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## Inside This Edition

**President Sirleaf launches National Decentralization Platform  
Dr. Sawyer Proposes PAO and scrapping of Assistant Ministers positions**



## President Sirleaf launches National Deconcentration Platform

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on Wednesday February 18, 2015 launched the National Deconcentration Platform in Salala Bong County. The program was graced by high level government officials including representatives of the National Legislature and Cabinet Ministers, the Doyen and members of the Diplomatic Corps, heads of national and international non-governmental organizations and donor partners, and local government officials from all of Liberia's fifteen counties.

The Deconcentration Platform details sector specific services to be immediately moved from the Capital, Monrovia, to the Counties to: a) assure tangible improvements in the lives and environments of the Liberian people and b) a fast moving process to improve the quality and access to services.

The launch of the deconcentration platform assures of government's determination and commitment to an holistic people-centered development oriented reforms making Liberians active partners in the delivery of services and in the governance of their communities and counties. President Sirleaf noted that:

“this is also meant to send a clear and strong message that our country is on course and bouncing back, mighty and strong, in spite of the ravages that faced us from the Ebola enemy”.

This government, in successive years, has undertaken numerous initiatives to enhance decentralization and local area development. Notably among these are:

- a) County Development Fund - The government established, for the first time in this country's history, the County Development Fund, which is directly under the control of the county authorities for development purposes. The government also introduced the Social Development Fund, contributed by concessions, to augment the County Development Fund.
- b) Security Hub - Government has erected security hub in Gbarnga and plans to erect, along with its partners, four more around Liberia to ensure the enhancement of security, law and order (without which no development can take place) and provide equal access to justice.
- c) Establishment of school boards - local school boards have been established in school districts across the country.

Other line Ministries and agencies have joined government's decentralization plan geared toward service delivery and strengthening local governance in rural Liberia. To promote small farmers, County Agriculture Offices are being established, while the Ministry of Gender and Development has already embarked upon a program to erect safe houses in counties, and postal and banking services have been established in several counties. Despite the ravages of Ebola pandemic, considerable progress has also been made in restoring and establishing health facilities and strengthening county- based health care capacity. President Sirleaf, speaking in Gbarnga at the Deconcentration Platform Launch, admitted that government, at the time, did not factor into its responses the critical element of community capacity and preparedness in the wake of a health pandemic like that of Ebola.



President Sirleaf addresses the Conference

After more than a century of centralization in Liberia, a successful decentralization implementation will need time and the collective support of citizens. In many countries, decentralization reforms have required decades to unfold. But despite our numerous differences and criticisms, government remains positive about the success of Liberia's decentralization process. President informed the Deconcentration launch that decentralization implementation in Liberia will be carried out in three phases.

“We have laid out our Decentralization Reform Agenda to be pursued in phases. Our first phase is to continue to move the delivery of public services out of Monrovia to county centers and to do so in an efficient and coordinated manner to ensure that at the county level we build synergies among the service delivery ministries and agencies of government so that our people can be served more effectively. We look to the day, very soon, when teachers will no longer be told to come to Monrovia to attend educational matters; when our local business people will meet all the requirements for starting up and running their businesses from the counties and will not have to come to Monrovia to register or to do other businesses to carry on; when civil servants will not be told that the processing of their personnel action notices and other documents related to their employment are delayed due to the fact that their paperwork requires approval from Monrovia.

With the recent enactment of the Liberia Revenue Authority and its anticipated advent to the counties, we look to the day, very soon, when local administrators will have certain amount of fiscal authority in raising revenues to finance local development activities. That first phase is what we have started with the Deconcentration Platform.”

The second phase of the decentralization program is devolution of certain powers/authority which involves the sharing of limited political authority with local governance institutions. This also involves the election of superintendents, local councils, some sub-county officials and vesting them with authority, and encouraging them to do what is necessary, at the local level, without fragmentation that will retard development. Relevant government institutions including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Governance Commission, with support from the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning have already studied and crafted a draft Local Governance Bill to be submitted to the Legislature for passage into law.

Other important factors of decentralization include the effective delivery of public services in a coordinated manner that builds synergies require adequate public facilities such as a government center in rural Liberia to assure proximity of government institutions so that their operations and maintenance can benefit from economies of scale while making their services more accessible to the local population. The president said this process has already begun.

