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# “Accounting For Our Stewardship” – President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Delivers Annual Message

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Monrovia, Liberia – Monday, January 23, 2017: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has used this year’s Annual Message to account for her stewardship after taking over the mantle of Authority as Executive President in 2006.

According to an Executive Mansion release, the Liberia leader catalogued her achievements amid the challenges when she addressed the Sixth Session of the 53rd Legislature in the Joint Chambers of the Capitol.

President Sirleaf said: “I am seventy-eight years old. I have been fighting Liberia’s battles for more than half a century – all my adult life – and our nation’s struggles have blended into

and are indistinguishable from my own. I have been a witness as our country has gone from civil unrest, dictatorship, anarchy and war; from the abuse of children conscripted as soldiers, pervasive sexual violence, and economic collapse; and then, finally, to peace, elections, development, and an open and dynamic civil society”. She said as we will witness an historic transfer of power, providing the basis for consolidation of post-conflict democracy; where the future will be transferred to the next generation of Liberians – a people empowered through education, new technologies, and the experience of having battled and defeated one of the world’s deadliest diseases.

President Sirleaf reminded Liberians of the opportunity to journey from where we came in January 2006, when Liberians, through an historic election, embraced change and a future of hope adding “I take this opportunity to recognize our shortcomings, and to define what we yet have to do to shape our future; to remind you of the robust consultation that led to Vision 2030, and I challenge all citizens to vote responsibly and demand the best of Liberia’s future leaders”.





She expressed gratitude to members of

the 53rd legislature for the ratification of thirty-two ECOWAS Treaties and Protocols, which demonstrates our regional commitment to ECOWAS's objective of promoting economic, social and cultural cooperation and integration. .

The Liberia leader added that: "The ratification of ten agreements with international partners to provide development financing to support our infrastructure agenda deserves commendation. These include, notably, the Gbarnga-Salaye Road Project; the Liberia Urban Water Supply Project; the Roberts International Airport Project; the Youth Opportunities Project; and the Accelerated Electricity Expansion Project. As our country gravitates towards managing our own security, your passage of the National Police Act and the Immigration Service Act is significant for this transition".

She then submitted for the consideration of the 53rd Legislature the: A Bill to Decriminalize the Violation of the Right to Freedom of Expression and to Repeal certain Sections of the Penal Law of 1978, and PRC Decree 88A; A Bill to Create the National Bureau of Concessions and State-owned Enterprises; A Bill to Amend the Act Creating the Monrovia Consolidated School System; A Fisheries Bill; A Bill to establish a specialized Court dedicated to cases of corruption and financial crimes; A Corruption Offenses Bill, designating corruption and specific acts of corruption as criminal offences under Liberia's Penal Code; A Bill on illicit enrichment, to strengthen and extend the powers of security institutions to investigate financial crimes; A Bill to protect Whistle-blowers and Witnesses; A Bill to revise the Liberia Criminal Procedure Laws removing the statute of limitation on corruption and other financial crimes; A Bill to establish the office of the Ombudsman, as prescribed by the National Code of Conduct; A Truth and Reconciliation Commission Process Bill; A Bill to Establish an Economic Free Zone; A Bill to Amend certain Provisions of the PPC Law; A Bill to Repeal Acts establishing the Agricultural and Cooperative Development Bank and the National Housing and Savings Bank; A Public Debt Bill; Bills to ratify various legal instruments of the African Union; and A Bill to Harmonize our Fiscal Year with that of ECOWAS countries.

She recalled that: "In 2006, we inherited a collapsed economy, which recorded a staggering ninety percent decline in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – the greatest decline by any nation since World War II. Our administration also inherited an unsustainable external debt level of US\$4.9 billion – more than six times our GDP, brought about by debt unserviced for over two decades. A large verified domestic debt of over US\$900 million lingered in arrears. The Treasury was virtually broke, facing salary arrears, unmet obligations to international bodies, and continuing food and fuel crises. With only US\$80 million in annual revenues, Liberia was at the bottom of a very deep hole, desperately needing revival and emergency measures. With your support, we resuscitated iron ore and rubber – our historical productive sectors. We took bold steps by cancelling or renegotiating concession agreements in the agriculture, mining and forestry sectors".

"In 2013, we experienced significant shocks that adversely impacted the economy. The decline in global commodity prices affected our two primary exports. UNMIL drawdown reduced purchasing power. The Ebola virus led to an exodus from the country, which brought most production-related operations to a virtual halt. GDP

plummeted to zero percent, President Sirleaf chronicled.

She observed that the lack of foreign exchange, brought about by economic shocks, negatively impacted the exchange rate, resulting in a slowdown in economic activity; which was mitigated by applying prudent liquidity management, thereby maintaining an annual average inflation rate within single-digit range.

President Sirleaf noted that in spite of progress being made two areas namely corruption and reconciliation continued to pose major challenges for her administration. “We have not fully met the anti-corruption pledge that we made in 2006. It is not because of the lack of political will to do so, but because of the intractability of dependency and dishonesty cultivated from years of deprivation and poor governance. We could not reap – you cannot reap – in government what has not been instilled in families, schools, churches, mosques and society in general,” she emphasized.

She said our country’s long struggle for national reconciliation has its genesis in history. A coup d’état and years of civil conflict exacerbated longstanding divides that have left deep wounds; thus underscoring that the methods and motivations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have not helped us to find a way forward to achieve the desired results for reconciliation.

“We are proud that today, under programs of regional cooperation, lights are already on in Ganta and Harper, to be followed by Zwedru and Fish Town, at an affordable price of twenty-five cents per kilowatt hour. It comes from the grid of Ivory Coast. National effort has already brought electricity to the Kakata corridor, with the Robertsfield and Tubmanburg corridors to follow later this year. A major achievement in power expansion is our FULFILLED promise to rebuild our Mount Coffee hydroelectricity facility. We thank all partners who have contributed to this, she indicated”.

She challenged the 53rd legislature about the critical need to conclude the law for land reform; noting that an antiquated deed registration system that made it difficult to establish clear chains of custody to enable land sales to be traced, was made even more unreliable by deliberate destruction and tampering of deeds and deed records, resulting in an epidemic of fraudulent land deeds.

Said President Sirleaf: “As we move toward the greatest test of our democracy, the coming elections, we note that despite calls from the National Elections Commission, campaigning for the 2017 elections seems well under way. As we prepare for open campaigning in a few months, I propose a two-day electoral forum, with all political parties and registered independent presidential candidates, to discuss issues pertaining to the electoral process and arrive at a common ground for the campaign and its aftermath. I have asked Dr. Amos Sawyer, Chairman of the Governance Commission, to convene the meeting. Apart from having played a leadership role in crafting the current Constitution, he presided over the Interim Government of National Unity and has served as election monitor in multiple places on the continent. He will be the best person to lead such a process. As soon as we work out logistics, in the next few days, Dr. Sawyer will be asked to proceed”.

She said her government will continue to support the development of more media institutions, not only in terms of their quantity but also their quality. She added: “While we are happy to adhere to the full framework of the Table Mountain Declaration that requires us to promote free speech and a free media through supportive legislations and policies, media owners, publishers and reporters are also demanded by the same Declaration to conduct themselves with integrity and a high level of professionalism”.

She said: “Our ECOWAS Chairmanship has also brought visibility, exposure and professional growth to other officials who have had to chair ECOWAS meetings in their respective sectors. Our country continues to benefit economically by convening sectoral meetings – at least five already having taken place in Monrovia. Our Chairmanship will be climaxed this May, when the 51st Summit of the Authority of ECOWAS convenes in our capital”.

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