

Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

At "Lighting of African Union Flame of Peace" in Liberia

Commemorating "Year of Peace and Security in Africa"

Antoinette Tubman Stadium, Thursday, September 16, 2010

**(Delivered by Hon. Harrison Karnwea, Minister of Internal Affairs,
On behalf of the President)**

Members of the Legislature and of the Judiciary;

Members of the Cabinet and Other Officials of Government;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Ambassador Fayomi, and Members of the African Union Family;

Representatives of the UN Family and Other International Organizations;

Traditional Leaders, Chiefs and Elders;

Religious, Political and Civil Society Organizations;

Women, Youth and Student Groups;

Representatives of Trade and Business Organizations;

Fellow Liberians:

May we rise and observe a moment of silence for those who lost their lives during the period of conflict in Liberia.

It is with pleasure that I share this very important moment with all of you, fulfilling the African Union's Tripoli Declaration proclaiming 2010 as the Year of Peace and Security in Africa. Because our continent is

so often beset by conflict – regrettably, even as we speak – the AU urged its 53 Members to heed the call to “Make Peace Happen.”

We commemorate this special Year with the symbolic lighting of the African Union Flame of Peace, as an expression of our collective quest for a peaceful, non-violent and conflict-free Africa.

For us in Liberia, this event is not merely the fulfillment of the declaration of our regional organization; it also represents an occasion for reflection about a sad period in our history, and the untold suffering, the sorrow, and devastation visited upon this nation. We remember, so that we will never forget!

The peace we enjoy today, now going on seven years, came at a very high price – in countless lives lost, a people traumatized, a nation shattered. In pursuit of peace, our people signed a series of accords, and hosted four peacekeeping operations. It is our fervent prayer that the current operation, UNMIL, will be the last, as we consolidate peace and security and Liberia is celebrated as a peaceful, stable and prosperous nation.

We must maintain the peace, to ensure that those who died trying to gain and to preserve it did not sacrifice in vain. We salute the many hundreds of West African and other peacekeepers who came to help restore the peace, and who perished on these shores. We memorialize them, and are forever indebted for their sacrifices.

As we savor peace in Liberia, let us not forget our African brothers and sisters in war-torn zones, who remain trapped in the vicious cycle of conflict and its deadly consequences. We join in solidarity with them, and with people everywhere in their search for genuine peace and stability.

By signing the Tripoli Declaration in August 2009, AU Members agreed to review peace-building efforts, strengthen existing initiatives and, where appropriate, to launch new measures to promote peace and security, so as to bequeath a peaceful continent to the next generation.

Liberia is consolidating peace and security through the establishment a New Liberian Army – the Armed Forces of Liberia – comprised of more than 2,000 professional men and women trained to protect and safeguard the peace. Earlier this year, we reactivated the Liberian National Coast Guard, with a mandate to improve security of our coastline and control smuggling and illegal fishing. Our Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization has established border patrols to protect our porous borders against illegal activities. Our Liberia National Police, with the reforms underway, is one of the basic building-blocks for Liberia’s new security architecture. Some of our officers are also training to participate in the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF), to contribute to the stability of our sub-region and to Africa when called upon.

We know only too well that none of these measures to sustain the peace will succeed if we do not rebuild and revitalize our economy so that people can find jobs and lift themselves out of poverty. We know that we must promote governance and the rule of law, so that the rights of all Liberians, and their access to quality justice, will be protected. We also know that we must rebuild the physical and social infrastructure that were totally destroyed, and empower and propel our people to achieve sustainable peace and growth and development.

Many people contributed to the peace that we enjoy today. First are our own people, with their resilient spirit, their indomitable

commitment, and their own yearning for peace. Peace exists because our people have turned their backs on war and have said yes to peace and reconciliation and development.

We also acknowledge those who have come to help us to keep the peace – our African brothers and sisters, and the international community. We are indebted and grateful for your contributions and your sacrifices – both financial and in lives lost. Blessed are the peacemakers!

Our international partners have contributed in large measure to Liberia's peace and development. Because of their efforts, Liberians are today constructively engaged in nation-building. To them, we express our heartfelt thanks and gratitude.

I am honored to receive this African Union Flame of Peace, and to light it, in the presence of Liberia's stakeholders, and on their behalf. I do so in the sincere hope that once lit, this Flame will spread peace, like wildfire, all across this exceptional continent that is our home.

Our challenge, here in Liberia, is to keep alight this Flame of Peace throughout the nation – in our communities, villages, towns, and cities; in our homes, schools and places of worship.

We thank the Almighty God for His many blessings. We know that He has blessed us and our country. And so, tonight, from this podium, I call upon all Liberians to safeguard our precious peace.

Let us remain committed, united, and moving forward to rebuild our country to respond to the needs of our people. Only then will we truly "Make Peace Happen!"

I thank you