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Harbel, Margibi County: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has opened the 51st Session of the Summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government and outlined achievements during her tenure as Chairperson of the Authority of Heads of State.

According to an Executive mansion release, the Liberian leader was speaking in Harbel, Margibi County at the Farmington Hotel when she opened the 51st Session of the ECOWAS Summit of Heads of State and Government.

It can be recalled exactly one year ago, on June 4, 2016, in Dakar, Senegal, on the occasion of the 49th Ordinary Summit of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, the

Authority entrusted with the leadership of the ECOWAS Community. She praised her predecessor – Senegalese President, Macky Sall, who had worked tirelessly on Community matters.

She acknowledged the progress made by Liberia, which was considered a pariah state just fifteen years ago. President Sirleaf said it took the sacrifices and the solidarity of members of this community to bring us to this day, when we can lead the sub-regional organization and be able to receive you all, in a peaceful and trending Liberia.

She also paid homage for the great work accomplished by those who held the mantle before her and ensured that our community work in the interest of our people, putting our unity and solidarity above all other consideration.

Recounting her assumption of the chairmanship of ECOWAS Authority, President Sirleaf immediately prioritized a four-point agenda with the main thrust on Consolidation of Democracy, Strengthening our Peace and Security Architecture; Improving Financial Stability and Promoting Institutional Reform, including the Review and Restructuring of the Community Institutions; Promoting Regional Integration through Agriculture; and Infrastructure Development.

She said in the area of democracy – sub-region recorded impressive gains leading to the peaceful transition through elections achieved in Cabo Verde and Ghana. President Sirleaf, on behalf of ECOWAS applauded Ghana for being the leader in this regard on the Continent. She paid tribute to the leadership of our ECOWAS Mediator, President Buhari of Nigeria, which saw a 22-year political domination in The Gambia come to an end in a peaceful transition. This, she noted was accomplished through several diplomatic and mediatory missions by the Mediation Team – Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia. She further recognized the pivotal roles played by Senegal, Guinea and Mauritania.

She indicated that this success came as a result of full solidarity and firm resolve by all of you to implement the decision taken at the 50th Summit, which received world acclaim and established ECOWAS as a model of decisive leadership in defense of regional democracy in Africa.



She said diplomatic and mediatory missions were taken to Guinea Bissau under the leadership of President Condé of Guinea as Mediator that brought together a historic gathering of representatives of all the political parties of Guinea Bissau in Conakry in October 2016. "Their discussions culminated in the Conakry Agreement, which outlined the roadmap to a resolution of the long standing political impasse in that country, she observed. President Sirleaf said these achievements would not have been possible without the support and collaboration of the African Union, United Nations, European Union, as well as other friendly bilateral partners outside our region. On efforts to consolidate peace and security in our region continue, she said: "With the realization that in the absence of peace, there can be no development. Terrorism has brought instability, death and destruction to many member states of our Community. What started a few years ago as a dispute about autonomy in northern Mali is now spreading. Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria have all been victims of terrorist attacks. In this regard, we acknowledge the gallant efforts of the Nigerian Government in degrading the capability of Boko Haram and support the spirited efforts of the Government of Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire, together with other countries of the Lake Chad Region." She stressed - "We can stem terrorism only if we strengthen intelligence capacity, improve information sharing and enhance coordination with the African Union and other regional organizations on the continent."

President Sirleaf informed the summit that good progress has been made in the restructuring of the Community institutions. She said in early December 2016, she undertook a working visit to ECOWAS Institutions in Abuja and met with the President and Judges of the Community Court of Justice, and the Speaker and Bureau of the ECOWAS Parliament at their respective headquarters. She said the visit provided her an opportunity to better understand the internal workings and the pace of the implementation of reforms, including fast tracking of the work of the Maxwell Stamp Consultants in restructuring Community institutions. She then thanked the leaders of the various institutions for the opportunity granted her during the visit with them.

She commended the Authority of Heads of State and Government for supporting reforms in all the Community institutions aimed at reducing operational and administrative costs, inefficiency and mismanagement of resources. The outgoing Chairperson emphasized that the reallocation of resources from administration to programs will improve services to our people. She however used the occasion to commend, particularly, the exceptional support and commitment made to this effort by the President of the Commission, Mr. Marcel de Souza.

She noted that existing protocols and mechanisms - call for financing our Community through contribution of the Community levy by Member States, which is the principal means of meeting the operational costs of our institutions and responding to security emergencies such as those faced by our peacekeeping troops in Mali and Guinea Bissau. She joined her colleagues in commending His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari for the relief brought by his recent expressed commitment to continue Nigeria's support to the community levy.

Touching on regional integration, she said the road to regional integration is likely to be long and require consistency especially where economies of several of our countries have progressed tremendously in the past years but are now plagued by the sharp decline in commodity prices on the world market.

She noted that regional integration plans continue on course as a result of the Community's collective resolve to implement the Protocols on Free Movement of People and Goods, particularly the Common Internal Tariff (CET), the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA).

"Our community has achieved considerable progress in the last four decades, including harmonization of macroeconomic policies, trade integration, regional infrastructure, all resting on the pillars of peace and security, democracy and rule of law. We applaud the free movement of people throughout our sub-region as the greatest achievement of all, because it provides to our people the freedom of cross border movement, without having to stand in line for visas, she emphasized."

President Sirleaf said: "To reach our objective of total integration, we owe it to our people to make cross border trade and travel as easy as possible for our people by eliminating harassment and imposition of personal fees by those many border posts. We must recognize that most of our people who travel across borders for trade, seasonal work or family visits do so by road. Small business and migrant workers constitute the backbone of our economic development and integration. Commerce will greatly be enhanced if we have a seamless cross border movement."

Looking forward; she said we have determined that agriculture and infrastructure will enable us to achieve transformation in the implementation of our Vision 2020. The success of several of our countries in value addition in agriculture can be expanded and our trade integration enhanced through acceleration of the several ongoing regional projects in roads, energy, and railroads. “Agricultural programs should consider innovative ways of integrating young people to minimize youth unemployment; a strong case also exists for air services connectivity to provide cost effective movement of citizens, increased trade, and tourism, as called for by the Yamoussoukro Declaration and Decision, she stressed.”

On Infrastructure in the Region, she underscored the development of road networks and energy generation and distribution. She then commended the Heads of State of Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire and the Ministers for Public Works, Road Infrastructure and Justice for launching the critical Lagos-Abidjan Corridor. “Today, we will be breaking ground, leading to finalization of the treaty on the second phase, the Dakar-Abidjan Corridor (DAC). We look forward to signing the DAT phase to meet the challenges to all of us including our development partners for rapid implementation of these important projects, she announced.”

The summit was attended by 12 Heads of State from Cape Verde, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea, Ghana, Togo, Mali, The Gambia, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau and Liberia. The summit also saw the participation of Israeli Prime Minister – Netanyahu, the EU Vice President, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General on West Africa/Sahel – Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, among others.







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