

Greetings from the President – July 26, 2010

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Fellow Liberians: As we celebrate 163 years of independence as a Republic, I am compelled to reflect on this year's theme, "Utilizing Our Diversity to Enhance National Unity and Harmony."

How do we differ, as Liberians, and what are the ties that unite us as a people, as a nation?

"Utilizing Our Diversity to Enhance National Unity and Harmony"

In my travels across this great land we call home, I am struck by how much we, Liberians, look alike – similar in our features, our stature, and our roots. From Cape Mount to Cape Palmas, from Nimba to Montserrado, and from Lofa to Grand Kru; in town after town, village after village, our people resemble each other. We are one and the same.

What sets us apart are the dialects we speak – Bassa, Gola, Grebo, Kpelle, Krahn, Kru, Lorma, Mandingo, Vai, and many more. Look around you at another Liberian; unless the person speaks in a vernacular, it is almost impossible to pinpoint what part of the country he or she comes from. So ethnically, we are the same people; linguistically, we differ. It is through our speech that we are identified with a tribe, from a particular part of the country; and if that tribe is at odds with yours over land or other issues, animosities and divisions begin to assert themselves.

But what is it that unites us as a people? What is that characteristic that is intrinsic to all Liberians? What does it mean to be a Liberian and proud of that identity? Unlike other African countries, which had apartheid or colonialism as a common rallying cause, there is nothing in our history that gave us a real sense of national identity. We were always unsure whether we were true Africans or transplanted Americans, even though the majority of our population is of indigenous, native descent. Lacking a spirit of nationalism, we remain individualistic in everything we do – clannish, tribalistic, divided. We have never risen above that individualism to see the national good as that which binds us and is superior to anything else we are or represent.

"A house divided against itself cannot stand," Abraham Lincoln declared more than 150 years ago, referring to the division of his country over the issue of slavery. The same holds true for Liberia. Until we can find a common identity, a common sense of purpose, and a common understanding, we will always face the threat of disunity.

What will it take to get there – to make us feel as one people, united and in harmony? Unity denotes a coalescence of all parts, elements and individuals into an effective whole. Unity is also acceptance and respect amidst diversity.

Our goal, as Liberians, must be to unify our nation and put it on the path of sustained peace and development. We need, therefore, to come face to face with the issues that divide us, by first holding a real conversation, real debate on the subject. We need to talk openly and honestly all over this country about our history and our roots, about the evils of our past and the good in it too.

We have begun this process. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission made meaningful recommendations for the

healing, reconciliation, restoration of peace, prosperity and progress of our nation. It is important that we move ahead cautiously and strategically in the implementation of the Commission's recommendations. I especially welcomed those on National "Palaver Hut" Programs and reparation as true measures for reconciliation, and have called for identifying the resources for their implementation.

On this July 26 Independence Day, let us vow to stay on the path of national unity by recognizing the many contributions of all segments of Liberian society. Let us be patriotic and respect one another by examining our attitudes, our words and our actions. Let us say no to individualism and tribalism and religious rivalry and suspiciousness. Let us say yes to national unity, to religious tolerance, to trust. We cannot change our history; let us accept it for what it is and go forward. Only when we can do all these things will we move into the future together, using our diversity to build national unity and harmony among all Liberians.

As we celebrate 163 years as a nation, let us remember that we are all Liberians. Let us embrace our diversity, and unite, with one goal of Lifting Liberia.

Sincerely,
Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia

