

**Speech by
Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia and
Commander-In-Chief of the
Armed Forces of Liberia**

**At the Commemoration of the
59th Armed Forces Day Celebration**

At the

**Barclay Training Center
Monrovia, Liberia
February 11, 2016**

(As Delivered)

We gather here today to commemorate the 59th Armed Forces Day celebration; a day set aside to honor our gallant men and women serving in our nation's armed forces. On this day, we also pay homage to those who made the ultimate sacrifices for our nation and our people.

I thank this year's Keynote Speaker, also DSO recipient, Minister Marjon Kamara, for the splendid speech delivered. Ambassador Kamara's tenure as our Permanent Representative to the United Nations elevated Liberia's international profile and promoted a tangible re-engagement of the AFL with the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations. We take due note of the suggestions you have proffered in enhancing the AFL's capability in a post-UNMIL environment.

I understand that Major General Gregory J. Vadnais, Adjutant General of the Michigan National Guard is here. We want to welcome you back to Liberia. Your leadership at the Michigan National Guard has been very pivotal for the kind of support and assistance thru mentorship and training that have benefited our Armed Forces.

We are pleased that on yesterday, the Minister of National Defense represented me, at the EBK Military Barracks, during the ceremony which renamed the Brigade Preparatory School to the LINDA THOMAS GREENFIELD PREPARATORY SCHOOL. Unfortunately she could not be here to participate, but the citation will be sent to her through the diplomatic channel. Secretary Thomas Greenfield played an essential role in supporting the existence of this school, and personally ensured donations and other supplies that is benefiting over a 1,000 young Liberians to acquire much needed quality education.

I also recognize in abstention, DSO recipient, Lieutenant General William "Kip" Ward, First Commander of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM). General Ward's leadership at AFRICOM brought renewed vigor to the enduring relationship between the Armed Forces of Liberia and the U.S. Military. It led to the launching of Operation Onward Liberty in 2010, which saw dozens of United States Military personnel deployed on a rotational basis to Liberia, over a five year period, to train, mentor and support the restructuring and professional development of the Armed Forces of Liberia.

Both Assistant Secretary Greenfield and Lt. General Ward deserve our personal thanks and appreciation for their leadership and support to the AFL.

I welcome you back to Liberia Ambassador Chigozie F. Obi-Nnadozie, one of our DSO recipients, who recently ended her tour as Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to Liberia. We hope you will remain engaged in strengthening our bilateral relationship which sought to promote regional peace and security.

I commend Ambassador Zhao of the People's Republic of China for his leadership and support of his government to the Armed Forces of Liberia. This partnership has culminated into training opportunities and the donation of several engineering equipment, as well as a fleet of military trucks and other supplies to strengthen the operational capacity of the AFL. China has remained engaged in supporting our development agenda, and making donations of much needed equipment and supplies to the AFL.

Mr. Vice President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, my congratulations to all other recipients of this year's Armed Forces of Liberia Distinguished Service Order for their immeasurable contributions and services rendered our Armed Forces. They have brought honor and credit to themselves, their families and their respective countries for their services rendered the Armed Forces of Liberia.

On a sad note, I want to pay homage to the late Major Lawrence Ayorigo of the Ghana Armed Forces who was deployed to Liberia in November, but had only served for a month prior to his demise in December 2015. It is our collective prayers that the Almighty God will grant comfort to his family, the Ghana Armed Forces and the people of the Republic of Ghana.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, each Armed Forces Day is celebrated under a theme carefully selected to serve as a path that harnesses efforts for the AFL's future training needs and responsibilities. This year's theme, ***“Military Support to Civil Authority in the Post UNMIL Environment,”*** is particularly important as the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) will be scaling down its troops and security, and revert same to the full responsibility of our Liberian military and security forces.

As Commander-in-Chief, I have implicit confidence in the ability of our troops and security forces to effectively execute their duties in a post UNMIL environment as evident by their levels of preparedness. I want to thank His Excellency Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the Secretary General and the UNMIL Leadership for the support, training and assistance to our security sector. Your role has been crucial in getting us to where we are today. Please convey to all troops contributing countries our gratitude for supporting the peace thus far.

There are unique capacities that the AFL can bring in supporting civil authority, particularly in our development efforts. The AFL has demonstrated over the years, with the recent acquisition of engineering equipment from our partners that they have a vital role to play in the reconstruction of our country.

We must continue to strengthen our border control mechanisms and remain vigilant against the negatives that will affect the peace and stability of our nation and people.

Likewise, we must not waiver to protect ourselves against extremism and the consequences of terrorism. Accordingly, we must be better informed and ensure effective coordination and preparedness between and among our military and civilian law enforcement agencies against any action that affect our peace, security and stability.

Today, our flag is being proudly carried by our soldiers in the tumultuous region of Timbuktu, Mali, a very volatile and dangerous mission. Our hearts go out to them and we look forward to proudly receiving them upon the end of their mission.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let me thank Minister Samukai and his team for the exemplary leadership in making our armed forces a “Force for Good”. Your efforts in transforming our military have

garnered the credibility and respectability both at home and abroad. In the same vein, let me thank you, Brigadier Daniel Ziankhan, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of Liberia, for your outstanding leadership and sense of discipline and direction that has engendered the confidence of the Liberian people. General Ziankhan, you make us proud. My personal congratulations.

I know how important the family is to our men and women who serve our country. I want to personally thank all of our families, husbands, wives, children and extended families for their continuous support, thus positively imparting the performance of our troops.

Finally, I wish to thank all members of the Armed Forces of Liberia – you, “Force for Good” - for your discipline, dedication to duty, commitment to the responsibility of protecting our territorial integrity. The gallantry exhibited by you in executing your mission and tasks such as your deployment in MINUSMA, your support through Operation Restore Hope, as well as Operation White Shield, Operation Fielder Blizzard, rehabilitating our community roads are worthy of commendation, appreciation and recognition.

Fellow citizens, the challenges we face today as a nation is an embodiment of the path we began nearly eleven years ago. We took bold decisions to change things and restore public confidence in our Military and Security Sectors. It had not been easy, against the background of constraints of limited resources and technical inefficiencies. In spite of it all, we did not waiver. We all were collectively firm in the belief that our intentions were for the future benefit of our citizens. The investments we have made in the military and our security sector, with the strong support of our partners, have given all of us the reassurance of a safe and secured society as UNMIL draws down.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the peace remains in our hands as we support our Armed Forces; Armed Forces we are proud of; Armed Forces we must all continue to support their efforts and improve the conditions and facilities under which they live and work.

I say to our men and women in arms, carry the Lone Star with pride and dignity. Remain a disciplined force for good. Dare to defend the gains of our democracy. Accept my congratulations. Happy 59th celebrations!

I THANK YOU.