Inaugural Address Of H.E. ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF

January 16, 2006

Excellencies, Fellow Citizens, Ladies and Gentleman

Let us first praise Almighty God, the Arbiter of all affairs of humankind whose omnipotent Hand guides and steers our nation.

Before I begin this address, which signifies the high-noon of this historic occasion, I ask that we bow our heads for a moment of silent prayer in memory of the thousands of our compatriots who have died as a result of years of conflict.

Thank you!

I also ask your indulgence as I reflect on the memory of my two rural illiterate grandmothers and my mother and father who taught me to be what I am today, and the families who took them in and gave them the opportunity of a better life.

Let us also remember in prayers during his affliction, His Grace Archbishop Michael K. Francis, the conscience of our nation.

Vice President Joseph N. Boakai and I have just participated in the time-honored constitutional ritual of oath-taking as we embark on our responsibilities to lead this Republic. This ritual is symbolically and politically significant and substantive. It reflects the enduring character of a democratic tradition of the peaceful and orderly transfer of political power and authority. It also affirms the culmination of a commitment to our nation's collective search for a purposeful and responsive national leadership.

We applaud the resilience of our people who, weighed down and dehumanized by poverty and rendered immobile by the shackles of fourteen years of civil war, courageously went to the polls, not once but twice, to vote and to elect Vice President Joseph Boakai and me to serve them. We express to you, our people, our deep sense of appreciation and gratitude for the opportunity to serve you and our common Republic. We pledge to live up to your expectations of creating a government that is attentive and responsive to your needs, your concerns, and the development and progress of our country.

We know that your vote was a vote for change; a vote for peace, security and stability; a vote for individual and national prosperity; a vote for healing and leadership. We have heard you loudly, and we humbly accept your vote of confidence and your mandate.

This occasion, held under the beautiful Liberian sunshine, marks a celebration of change – and a dedication to our agenda for a socio-economic and political reordering; indeed, a national renewal.

Today, we wholeheartedly embrace this change. We recognize that this change is not just for the sake of change, but a fundamental break with the past, thereby requiring that we take bold and decisive steps to address the problems that for decades have stunted our progress, undermined national unity, and kept old and new cleavages in ferment.

As we embrace this new commitment to change, it is befitting that for the first time in our country's 158-year history, the inauguration is being held on the Capitol Grounds, one of the three seats of Government. We pledge anew our commitment to transparency, open government, and participatory democracy for all of our citizens.

Yet, we are humbled and awed by the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead – to heal our nation's wounds, redefine and strengthen its purpose, make democracy a living and effective experiment, promote economic growth, create jobs, revitalize our health and educational facilities and services, and quicken the pace of social progress and individual prosperity in this country.

My Fellow Liberians:

Today, as I speak to you, I wish to state that I am most gratified by the caliber of the delegations of Foreign Governments and our international and local partners who have come to join us to celebrate this triumph of democracy in our country. I am particularly touched by the presence of the African Union Women Parliamentarians and others of my sisters, who are participating here with us today in solidarity.

I wish to pay special recognition to several African Presidents who are here today. His Excellency Mamadou Tandja, President of the Republic of Niger; His Excellency Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; His Excellency John Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana; His Excellency Thabo Mbeki, President of the Republic of South Africa; His Excellency Tejan Kabbah, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone; His Excellency Blaise Campaore, President of the Republic of Burkina Faso; His Excellency Amadou Toumani Toure, President of the Republic of Mali, and His Excellency Faure Gnassingbe, President of the Republic of Togo. All of you, especially the Leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), have spent invaluable time, energy, and the resources of your respective countries to help guide and support the process of restoring peace, security, and stability to Liberia.

To General Abdu Salam Abubakar and his Team, we thank you. We adore and respect you for your persistence and commitment in the successful implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement which gives closure to 14 years of civil conflict with my taking the Oath of Office today.

My dear Brothers and Sisters of West Africa:

You have died for us; you have given refuge to thousands of our citizens; you have denied yourselves by utilizing your scarce resources to assist us; you have agonized for

us, and you have prayed for us. We thank you, and may God bless you for your support to Liberia as well as for your continuing commitment to promote peace, security, stability, and bilateral cooperation within our. We thank you, and may God bless you for your support to Liberia as well as for your continuing commitment to promote peace, security, stability, and bilateral cooperation within our sub-region – and beyond.

