

**Keynote Address by H. E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
To the 25<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Liberian Council of  
Churches**

**Eliza Turner Memorial A.M.E. Church  
Camp Johnson Road  
Thursday, May 13, 2010**

**Mr. President;**

**Mr. Secretary-General;**

**Members of the Liberia Council of Churches;**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:**

**I wish to convey to you, and this august Assembly, sincere greetings on behalf of the Government and in my own name, as you celebrate the Twenty-Fifth General Assembly of the Liberian Council of Churches.**

**Permit me to also pay special honor to the former leaders of the Council: Bishop Sumowood Harris; Bishop W. Nah Dixon; Bishop Arthur F. Kulah; and Archbishop Michael K. Francis.**

**Their sense of purpose and invaluable efforts to strengthen the role of the Church in the pursuit of peace**

**and security has brought great benefit to our nation and its people. The virtues they embody should be a beacon for us all: especially the commitment they brought to the search for reconciliation during our years of crisis.**

**That this Council is celebrating 28 years of ecumenical service to Liberia stands as a great tribute to the centrality of the Church in Liberian society. You, our spiritual guides, are crucial to the resilience, courage and future of our country.**

**It also gives me great pleasure to be invited to give this address the day before National Unification Day. Tomorrow, Liberians everywhere will honor the values that unite us: tolerance, respect and diversity.**

**As every Liberian knows, these values have been hard won. In the 28 years that this Council has done its work, our country has endured great hardship. But that hardship is now giving way to reconciliation, the theme of your Assembly and my remarks to you today.**

**The subject of reconciliation is the subject of humanity itself. We live with the inevitable reality of human complexity and difference. The harmonious co-existence of people in the face of these God-designed differences is the basis for our unity.**

**The injury that is being continually inflicted on human unity by the misunderstanding of our differences compels us to fully embrace the virtue of reconciliation.**

**Our Christian heritage also cherishes biblical values which reveal our responsibility to be reconcilers. This is the divine dimension to reconciliation and it enshrines the principles of the concept: that it is a divine act; that it stems from love; and that it requires courage. Reconciliation is also a national duty; reconciliation is all our responsibility.**

**Human history is full of stories of intolerance between and among families, clans, kingdoms, civilizations, and nations. But the fact that humanity has survived these chaotic experiences signals the positive side of history. It engenders courage for today and hope for the future.**

**Liberia is no exception.**

**Witness the challenges of co-existence and the clash of civilizations that immediately ensued upon the arrival of the Settlers on our shores; the eventual achievement of our national sovereignty; the progression of our national history to date in spite of all the mishaps.**

**These are all reasons to have faith in our country.**

**We have misunderstood each other, hated each other, divided each other, and even fought each other. But our nation has survived.**

**I do not underestimate the challenges we face in uniting our people, especially in light of the recent civil war. But we must, while respecting the past, also not hesitate to herald the hope of our nation and rally our people to recover from the brutal consequences of division.**

**As our nation emerges from conflict, all Liberians need to play their part in building an inclusive society. The**

**Government, this Assembly, civil society, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – we all have an important role to play.**

**Mr. President:**

**Twenty-eight years ago, in 1982, the Liberian Council of Churches was created to, among other things, facilitate tolerance and unity in our country. The establishment of the Council could not have come at a better time, just two years after the brutal political events of 1980 that began the downward spiral of our country's history.**

**I wish here to commend the courageous services this Council has paid to our country over the years. The leadership of the LCC has understood the problems afflicting Liberia. They have shown this in their ability to ably coordinate the affairs of the Council, which is a symbol of hope for all Liberians, irrespective of their backgrounds:**

- **Your boldness and bravery in challenging warlords to sit at peace tables;**

- **Your resolved will to engage international partners and friends on the Liberia crisis;**
- **Your message to eradicate the tendencies for war, strengthen peace through justice; respect for the equal rights of all Liberians irrespective of their backgrounds; and**
- **Your efforts to break down denominational barriers and religious boundaries which led to the formation of the Inter-Religious Council and Inter-Faith Movement.**

**Your work on all these fronts has lifted our country. But it is to this last task that I wish to pay particular attention.**

**Too often religious division is allowed to deepen into mistrust and suspicion. Divisions within the Christian Church have led to great problems elsewhere in the world.**

**As a body representing Churches across the ecumenical spectrum, I commend the LCC for transcending sectarian lines. Your spirit of cooperation and tolerance has set a standard.**

**But relations between religions can be harder still. Liberia is home to people of many faiths and denominations. Your efforts toward the goal of understanding and harmony between faiths are crucial. But much work remains to be done in this area.**

**As February's tragic events in Lofa County demonstrated, the scourge of religious division can rear its head at any time. When brutality and violence temporarily pierced the fragile peace we have built, we were reminded how easily religious mistrust can lead to violence.**

**I am grateful for your effective and timely response to my call for your intervention, for your dispatch of an Interfaith Group which helped to calm the turmoil, for your action to promote understanding and peace.**

**The outcome there was a triumph of Liberian reconciliation. The events in Lofa stand as inspiring proof of our people's capacity to reach across old boundaries and overcome our differences.**

**I wish to thank the LCC for the work you have already done in building the Inter-Faith Movement. But this task is only just beginning and I call upon you, as leaders of the Christian Churches, to intensify your efforts and make sure that it continues. Your leadership and commitment towards this goal today are critical to building the unified nation we will celebrate tomorrow.**

**Reconciliation is the path to unity. It prefigures it, but it also sustains it. If our country is to continue to grow and change, then reconciliation should not stop at some imagined goal. It must be a permanent part of that ongoing healing process.**

**Mr. President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:**

**This Assembly is more than matched to this task. I wish to reaffirm my confidence in the Council and my undiminished hope that it will continue to be a just and effective instrument for the good conduct of relations between all religions and denominations.**



**Let this 25<sup>th</sup> General Assembly always keep alive the spirit of true reconciliation.**

**As I close this statement, I ask that we all continue to pray for the miracle of Archbishop Francis's recovery, that we all remember to reach out to him in consolation.**

**God bless us all, and God save our nation.**

**I thank you.**