bring up their children in an ideal surrounding. This occasion marks the start of a beginning for our displaced and war affected people who at the beginning had to flee their original homes with little or nothing; some with only babies and the elderly on bare backs, trekking for hundred of miles to a strange place the humanitarian organization called Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camp. The figure of IDP rose from a mere 100 in December 1989 to 350,000 by December 2003. Our international friends tell us that close to 500 million USD was spent in acquiring food and non food items (NFI) to enable our refugees and IDPs stay alive. IDP had to be provided with **WATSAN** and education opportunities for them and their children. The makeshift structures/dwellings that we are demolishing today became the most available type of living houses for our IDPs. This was the Beginning of the Beginning. The period ended with the commencement of the return process. This process drew up a result focused program that allow for our IDPs to return home to their land or origin, or choice, under the return process, IDP were provided with return kits, food and non food items or NFI, to encourage return movement.

All of us realize or must realize that the good will of the donor community is not forever. We cannot and will not be a country where handouts-bulgur wheat, corn meal and tarpaulin are our portion of the people. We should not and will not allow this to happen. There has to be a cut off point. Our people must again gain their self-respect; Relief food must be a thing of the past. Our people must farm the land, build decent homes for themselves and their children and provide education and other services for themselves. This government is committed to helping you rebuild your lives.

Our people - IDP must leave these "Bafas" where only a man and his wife slide in at night and cannot even stand up while inside and they must now go to their towns and villages where they and their family can sleep in the same house.

This, my brothers and sisters, is the Beginning of the End.

To begin the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end, we symbolically demolish a hut/Bafa to signify to all the World that displaced life and displaced food are over. Liberians are willing and prepared to start over a life of development, productivity and stability. We will certainly study war no more. We, by this gesture, inform our international partners that when ever you visit us henceforth, you will meet us not in a barrack like camp, but in our towns and villages.

As we demolish these huts, we are sending a clear message to the world that this episode in the life history is over and we are now marking a new chapter. We must never again let ourselves to be reduced to this level of receivership! We must never again permit the things that give rise to the condition we are ending today, to occur again.

As we commence the end of the beginning, we must thank all our partners in progress, the international community, especially UNHCR for their assistance in getting our people back to their homes of origin or homes of choice. We thank the UNMIL for creating a safe and conducive environment in our country to allow our people to move about in safety and dignity. The government will through its agency LRRRC work along with the international community, especially UNHCR, to bring to final fruition the complete end of the return process. We hope and pray and that the residual case will be handled expeditiously and everybody will be back home and happy. We also thank the host communities for allowing our IDPs to farm on their hands to sustain themselves. We are a proud people, loving each other caring not which group you or I belong to. We once embraced each other, eating from the same bowl in a true sign of camaraderie. We were a nation of people who once boasted excellence in hospitality.

In closing, let it be said that Liberia will never go this way again. Our people are going to live a free live, bring up their children, in an environment that is free of hostility, violence, and the very threat of violence. Yes our people will be able to educate their children and together with the government provide conditions that help them enjoy the country. May God always bless us, protect our sovereignty, unify us, preserve our dignity and keep us safe. Thank you.