Permit me to take special note of the presence of Her Excellency Mrs. Laura Bush, wife of the President of the United States of America, Her Excellency Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State of the United States, and other members of the American delegation. Mrs. Bush and I share a common passion and commitment to gender equity and the education of the girl child. I salute her for her work in Africa and in the Persian Gulf Region. I also thank her and Secretary of State Rice for their presence – and support. For us, this manifests a renewal and strengthening of the long standing historic special relations which bind our two countries and peoples. It also reflects a new partnership with the United States based on shared values. We are confident that we can continue to count on the assistance of the United States and on our other development partners in the urgent task of rebuilding of our nation.

We, note with satisfaction, the presence of Ms. Louise Frechette, the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations; His Excellency Cellou Diallo, Prime Minister of the sisterly Republic of Guinea; His Excellency Li Zhaoxing, Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China; His Excellency Hans Dahlgren, Special Representative of the European Union to the Mano River Union; His Excellency Louis Michel, Commissioner of the European Union for Development and Humanitarian Aid; His Excellency Alan Doss, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations in Liberia; His Excellency Dr. Ali Abdu Salam Tiki, Special Representative of the President of Libya and Minister of for the African Union; and all other distinguished delegates to this inaugural ceremony.

In acknowledging your presence, permit me to express through you to your respective Governments our deep appreciation for your moral and financial support and contribution that have enhanced the process of restoring peace, security, and stability to Liberia.

I wish to acknowledge the stewardship of the National Transitional Government under the leadership of its former Chairman, Mr. Gyude Bryant, for their contribution to peace and to the successful electoral process. I also recognize and thank the former National Transitional Legislative Assembly for their service to the nation. And I welcome the members of the 52nd Legislature who were sworn in a few moments ago, and are here resolved in Joint Assembly. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I congratulate you as you assume your individual responsibilities of representing our people. I look forward to working with each of you as we strive to build a better nation.

I thank and applaud our gallant men and women of the Armed Forces of Liberia who have rendered sacrificial service to our nation and are now being willingly retired to facilitate the training and restructuring of the new Armed Forces of Liberia.

I also thank the leadership and gallant men and women of the United Nations Military

Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) who daily labor with us to keep the peace that we enjoy.

Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen:

No one who has lived in or visited this country in the past fifteen years will deny the physical destruction and the moral decadence that the civil war has left in its wake here in Monrovia and in other cities, towns, and villages across the nation. We have all suffered. The individual sense of deprivation is immense. It is therefore understandable that our people will have high expectations and will demand aggressive solutions to the socioeconomic and societal difficulties that we face. Our record and experience show clearly that we are a strong and resilient people, able to survive; able to rise from the ashes of civil strife and to start anew; able to forge a new beginning, forgiving if not forgetting the past. We are a good and friendly people, braced for hope even as we wipe away the tears of past suffering and despair. Our challenge, therefore, is to transform adversity into opportunity, to renew the promises upon which our nation was founded: freedom, equality, unity and individual progress.

In the history of nations, each generation is summoned to define its nation's purpose and character. Now, it is our time to state clearly and unequivocally who we are, as Liberians, – and where we plan to take this country in the next six years.

Political Renewal

First, let me declare in our pursuit of political renewal, that the political campaign is over. It is time for us, regardless of our political affiliations and persuasions, to come together to heal and rebuild our nation. For my part, as President of the Republic of Liberia, my Government extends a hand of friendship and solidarity to the leadership and members of all political parties which participated in our recent presidential and legislative elections. I call upon those who have been long in the struggle – those who recently earned heir stripes – to play important roles in the rebuilding of our nation.

Committed to advance the spirit of inclusion, I assure all Liberians and our international partners and friends that our Government will recognize and support a strong democratic and loyal opposition in Liberia. This is important because we believe that our democratic culture and our nation are best served when the opposition is strong and actively engaged in the process of nation building.

Moreover, we call upon our colleagues of all political persuasions now in the Diaspora to return home and join us in meeting this exciting challenge of national renewal.

We are aware that we have hundreds of doctors, engineers, and economists, as well as thousands of teachers, nurses, professors, and other Liberians who possess specialized skills currently living abroad. I re-echo my appeal to all of you to please come home!! Please make the sacrifice, for your country needs you and needs you now!!!

We make a similar appeal to the thousands of our citizens who continue to live in refugee camps throughout the sub-region and beyond. We recognize and sympathize with your plight and will explore with our development partners ways and means to facilitate your early return home as a national imperative for our renewal and development.

