

**“Gratitude from a Proud Nation”**  
**Statement by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**  
**At Program for the Departure of the Liberian Peacekeeping Contingent to Mali**  
**Roberts International Airport**  
**Thursday, June 20, 2013**

Proud Sons of Liberia;  
Excellencies;  
Special Guests;  
Officials of Government:

“Proud” and “Pride” and “Thank You” are words you’ve heard this morning; are words you’ve heard throughout your training. I now say so in my capacity as President and as Commander-in-Chief, as we express the gratitude of a proud nation to you, the members of our Armed Forces of Liberia, who have made us so proud.

We are proud for your selection to represent our nation in the Africa-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA). We are proud of the intense training you have undergone at Camp Sande Ware in preparation for this mission. And we feel a deep sense of pride, as we gaze upon your young faces, eager to get going and to get the job done. We honor you for your invaluable service to our country. This is a proud day for all of us, as Liberians, and, truly, you are the pride of our nation!

Not since 1960 – more than 50 years ago – has Liberia been in a position to dispatch this number of troops to participate in a peacekeeping operation! With a trained National Army back then, we became one of the first independent States to contribute to the United Nations Congo Operation. For that mission, we sent forces on two occasions, and everyone returned home, safe and sound. We know that this will be the same outcome, as we today deploy this Infantry Platoon of our Armed Forces to AFISMA, in Mali.

For so long – decades, in fact – we have been the beneficiary of support from our ECOWAS neighbors, and friends from far and wide, who came to our shores to

help us restore the peace and rebuild a shattered nation. It is time for Liberia to give back, in whatever small way that we can. That you are the chosen ones, to represent our nation and people, as we contribute to ensuring the restoration of peace and a return to democratic rule in Mali, are the reasons for our pride and our celebration today.

We are indebted to so many individuals, organizations and bilateral partners that have made this day possible. To all of them we express our profound gratitude and thanks.

You may recall that, in solidarity with the ECOWAS decision for the deployment of a Standby Force in Mali, following authorization by the UN Security Council, I announced, on January 19, that Liberia had pledged an Infantry Platoon to participate in the peacekeeping mission to Mali.

In my Annual Message to the 53<sup>rd</sup> National Legislature a few days later, on January 28, I sought the Legislature's concurrence, and the mobilization of resources, to enable our participation in this very important mission. I want particularly to thank the honorable Legislature for their approval and their support of this decision for our AFL to join in this historic and noble undertaking.

Our special thanks to ECOWAS for establishing AFISMA, to restore democratic rule in Mali and to protect its territorial integrity. We value the Community's commitment in the maintenance of internal peace and security, and we are grateful to all ECOWAS countries that have sent military personnel to help restore peace to our own country, and have helped our AFL to become a professional and reliable force. We also say thank you to the African Union, for its steadfast support of the regional position on Mali.

To our sister country, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, under whose military command our small contingent will be embedded, we say thank you, once again, for your willingness to support Liberia's contribution to AFISMA – the third time in our military relations that Nigeria has accepted to have the AFL embedded in one of its battalions. Nigeria remains the lead ECOWAS country that continues to stand by Liberia in the mentoring of the AFL, and in affording our officers the

opportunity to study and to graduate from its most prestigious military academy. We also thank officers and Non-Commissioned Officers from other ECOWAS members for their service to Liberia.

We thank the United States of America for the role of AFRICOM, under “Operation Onward Liberty,” which has been pivotal in restructuring our Armed Forces. This is a historic moment, not only for Liberia, but also for the United States as a shared commitment to building Liberia’s security sector has reached the point that our nation is not only stable within our borders, but willing and able to contribute to the shared security interests of our region. We also thank the U.S. for support with transport and with equipment to maintain our troops.

We recognize and thank our other partners who helped in shaping the AFL into a professional outfit through rigorous training, mentoring and other strategic contributions, thereby giving us a professionally trained Army capable of taking part in a peacekeeping mission. In this group we include the People’s Republic of China, the United Kingdom, Rwanda, Ghana, Sierra Leone, among others.

We thank the United Nations which, commencing in July, will replace AFISMA with an 11,200-strong United Nations peacekeeping force, to be known as MINUSMA – the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission. We also thank the UN, represented here by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for the enormous contribution of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in maintaining the peace and security of our nation, while simultaneously helping with the skilled advancement of our military.

Our military families are the pillar of strength in our Armed Forces. They encourage our troops. They boost our morale. To all of them, and particularly the families of our soldiers who are departing today, allow me to express, on behalf of a proud and grateful nation and people, our appreciation for the sacrifices you make for the rest of us. As a nation, we remain forever in your debt.

To our gallant AFL, once again: Thank you for your discipline, your dedication to duty, your patriotism. We are proud of your service to country; we are proud of

your sacrifice. And, as I did on February 11, Armed Forces Day, I call upon you to discharge your duties with valor unpretending as you deploy to Mali.

In closing, let me recognize Major General Abdurrahman and the mentors. They are the ones who enabled our troops to be called: “Ready for Combat, Ready for Service, Ready to serve their Region.” Thank you for training them and making them the best soldiers possible.

Thank you.