

# Liberia independence day

## Revitalization having success after years of civil war

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On July 26, Liberia will celebrate its 163rd independence anniversary.

The celebration will take place at a time when the nation has just achieved the HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor



Countries) Completion Point and is firmly on the path to economic recovery and social reconstruction. It will also take place at a time when the government of H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is endeavoring assiduously to ensure that the seven years of peace and stability the country has attained continues to be enjoyed by the Liberian people.

The current state of affairs resumed a little over four years ago when H.E. Sirleaf took the mantle of leadership as the president of Liberia after 14 years of civil strife.

Liberia was founded in 1822 by freed Africans from the diaspora. It became the first independent country in sub-Saharan Africa with a declaration of independence on July 26, 1847. Liberia is a unitary state with a republican form of government.

Liberia is situated in West Africa and occupies an area of 111,369 sq. km. It has a population of 3,489,072 people. The

country is divided into 15 sub-regions and has four seaports located in Greenville, Sinoe County; Harper, Maryland County; Buchanan, Grand Bassa County; and Monrovia, the capital, which has the largest seaport.

Liberia's main exports include iron ore, rubber, timber, diamonds, gold, coffee and cocoa. In recent times, the prospects for offshore oil have been positive.

Liberia experienced its darkest moments when rebels invaded the country in 1989 and waged war on the Liberian people for 14 years. With the intervention of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the larger international community under the auspices of the United Nations, the civil convulsion came to an end in 2003.

An election was held in 2005 and won by H.E. Sirleaf, the first female to be democratically elected to such high office in Africa.

Following her inauguration on Jan. 16, 2006, H.E. President Sirleaf embarked upon the process of nation building. For a country emerging from a civil war that killed more than 250,000 of its people, destroyed infrastructure and basic services such as water and electricity, ruined both health and educational institutions, in addition to a heavy external debt burden of more than \$4 billion and a poor internation-



H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

al image, the task was challenging. These challenges had to be addressed notwithstanding that they were mountainous and overwhelming.

The government formulated a policy to address the challenges, strategically based on four pillars viz., peace and security, revitalization of economic activity, rebuilding infrastructure and providing basic services, and strengthening governance and the rule of law.

The government has achieved a measure of success. Liberia has been at peace for the last seven years. This achievement to a large extent is a consequence of the vigilance of the United Nations peace-keeping efforts, the sacrificial services of ECOWAS and other friendly governments who continue to support the peace process.

The long years of peace and

stability are also due to the government policies geared toward reconciling and addressing the critical needs of the Liberian people. Accordingly, the government encourages the Liberian people to bury the hatchet and learn to live together again as a people with a common destiny.

The government also has not only increased the salaries of civil servants but has ensured that the salaries are paid on time. It has also put in place a free and compulsory primary education program, and revitalized the education system.

Revitalization of economic activity has had a tremendous success. Liberia registered 7.8 percent growth in 2006 and 9.5 percent in 2007. The growth was precipitated by incessant expansion in the service sector, mainly housing construction and investment in mining, agriculture and the forestry sector.

However, gross domestic product (GDP) declined to 7.1 percent in 2008. The expected growth for 2009 was 5 percent. The declining trend is due to global economic conditions. The effect of the global recession has mainly been felt in the reduction of government revenue, decline in exports, delayed foreign investment and reduction in inflow of remittances.

Despite the global recession Liberia has successfully implemented the poverty reduction strategy and maintained sound microeconomic policies. This required the formu-

lation of the right policies aimed at attracting private investment, passing laws to govern the budget and ensuring transparency. It also required financial discipline by not borrowing and spending only revenues collected.

As a result of the financial prudence exercised by the government, and again, the support provided by partners, the country has been able to achieve the HIPC Completion Point and a comprehensive debt reduction, which has written off more than 90 percent of the more than \$4 billion external debt inherited by the government.

In regard to strengthening governance and the rule of law, the government has initiated a series of institutional reforms. These reforms include the law reform commission, land reform commission, the anticorruption commission, whistle-blower protection, the functions and organizational structures of government ministries, public sector reform strategy, etc.

The rule of law has been one of the hallmarks of the government, ensuring the independence of the judiciary and also press freedom as well as the freedom of expression, which for many years eluded the Liberian people.

Rehabilitating infrastructure has also been a government priority. The government has, therefore, in the last couple of years engaged in the

rehabilitation of infrastructure with renewed vigor, rebuilding physical and social infrastructure including roads, ports and telecommunications, electricity generation, water, sanitation, educational and health facilities.

The cancellation of the external debt has therefore provided a critical impetus for the government to focus more on the reconstruction effort.

Liberia is a multiparty democracy with more than 10 political parties and a strong opposition.

The government has brought the issues of gender to the fore, encouraging the participation of women in the political process. An International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment was held in Liberia to empower women, and the government is encouraging the Liberian parliament to enact legislation that will set a threshold of 30 percent for women's representation and participation in government.

When President Sirleaf took office in 2006, Liberia was referred to as a "failed" or "pariah" state. The country's international image was severely battered. Liberia's relationship to international institutions suffered critically due to nonpayment of its assessed contributions.

In the African continental organization, the African Union, Liberia was under sanctions because it had not paid its dues for more than 10

years. The country could not speak or vote at AU meetings and Liberia's citizens could not be employed by the continental body.

Liberia's diplomatic service was in shambles.

A little over four years down the road, the international image of the country has improved. Liberia now has a voice at the AU and is making meaningful contributions to

ECOWAS.

Liberia currently chairs the Mano River Union, a bloc comprising Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and recently joined by Cote d'Ivoire. The Liberian leader has been playing a stabilizing role in the West African subregion.

The diplomatic service has been resuscitated and has regained the respect and honor it deserves.

### Congratulations to the People of the Republic of Liberia on the 163rd Anniversary of Their Independence Day



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