To those who are still internally displaced, we pledge to work with our partners to get you back to your communities to enable you to start the process of rebuilding your lives.

We must have a new understanding. Your job, as citizens, is to work for your family and your country. Your country's only job is to work for you. This is the compact that I offer you today.

A New Era of Democracy

My Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Ours has certainly not been an easy journey to where we are today. Indeed, the road has been tortuous and checkered. From the establishment of our National Politics 158 years ago through the period of integration which helped to shape our society several decades ago, to the long running political fight for the forging and fostering of a viable and cohesive society in the decades that followed, the struggle of many has centered on five core values: peace, liberty, equality, opportunity, and justice for all.

The tendencies of intolerance of each other's opinion rooted in parochial and selfish considerations - and greed - have driven us into our descent into recent tragedies and paralysis as a nation and people. These negative national tendencies have, in the past, bred ethnic suspicion and hatred, led to injustice, social and political exclusion. They have also weakened our capacity to peacefully co-exist as a people with diverse socio-cultural, economic, and political backgrounds and differences. Consequently, we have witnessed needless generalized conflicts that have profoundly affected the Liberian family, the foundation of our society.

And in the process of resolving the numerous contradictions that have underpinned this struggle, a high price has been paid by many Liberians of diverse backgrounds and social status. I know of this struggle because I have been a part of it. Without bitterness, anger, or vindictiveness, I recall the inhumanity of confinement, the terror of attempted rape, and the ostracism of exile. I also recall the goodness and the kindness of the many who defied orders and instruction to save my life, and give food to the hungry and to give water to the thirsty. I recall their humanity – and thank them.

And so, my Fellow Liberians let us acknowledge and honor the sacrifices and contributions of all as we put the past behind us. Let us rejoice that our recent democratic exercise has been a redemptive act of faith and an expression of renewed confidence in ourselves. Let us be proud that we were able to ultimately rise above our intense political and other differences in a renewed determination as a people to foster dialogue instead of violence, promote unity rather than disharmony, and engender hope rather than disillusionment and despair.

Today, I urge all of us to commit ourselves to a new era of democracy in Liberia. In our new democracy, we will tolerate even if we disagree; we will co-exist even if we consider our neighbor unfriendly – and we will find common ground on the many vexing issues that face our nation. This is because our shared national values are more important than our individual interests. We must therefore abandon the temptation and inclination to

court and engage in violence. Our recent history teaches us that violence diminishes our nation and ourselves, not just within our borders, but more importantly in our dealings with other nations and peoples.

My Administration therefore commits itself to the creation of a democracy in which the constitutional and civil liberties and rights of all our people will be advanced - and safeguarded. While ensuring the security of our nation and people, we will work tirelessly to ensure that the writ of democracy is expanded, not constricted in our land.

Economic Renewal

In a similar quest for economic renewal, we start on the premise that we are a wealthy people. Our nation is blessed with an endowment rich in natural and human resources. Yet, our economy has collapsed due to the several civil conflicts and economic mismanagement by successive governments. The task of reconstructing our devastated economy is awesome, for which there will be no quick fix.

Yet, we have the potential to promote a healthy economy in which Liberians and international investors can prosper. We can create an investment climate that gives confidence to Liberian and foreign investors. We can promote those activities that add value in the exploitation of our natural resources. We can recognize and give support to our small farmers and our marketers who, through their own efforts over the years, have provided buoyancy and self-sufficiency in `economic activity, even during the difficult years of conflict. We can revisit our land tenure system to promote more ownership and free holding for communities. We can expand ongoing programs of economic and social infrastructure rehabilitation.

This will call for the translation of our economic vision into economic goals that are consistent with our national endowment and regional and global dynamics. Included in this process is a formulation of the policy framework and identification of the sequential measures of structural change that need to be taken to achieve the overarching goals of sustainable growth and development. We will ensure that allocation of our own resources reflects these priorities. We will call upon our development partners to likewise recognize that although they have made significant investment to bring peace to our country; this peace can only be consolidated and sustained if we bring development to our people.

With this in mind, we are working with our partners to identify key objectives and deliverables in the first one hundred and fifty days of our Administration which coincides with the remaining budgetary period of the former government. We must meet our commitment to restore some measure of electricity to our capital city. We must put Liberians back to work again. And we must put our economic and financial house in order. Most of all, we must revive our mindset of courage, hard work, and a can do spirit.

