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## Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Liberian president, thanks Congress for Ebola aid

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Monrovia, Liberia - President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has expressed heartfelt appreciation to the United States government and partners for the progress the country has made in containing the Ebola virus disease. "It was the leadership of the Obama Administration supported by Congress that opened the space for the disease to stabilize in Liberia and encouraged the rest of the world to respond to this global crisis," the Liberian leader said. However, she warned that though much progress has been made, more has to be done as this is the most critical stage of the fight against the deadly disease. According to an Executive Mansion release, President Sirleaf made the statement when she addressed members of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs on Wednesday, December 10, 2014. The hearing discussed 'The Ebola Epidemic: The Keys to Success for the International Response' and was chaired by Senator Chris Coons (D-Delaware). The Liberian leader, providing an update of the progress made so far, said 13 Emergency Treatment Units, with a total of 840 beds, has only 136 patients; while 70 burial teams have buried 23 persons per day across the country compared to hundreds, months ago. "We have seen a drop from around 100 new cases per day at the peak of the epidemic, to only 10 confirmed new cases per day over the past week. Our six active laboratories have tested 60 samples a day, but on average only find 8 new Ebola cases per day. The 4,000 contact tracers which involve community workers are following some 7,000 persons. Doctors, nurses and other health care workers, some 174 of the over 3,000 who have died, are no longer at risk because quality treatment facilities are available to them. We are happy to say that 1,312 persons including 345 children, many of them orphaned, have walked away free from the disease," she told the US Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee. President Sirleaf indicated that though at 10 cases a day, the crisis is manageable experts have noted that reaching zero new cases will be much more difficult because the disease has retreated and must now be chased down in every corner. Citing an example of the challenges faced in Liberia, President Sirleaf highlighted the issue of contact tracing. She said for each patient in the US, there were around 40 contacts that needed to be quarantined and monitored. For Liberia, the challenge is even greater, with thousands more contacts, often in villages which takes hours to reach through the dense bush and deplorable roads. "This is one of the many reasons why continuing your support and our joint work together is so important," she pointed out. The Liberian President emphasized that full eradication will not be achieved until the whole region is freed from Ebola; there is prevention against future possible outbreak and until a medicine is developed, both preventive and curative to conquer this deadly disease. President Sirleaf cited the a regional Technical Summit hosted by Liberia on Tuesday, December 9, with Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Mali to share lessons and best practices which resolved that Ebola is a global issue that all countries must continue to confront. "This is why continuing assistance to the combined efforts with our neighbors remain a priority. This is



why the U.S. has been right to tackle it at the frontline, here in West Africa. This is why Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of WHO, was right when she noted that this is greatest peacetime challenge the United Nations and its agencies have ever faced. In Liberia, and in Sierra Leone and in Guinea, we continue to live this challenge,” she reiterated. The Liberian leader urged partners, most especially the United States government, to continue to support the efforts to her government to help the country graduate from treatment to prevention. She called for strengthening community ownership and responsibility for awareness and immediate response action, through the Community Care Centers that are being established with the support of USAID. Providing few statistics in this regard, President Sirleaf provided a grim picture of Liberia’s healthcare system. “Liberia has 218 medical doctors and 5,234 nurses to serve a 4.3 million population at 405 public and 253 private health facilities. This means we have 1 doctor for 100,000 people, compared with 4 per 100,000 in Sierra Leone, 10 per 100,000 in Guinea and 245 per 100,000 in the United States,” she said, noting that there are more Liberian doctors and medical professionals in the United States than at home; most of whom left during the war. She warned that Liberia is far behind and can only sustain the progress and prevent a recurrence through a better trained and better equipped health facilities – better diagnostic facilities for infectious diseases, better hospitals and better clinics. President Sirleaf informed the US Senate Subcommittee that her government has asked the 137 partners from some 26 countries who are with the country in this fight to join in this expanded effort. She stressed that Liberia must get back on the path to growth. “My government is preparing a comprehensive plan for Liberia’s post-Ebola economic recovery, accelerating our work in infrastructure – above all Roads to Health, electricity and WATSAN operations. A major push in the agricultural sector, where most Liberians are employed, will enable us to generate jobs and restore livelihoods. The private sector will play a crucial role,” President Sirleaf informed the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee. She appealed for an extension of the Millennium Challenge Corporation grant which, she says, would be a game changer for Liberia. “It would facilitate our post-Ebola economic recovery and put our development momentum back on track leading to substantial transformation of our economy. Liberia achieved MCC compact eligibility in 2012 by passing 10 out of 20 indicators, including control of corruption and again passed eligibility in 2014 by passing 10 out of 20 indicators. President Sirleaf expressed gratitude to the United States Congress, for the friendship and assistance, without which much progress would not have been made to date. She stressed that there remains a lot to do – “to ensure the resources are properly deployed by the many institutions to which it is directly allocated; to ensure that there is full accountability to you and all our partners and to the Liberian people.” She noted that her resolve to meet the challenge that confronts Liberia is strong and unrelenting. “We will win this battle,” she concluded optimistically. Others who addressed the hearing later included the Co-founder of Partners in Health, Dr. Paul Farmer; Vice-Dean for Public Health Program, Ponce Health Sciences University and World Vision based in Washington, D.C., Dr. Anne Peterson; President and Chief Executive Officer of Intra-Health International, Pape Gaye; and Senior Team Leader, Strategic response and Global Emergencies, Mercy Corps, Mr. Javier Alvarez. President Obama has requested US\$6.2 billion in emergency funding from Congress to fight the Ebola virus disease at home and abroad, although lawmakers announced late Tuesday they plan to authorize US\$5.4 billion at his request. (Article as published on the Executive Mansion website)

- See more at: [http://www.emansion.gov.lr/2press.php?news\\_id=3159&related=7&pg=sp#sthash.opqZjjJq.dpuf](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/2press.php?news_id=3159&related=7&pg=sp#sthash.opqZjjJq.dpuf) [1]

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