

**‘Human Security and National Reconciliation: The Liberian Experience’**  
**Statement by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**  
**at Nigeria’s Centenary Celebration Conference**  
**International Conference Centre, Abuja**  
**February 27, 2014**

President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan;  
Fellow Heads of State or Government;  
Parliamentarians, Ministers and Other Officials of Government;  
Special Guests;  
Brothers and Sisters of Nigeria;  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you, President Jonathan, for the invitation to be a part of this historic Nigeria’s Centenary Celebration Conference, with its focus on “Human Security, Peace and Development.” Thank you, also, for your keynote address, setting out the human security and development agenda for Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Liberia’s political and economic history is unique, characterized by strong dualism in tradition, culture and structure. As a result, governance institutions have been weak and economic growth neither equitable nor sustainable.

The 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Accord, which ended the long period of decline, provided the opportunity for national renewal. The last several years have seen good macroeconomic fundamentalism, debt distress resolved, growth of over average annual 7 percent, basic economic and social infrastructure reconstructed, direct foreign investment of over US\$16 billion mobilized, laws revised, new policies formulated and institutions reactivated and strengthened. *An Agenda for Transformation* sets forth a five-year development strategy as the first step in achieving goals set out in *Liberia Rising 2030*, a long-term vision of socio-economic transformation and development which seeks to make the country a more prosperous and inclusive society.

A decade of unbroken and sustained peace was made possible through determined domestic efforts, and regional and international support, including a peacekeeping mission, UNMIL.

Professor Paul Collier gave us two reasons to be hopeful of this lasting peace in Liberia: one is the passage of time – that after ten years of peace, the risk of going back to war is much less; the other is economic development – that when income doubles, the risk of civil war halves. With every passing year, we are putting the dreadful spectre of war further behind us, enabling us to tackle the challenges of human security and national reconciliation.

The United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda defined human security as reducing the level of poverty – poverty defined not just in terms of income but also access to basic healthcare and quality education, adequate housing, employment and a safe environment. Human security is the vision to end extreme poverty in all its forms in the context of sustainable development and put in place all building blocks of sustained prosperity for all. Human security is about freedom from want, through empowerment and equity; ensuring that all people have access to basic services; that they can find a livelihood and have a voice in determining the way they live; and that their concerns are addressed and their priorities respected. Human security is not just a moral issue for our times; it is a political imperative, the cornerstone of social stability and human development.

As a fragile State, Liberia cannot claim to be fully at peace, as we strive to meet raised expectations in a society where over 60 percent of the population is less than 35 years of age, concentrated in the informal sector with vulnerable means of livelihood and limited skills.

Efforts towards reconciliation, in a highly charged environment of historical cleavage and long years of conflict, can be most challenging. At a National Visioning Conference, in December 2012, we adopted, as part of the National Vision, and along with the *Agenda for Transformation*, a *National Roadmap for Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*.

Both the *Agenda* and the *Roadmap* speak directly to the concerns and recommendations of the erstwhile Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and together they are guiding our journey to our desired future of “One People, One Nation, United for Peace and Sustainable Development.”

The National Reconciliation Roadmap, with its 18-year timeframe, is a multi-dimensional process of overcoming social, political, and religious cleavages; mending and transforming relationships; healing the physical and psychological wounds from the civil war, as well as confronting and addressing historical wrongs, including the structural root causes of and potential areas of conflicts in the country. The Roadmap notes our nation's history of cleavage, disunity and confrontation, but also a history of a resilient people who have, time and time again, risen above the odds during times of adversity to reach across the divide and promote a united country.

Land, which is a fundamental input in economic production, representing the biggest prospect for poverty reduction and investment growth, remains a vortex of contention today, brought about by claims and illegal occupation during years of displacement and exile.

A Land Commission, established in 2009, is actively involved in resolving these intractable, historical land issues through a harmonizing of formal and customary land laws. Categories of land rights include: Private Land Rights, Customary Land Rights, Government Land Rights, and Public Land Rights. The new Land Rights Policy aims to reduce the tension between communities and other rights holders, recognizing that land reform is central to national reconciliation.

Also central to national reconciliation in Liberia is a process we call the National “Palava Hut” Program, not unlike the *Gacaca* in Rwanda, a traditional and cultural conflict resolution mechanism common in rural Liberia, which we launched last October. Palava Hut Talks, in the form of community-based truth-telling, atonement and psychosocial recovery, will be conducted in towns, villages and cities across the country, and will provide victims and perpetrators a safe space to tell their stories and seek the means of fostering national peace and reconciliation. An Independent National Commission on Human Rights is overseeing this process and coordinating its activities. We have challenged the Commission, traditional and religious leaders, the Liberia Council of Churches, the Muslim Council, political parties, civil society and all Liberians to fully participate and support the National Palava Hut Program, in order to ensure lasting peace and harmony.

Central to the provision of human security and national reconciliation is transparency in the utility of our natural and God-given resources. Therefore, we signed on to the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) and partnered with Resource Watch to improve transparency and accountability in mining, agriculture, forestry and nascent oil sectors, going beyond the required to include forestry and agriculture to ensure that revenues generated from the natural resources can bring more benefits to all citizens.

In the interest of creating a free and fair and open society, we strive to have an inclusive government – one that is courageous enough to include people from all parties, all counties, all religions, even those who have maligned us. This is in line with our policy to create an environment where all Liberians are assured of their right to own and enjoy the benefits of their homeland.

Liberia has come a long way, yet has a longer way to go, but the future is bright, full of promise because the Liberian people, walking away from the terror of the past, have made it so.

Mr. President;  
Dear Colleagues:

Liberia’s peace and prosperity is intertwined with that of all African countries, particularly those in the West Africa sub-region. This is why we applaud the tremendous effort you are making to contain the conflicts in your own country, Nigeria, and, through significant contribution, the conflict in several others throughout our region.

Today our continent ranks high on the perception ladder of potentially successful transformation, made possible by the support of our regional institutions, underpinned by the African Union, which continues to place peace and security as top priorities.

Today, the winds of solidarity, cooperation and the pursuit of integration blow strong among all our nations. Tomorrow, perhaps the dream of Nkrumah for political union will come true.