Our strategy is to achieve quick and visible progress that reaches significant number of our people, to gain momentum, consolidate support, and establish the foundation for sustained economic development. This will encompass five major pillars: Security, Economic Revitalization, Basic Services, Infrastructure, and Good Governance.

In implementing the programs consistent with this strategy, we will ensure broad geographic representation and participation, placing emphasis on those areas that have received less in the distribution of economic benefits. In this regard, we thank the European Union for supporting activities in the power sector, in community development, as well as providing technical assistance in economic management. We thank the United States for supporting the restructuring and training of our security forces, for activities in community development, and for commencing the construction of the Barclayville Bridge in the neglected area of the Southeast. We thank our sisterly countries of Nigeria and Ghana for providing training for our security forces. We thank the United Nations System for supporting community development, technical assistance for economic management, reintegration, and good governance. We thank them also for the strong peace keeping effort, in conjunction with ECOWAS, which has enabled us to have an environment that led us to free and fair elections. We thank the World Bank for support of activities in community development, infrastructure, and technical assistance in economic management. We thank the many foreign and domestic non-governmental organizations for their support for community development, and for peace and capacity building.

As we look ahead, we plan to collaborate closely with both the international and national NGO's and the civil society community in order to formulate an appropriate strategy and approach for their engagement with our Government in order to maximize their contributions. For the long term, more will be required from us and our partners. We will formulate a multi-year economic reconstruction plan tied to a Poverty Reduction Strategy Program that relieves our country from a staggering US\$3.5 billion external debt and paves the way for acceleration in our national effort to make more progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

We will seek a strong partnership between the public and private sector, with direct foreign investment and Liberia entrepreneurship at the core. We envision a multi-year commitment in the order of US\$1 billion for this purpose with details to be presented at a partnership meeting planned for May or June of this year.

As we seek to engage our youth in our enterprise of nation building, we must recognize the threat that HIV/AIDS pose to our human capital and to our growth and prosperity. With 12% of our population now affected by HIV/AIDS, my administration will tackle this national scourge by updating and reinvigorating our HIV/AIDS policy within our first 150 days. We will also reconstitute and empower, along with our development partners, the National Commission on HIV/AIDS.

Governance

We know that our desire for an environment for private sector driven sustainable growth and development cannot be achieved without the political will and a civil service that is efficient, effective and honest. The workforce in our ministries and agencies is seriously bloated. Moreover, many of the ministries and agencies lack clarity in mandate and have little or no linkages to our national priorities, policies, and goals.

Our Administration will therefore embark on a process of rationalizing our agencies of

government to make them lean, efficient, and responsive to public service delivery. This will require the creation of a meritocracy that places premium on qualification, professionalism, and performance. As a major component of our Civil Service Reform Agenda, we will review our public service wage system with the view to ensuring that those who work in our Civil Service are paid commensurate with their qualifications and performance – and that they are paid on time. It may take us some time to achieve this objective given our inheritance of a bloated and poorly paid civil service for which there are currently salary and benefit arrears totaling some US\$20 million.

Our present unemployment situation is a national crisis. We must redeploy some of our current public service employees to areas where they can perform successfully. We will start the process to train and retrain others who lack requisite professional skills. We will empower them through our proposed alternative employment initiatives. We will also provide additional support through our proposed micro-loan program.

Bonding

My Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Across this country, from Cape Mount in the West to Cape Palmas in the East, from Mount Nimba in the North to Cape Monsterrado in the South, from Mount Wologizi in North central to Mount Gedeh in the Southeast, our citizens at this very moment are listening to my voice by radio – and some are watching by television. I want to speak directly to you. As you know, in our various communities and towns, our children have a way of greeting their fathers when they come home after a long, tiring day of trying to find the means to feed the family that night and send the children to school the next day. They say, "Papa na come."

Well, too many times, for too many families, Papa comes home with nothing, having failed to find a job or to get the help to feed the hungry children. Imagine then the disappointment and the hurt in the mother and children; the frustration and the loss of self-confidence in the father.

Through the message of this story, I want you to know that I understand what you, our ordinary citizens, go through each day to make ends meet for yourselves and for your families.

Times were hard before. Times are even harder today. But I make this pledge to you: Under my Administration, we will work to change that situation. We will work to ensure that when our children say "papa na come", papa will come home joyfully with something, no matter how meager, to sustain his family. In other words, we will create the jobs for our mothers and fathers to be gainfully employed. We will create the social and economic opportunities that will restore our people's dignity and self-worth.

