

**ADDRESS BY JEREMIAH C. SULUNTEH
ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY
141ST FOUNDERS' DAY CONVOCATION
Mississippi, USA
September 27, 2012**

President M. Christopher Brown, II

Members of the Board of Trustees

Faculty, staff, alumni and students

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

- Permit me, at the outset, to bring you sincere felicitations from Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, the Government and people of Liberia, and the Liberian Embassy in Washington.
- Thank you President Brown for the kind invitation extended to President Sirleaf to deliver the keynote address at this auspicious occasion. As you are aware, owing to her very busy schedule at the regular session of the United Nations General Assembly, which is currently convening in New York, President Sirleaf was unable to join you at this year Founder's Day Convocation. However, she has been pleased to have me serve in her stead, as her personal representative and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic Liberia to the United States of America.
- We recognize that this is a herculean task to perform, and have no illusion to pretend that we are not President Sirleaf. However, suffice it to express our heartfelt delight for the awesome opportunity afforded us to share light

on what is an important and historic relationship, that could further be strengthened and transformed into a mutually rewarding partnership for a better tomorrow, between your esteemed institution and that of the Republic of Liberia. As such, it is only befitting that we gather in this beautiful ambiance, the Oakland Memorial Chapel, which was recently renovated, to celebrate the rich history and achievements of an iconic institution built to develop the minds of descendants of freed slaves into productive leaders and citizens of today and succeeding generations to come.

- It is particularly pleasing to note that your choice to keynote the 2012 Founder's Day Convocation is an esteemed daughter and first female president of a country that embodies the yearning of freed slaves to establish on the homeland, the continent of Africa, a nation-state in their quest for self-governance. That dream, with the assistance of the American Colonization Society, was fulfilled by the successful declaration of Independence of the Republic of Liberia on July 26, 1847, fourteen years prior to the establishment of Alcorn State University in Mississippi, USA.

Our dear brothers and sisters,

- Today, we have come to join you celebrate the founding of this great institution and we do so with a reflection on "Mississippi and Liberia Relations in the context of Fostering Partnership to promote Education and Culture". This relationship recounts a story of two shining pillars, each

situated on two separate continents - Alcorn State University of Mississippi, United States of America on the one hand, and the founding of the Republic of Liberia in Africa, on the other.

- With similar experiences and history, a first rate institution of higher learning was established to champion the cause of humanity; whilst the promise of statehood as a beacon of hope for blacks everywhere was actualized, and today continues to make its mark, in spite of its recent turbulent past and challenges of nation-building.
- Thus, it is noteworthy, reading its history that revealed Alcorn State University as the oldest historically black land-grant institution in the United States, named for James L. Alcorn, then State Governor, who thought that the future of Mississippi depended on molding the minds of the its future leaders. From 1871 to date, it has undergone tremendous developments that are emblematic of the quality of its graduates and the various disciplines it offers. Indeed, deserving commendation must go to those pioneering fathers who served as trailblazers, occasioning our presence here today, to celebrate their triumphant efforts, buttressed by that of succeeding generations, making Alcorn State the envy that it has become.
- We here make proud references to the first African American Senator, Hiram Rhodes Revels, who willingly resigned his prestigious position to become the first President of Alcorn State University; We should also like to

mention the 2011 Founder's Day Keynote speaker, the Civil rights icon, Professor Myrlie Evers, an alumnae whose footsteps we are delighted to follow today.

- Distinguished guests, it was during this same period that Liberia, a country the size of Ohio and a bit larger than Tennessee would then emerge to lead the struggle for independence in Africa, and maintain for a long time as the cornerstone of its foreign policy, the total emancipation of the continent of Africa and its people from the yoke of colonialism, an appalling system that immensely underdeveloped the continent and delayed the unleashing of the potential of its peoples.

- **Colleagues in academia,**

Perhaps, the story is better told by Alan Huffman in his book, *“Mississippi Africa”*, in which he gave a historical account of the determination and commitment on the part of freed men of color to establish a homeland that became Liberia. Between 1829 and 1860, 571 freed slaves from Mississippi travelled to Liberia and settled in an area they named Greenville, Mississippi, in Sinoe County, Liberia, after a wealthy cotton farmer in Adams County, Mississippi. Additional freed slaves from New York and Pennsylvania were settled on the Bassa Cove in Grand Bassa County on the west of Greenville, while those freed slaves from the State of Maryland, USA settled on the east.

- If the question arises as, what lessons can we learn from the undaunted spirit of our forefathers who, in spite of all odds, managed to survive the dehumanizing conditions of slavery to establish a country for posterity, proving that the black man is capable of self rule, and building a first class and flourishing institution of higher-learning. Then we don't need to look too far to answer this important question, which lies in the promise of Liberia.
- Nearly doomed to self destruction, but took the visionary leadership and resilience of the Liberian people, and great support from the international community, to resurrect a sleeping giant or a failed state, Liberia, into a post-conflict success story. Yes, we are by no means out of the woods, but it is safe to say that Liberia is headed in the right direction, resolved never to return to her ugly past.
- We should like to report that Liberia has made remarkable progress in several areas including, institutional building, economic recovery and consolidating its democracy. Over the past six years, Liberia has attracted about US16 billion in foreign direct investment, looking to build the infrastructure that would turn these investments into jobs creating industries. Additionally, the issue of education and training for the youth of Liberia remains a critical factor in addressing unemployment in a country where 70% of its 3.8m inhabitants comprised the youth, who are the future leaders of Liberia.

- In this regard, the question may be asked how can Alcorn State University and Liberia use the experiences of their past to forge even a stronger partnership to their mutual benefits? We note with delight that already an agreement was signed on September 11, 2011, formally establishing a sister-city relationship between the cities of Greenville, Mississippi, USA and Greenville, Sinoe County, Liberia, with strong emphasis on the building of health and educational centers in Greenville, Liberia as well as improving tourism and cultural exchanges, among others.
- These two cities are now on the verge of cementing a strong sisterly relationship. Moreover, Liberia could immensely benefit from the rich experiences of Alcorn State University in building the capacities of young Liberians through scholarships in the areas of agriculture, the sciences, education and nursing, as well as, faculty exchanges between the higher institutions of learning in Liberia and Alcorn State University.
- Distinguished brothers and sisters, the partnership we seek is not only limited to the State of Mississippi, but the entire continental United States of America in the areas of capacity building, innovation and best practices, as well as, trade and commerce. Liberia is endowed with natural resources, including diamond, gold, iron ore, timber, rubber and various cash crops,

among others. We encourage your visit to Liberia to take advantage of these opportunities.

- Finally, Mr. President, members of the Board of Trustee, faculty/staff and students, let's resolve that this Founder's Day Convocation is a way of reconnecting us to the genesis of our common history, which binds us to the dreams of our forefathers that with God above, our rights to prove, we will overall prevail.
- We would like to invite you to come home; come to Liberia, trustees, faculty, staff and students of Alcorn, and residents of Mississippi to the place of your ancestors to see where you may find the need to support our efforts to transform, develop and preserve this land of liberty.

We thank you!