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Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's Independence Day Message to the Nation

Embassy of the Republic of Liberia in the United States , Tue, Jul 26, 2011

My Fellow Liberians:

Today, we celebrate 164 years as a Republic. Let us, in reverence towards God Almighty and our forbearers, give thanks for our nation and for our independence.

We have much to celebrate this July 26, fellow citizens. Our country is, indeed, blessed, and we thank God for bringing us to where we are today. After years of bitter conflict and destruction, Liberia is on the move again, due to God's blessing, and there's no stopping us.

It is important, as we celebrate the birth of our nation, to also reflect on its journey – where it was five years ago and where it is today. It is for that reason that the theme for this year's Independence Day commemoration, "Rallying Our Nation for Peace, Reconciliation and Development," is so appropriate. Our nation must have peace in order to reconcile our differences and to develop our beloved country.

Now in our eighth year of uninterrupted peace, we are showing the world that Liberia can become a post-conflict success story. Negative perceptions about us have given way to international respectability. Investors have come in large numbers to invest their resources in our country. We have created the enabling environment for Liberians and foreigners alike to peaceably go about their various activities. The dividends of this peaceful state of affairs are clear for all to see.

We are eight years into a two-decade process of recovery and development. In these years, we have cleared some significant hurdles, but the challenges ahead are perhaps the most important ones to tackle. They include building the institutions of government, of civil society, and building a private economy that will provide jobs and prosperity for future generations.

When we came into office in 2006, we faced a country that was completely destroyed and in need of complete reconstruction of both the state and the society. Post-war reconstruction in Liberia has been all-encompassing, involving security, the economy, infrastructure and basic services, governance, national status, and national healing. In all of these areas we have made significant progress, but the job is not yet done and we accept that we have more to do.

With peace and stability comes our great need for further reconciliation of the Liberian people, traumatized by war and by ethnic and social tensions. We have started that process, and have taken important steps to heal the



country through a fully established Independent Commission on Human Rights. They are moving forward with the national “Palaver Hut” programs.

We are celebrating our country's Independence in Lofa this year, a county which, a little over a year ago, was torn by religious and tribal conflict which set back its development. Our process of national healing and reconciliation is neither perfect nor complete, but we know that we've made the necessary first step in this long journey.

Our progress as a nation depends on a system which assures the peaceful transfer of power through the exercise of choice – the institutionalization of democracy. That is why this year, our national election year, is critical to our recovery. It puts to test all the work we have done to create a strong, open society, a democratic society. The national contest will test our democratic principles, our multiparty system, and our independent judiciary. Without these, there's no sustainable progress in a post-conflict country. We simply cannot afford to have the processes of peace, reconciliation and development interrupted, and the progress we have made turned around.

In June, on a visit to the United States, and in meetings with congressional leaders and the Obama Administration, we made some ambitious predictions. We told the American people that, should our country continue on the path this government has charted, Liberia will be self-sufficient in 10 years and shall no longer require foreign assistance. We went further to say that in developing our long-term perspective and in our development agenda, Liberia is determined to join the ranks of middle-income countries by the year 2030.

Because of our decision to be united, every citizen over the last five years has helped to lay the new foundation of our nation's development. Now every citizen shares the responsibility to build for the future. This is why we must rally, remind ourselves what it means to be Liberian, and celebrate our glorious independence.

Liberians in the Diaspora, wherever you are you, as you celebrate “26” in countries, cities, and towns far away from our shores, we want you to remember that you are an integral part of our reconstruction and renewal. Through your remittances, through your local investments, through your lobbying and advocacy on this country's behalf, through your participation in the democratic process, and your love of country, you have proven that in union strong, success is sure.

Let me, therefore, pay tribute to the patriotism, resilience, strength and determination of the Liberian people. Without you, it would have been impossible to make such great strides in so short a time. With your continued support, the sky is the limit.

As we celebrate 164 years as a nation, let us always ensure that no matter what, we must over all prevail in peace, reconciling our differences. The future of this country is one that we must collectively decide. Independence means that our destiny is in our hands.

Happy 26 to all, and may God continue to bless our native land, our Liberia!

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Source URL (modified on Oct 17 2019 - 12:50am):<https://liberianembassyus.org/in-the-news/her-excellency-president-ellen-johnson-sirleafs-independence-day-message-to-the-nation>