We will make the children smile again; the thousands of children who could not present their voting cards, but repeatedly told me whenever I met and shook their hands that they voted for me. Indeed, they voted with their hearts. To those children and to all other Liberian children across this nation, I say to you, I love you very, very much. I shall work, beginning today, to give you hope and a better future.

Now, I would like to speak in particular to our youth. You can believe my word that my Administration will do its utmost to respond to your needs. We will build your capacity and empower you to enable you meaningfully participate in the reconstruction of our country. We shall actively pursue the Kakata Declaration resulting from the National Youth Conference held in 2005 and the implementation of a National Youth Policy and Program.

Corruption

Fellow Liberians, we know that if we are to achieve our economic and income distribution goals, we must take on forcibly and effectively the debilitating cancer of corruption. Corruption erodes faith in government because of the mismanagement and misapplication of public resources. It weakens accountability, transparency and justice. Corruption short changes and undermines key decision and policy making processes. It stifles private investments which create jobs and assures support from our partners. Corruption is a national cancer that creates hostility, distrust, and anger.

Throughout the campaign, I assured our people that, if elected, we would wage war against corruption regardless of where it exists, or by whom it is practiced. Today, I renew this pledge. Corruption, under my Administration, will be the major public enemy. We will confront it. We will fight it. Any member of my Administration who sees this affirmation as mere posturing, or yet another attempt by yet another Liberian leader to play to the gallery on this grave issue should think twice. Anyone who desires to challenge us in this regard will do so at his or her personal disadvantage.

In this respect, I will lead by example. I will expect and demand that everyone serving in my Administration leads by example. The first testament of how my Administration will tackle public service corruption will be that everyone appointed to high positions of public trust such as in the Cabinet and heads of public corporations will be required to declare their assets, not as part of a confirmation requirement, but as a matter of policy. I will be the first to comply by declaring my assets. My Administration will also accord high priority to the formulation and passage into law of a National Code of Conduct, to which all public servants will be subjected.

My Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen:

If we are to achieve our development and anti-corruption goals, we must welcome and embrace the Governance and Economic Management Program (GEMAP) which the National Transitional Government of Liberia, working with our international partners, has formulated to deal with the serious economic and financial management deficiencies in our country.

We accept and will enforce the terms of GEMAP, recognizing the important assistance which it is expected to provide during the early years of our Government. More importantly, we will ensure competence and integrity in the management of our own resources and insist on an integrated capacity building initiative so as to render GEMAP non-applicable in a reasonable period of time.

Foreign Policy

My Fellow Liberians:

Our nation's foreign policy has historically been rooted in our core values as a nation and people in the practices of good neighborliness, non-interference in the affairs of other nations and peoples, peaceful co-existence, regional cooperation and integration, and international bilateral and multilateral partnership. These core values will continue to guide the conduct of our foreign policy under my Administration. Our foreign policy will take due cognizance of the sacrifices and contributions that have been made to restore peace, security, and stability to our country. We will therefore work to be a responsible member of sub-regional, regional, and international organizations, including the Mano River Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union, and the United Nations. We will do all that we can to honor our obligations, past and current, and enforce all international treaties to which our country has subscribed.

To our sister Republics West, East, and North of our borders, we make this pledge: under my Administration, no inch of Liberian soil will be used to conspire to perpetrate aggression against your countries. In making this commitment, we will work for a new regional security that is based upon economic partnership aimed at enhancing the prospects for regional cooperation and integration. In this regard, we propose to tap into the successful Southeast Asian experiences regarding the promotion of regional integration with a heavy private sector component.

I also want to speak specifically to the countries which, from the onset of our civil conflict, have been in the vanguard of peace-making in Liberia. Some have made material and financial contributions. Some have provided moral support. Others have contributed troops that paid the supreme price for peace in our country. To our war-dead, our brother soldiers from West Africa and other regions – as well as to our own, we remember and honor you today. This occasion is owed to your fortitude and to your sacrifices. To every other nation and partner, we thank you for standing by us.

Reconciliation

Today, as we usher in a new era of responsibility, accountability, and transparency, we must strive to reawaken our people's faith in their Government. We must also recognize the urgency and imperative of meeting the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction. Yet, no single issue or factor will define our success or failure in this endeavor more than our willingness and ability to come together as a nation and people. Consequently, no task will be more urgent and more compelling; no cause will require my personal attention and engagement than national reconciliation.

As in the case of the overall challenge of economic reconstruction, there will be no quick fix to national reconciliation and healing. But we can neither flinch from the challenge, nor be overwhelmed by its complexities. After all, some of the underlying factors of our current problems are as deep and old as the history of our country. So, we must begin today to reconcile and heal our nation with deliberate and purposeful commitment, recognizing that we are first and last Liberians - and that our nation's strength, progress, and development are directly impacted by our unity, peace, security, and stability as a people.

Therefore, I today pledge my personal involvement in the work of reconciling and healing our country. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has an important role to play in this regard and my Administration will support and strengthen the Commission to enable it to carry out its mandate effectively.

My Fellow Citizens:

Let me assure you that my presidency shall remain committed to serve all Liberians without fear or favor. I am President for all of the people of this country. I therefore want to assure all of our people that neither I nor any person serving in my Administration will pursue any vendetta. There will be no vindictiveness. There will be no policies of political, social, and economic exclusion. We will be an inclusive and tolerant Government, ever sensitive to the anxieties, fears, hopes, and aspirations of all of our people irrespective of ethnic, political, religious affiliations, and social status. Let us be clear, however, that we will insist on specified standards of law abiding behavior in the exercise of this tolerance.

My Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen:

By their votes, the Liberian people have sent a clear message! They want peace; they want to move on with their lives. My charge as President is to work to assure the wishes of our people. We will therefore encourage our citizens to utilize our system of due process for settling differences whether those differences are within or between ethnic groups, or whether they are within or between religious groups. However, we will forcefully, swiftly and decisively respond to any acts of lawlessness, threats to our hard earned peace, or destabilizing actions that could return us to conflict.

As we today savor the new dawn of hope and expectation, I pledge to bring the Government closer to the people. The days of the imperial presidency, of an intrusive leadership, and of a domineering and threatening Chief Executive are over in Liberia. This was my campaign promise which I intend to keep. Yet, my Government will be unflinching and bold in influencing and defending those measures that ensure that our national goals are achieved.

In pursuing this policy, our Constitution will remain our source of strength. Its edifying phrase, WE, THE PEOPLE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA, and its equally ennobling proclamation that ALL POWER IS INHERENT IN THE PEOPLE, will be given concrete meaning and expression in all of our national life and conduct.

The Executive Mansion and Monrovia will no longer be the only centers of power and sources of development policy making. The people and their interests, as defined by them, will be at the very heart of our new dispensation of decentralization and the devolution of power.

And now I would like to talk to the women, the women of Liberia, the women of Africa – and the women of the world. Until a few decades ago, Liberian women endured the injustice of being treated as second class citizens. During the years of our civil war, they bore the brunt of inhumanity and terror. They were conscripted into war, gang raped at will, force into domestic slavery. Yet, it is the women, notably those who established

themselves as the Mano River Women Network for Peace who labored and advocated for peace throughout our region.

It is therefore not surprising that during the period of our elections, Liberian women were galvanized – and demonstrated unmatched passion, enthusiasm, and support for my candidacy. They stood with me; they defended me; they prayed for me. The same can be said for the women throughout Africa. I want to here and now, gratefully acknowledge the powerful voice of women of all walks of life whose votes significantly contributed to my victory.

My Administration shall thus endeavor to give Liberian women prominence in all affairs of our country. My Administration shall empower Liberian women in all areas of our national life. We will support and increase the writ of laws that restore their dignities and deal drastically with crimes that dehumanize them. We will enforce without fear or favor the law against rape recently passed by the National Transitional Legislature. We shall encourage families to educate all children, particularly the girl child. We shall also try to provide economic programs that enable Liberian women to assume their proper place in our economic revitalization process.

My Fellow Liberians:

We are moving forward. Our best days are coming. The future belongs to us because we have taken charge of it. We have the resources. We have the resourcefulness. Now, we have the right Government. And we have good friends who want to work with us. Our people are already building our roads, cleaning up our environment, creating jobs, rebuilding schools, bringing back water and electricity.

My Government will ensure that the creativity and industry of Liberians is unleashed in this incredible moment of history. We are making our beloved Liberia home once again.

We are a good people; we are a kind people. We are a forgiving people – and a Godfearing people.

So, let us begin anew, moving forward into a future that is filled with hope and promise!

"... In Union Strong, Success is Sure! We cannot fail ..." God bless us all – and save the Republic.

I thank you!