“In this respect, an important part of our decentralization program is to establish government centers in all counties as our resources will allow. We already have one or two, including Maryland and Grand Bassa. This will be a major undertaking to which we will commit our resources. We will also need the support of our development partners, and with the support of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning and all of our ministries and agencies with development functions will be required to work together to come up with a strategy that will enable us to carry out this objective. As we today launch our National Deconcentration Platform, we thank all of you, the development partners who have contributed to this work and to our development agenda in general. More importantly, our thanks go to the Liberian people for their guidance, their support, their patience and their participation. It is only through the involvement of people, through their

ownership of the processes of development and decentralization, can this become an historic undertaking.”



Partial View of Participants at the Conference

At the same time President Sirleaf, during the deconcentration launch, issued a number of executive directives meant to actualize government's visions at the official launch of the “Deconcentration Platform” in Gbarnga, Bong County recently. Under the presidential executive directives, government ministries were identified and designated certain Administrative, Fiscal and Political tasks to quicken the implementation of decentralization in

Liberia. Also, like many others, President Sirleaf commended the Chairman of the Governance Commission, Dr. Amos Sawyer, for being the driving force behind the decentralization plan in Liberia.

“Deconcentration Implementation Executive Directives:

Administrative Directives:

- a. County superintendents, from this day, are conferred with the authority to coordinate and manage the delivery of services in their county. All ministries and agencies staff deployed to the counties, while continuing to be employed by their line ministries and agencies, fall under the coordination of the County Superintendent administratively, and get technical guidance from the line ministry in Monrovia.
- b. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), in coordination and collaboration with all Ministries and Agencies, shall immediately coordinate a process to harmonize the finance, procurement, human resource, audit and monitoring and evaluation of services in the County to avoid the multiplication of these services in each ministry and agency.
- c. The MIA is directed to begin the process of developing a professional local government civil service with support from the Civil Service Agency.
- d. The line ministries and agencies shall delegate authority for the implementation of agreed county-based projects to heads of line ministry's county-based implementation units who will then operate within the local coordinating mechanism.

**Fiscal Directives:**

To achieve the above administrative reforms which will only be successful if they are complimented by the fiscal measures. Ministry of Finance and Development Planning will therefore be called upon:

- a. Expedite the establishment of County Treasuries, beginning with the 4 already identified and proceeding quickly to rest of the Counties.
- b. To make it possible for all government employees to receive their salaries in their County Headquarters. This directive is intended to provide support to Ministries like Education and Health who have to a large extent already deconcentrated, but whose quality of services hampered by the movement of staff to and from Monrovia in pursuit of their salaries.

**Political Directives:**

- a. Our final goal is a Liberia that is decentralized and therefore deconcentration should not become the end product. Implementing decentralization requires the establishment of a legal and regulatory framework. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Governance Commission are already working to finalize the few outstanding details on the draft Local Government Act. Our aim is to get this to the Legislature as quickly as possible.

- b. To my colleagues, members of the Legislative Caucuses:

This is an opportunity for you to be the torch bearers of the transformation of our nation and people. For those of you who are newly elected – everything about deconcentration and decentralization is what you promised in your campaigns. I know that all of you are already on-board and will do everything in your power to actualize this reform. We will need you to make the right decisions about budgetary allocation but the streamlining of resources to make deconcentration possible to allow the autonomy and independence of the coordinating mechanisms through the superintendents will take place without interference.

- c. To the Ministers and all functionaries of Government:

What you have crafted and I have launched today, the National Deconcentration Platform, is a monitoring and evaluation tool to follow your implementation progress which as chairperson of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Decentralization, I will follow and monitor day by day.

To the Superintendents, Mayors, Commissioners, and Traditional Leaders:

To you Superintendents, it is really you that are on the spot. If we get it wrong we are in serious trouble [because it will be recentralization]. If we get it right the credit will be taken by you and the people. The executive is entrusting you with increased responsibility so as to be the bridge to the people. We promise you that we will make every effort to adequately prepare and capacitate you for this new role.

To the custodians of our traditions and cultures, we count on you to lead us in this process and confer it with the legitimacy, dignity and honor that you symbolize in our communities.

To our Partners:

We proffer our thanks for your relentless and continual support to our effort to achieve our developmental goals and objectives. We implore you to continue especially for our Decentralization Reform Agenda.

To Dr. Sawyer, the architect of decentralization, the power pressure of governance reform, thank you for your persistence and patriotism.

To all of us, it is my pleasure to officially launch our National Deconcentration Platform, which is our call to duty, and social contract with our people. Thank you.”

The decentralization plan and other reforms taking place in Liberia have given cause for Constitutional amendments. The Law Reform Commission is expected to help craft the necessary Constitutional amendments required for these reforms including those related to local governance to be fully implemented. These amendments will later be submitted to the public through a referendum for approval.

President Sirleaf has observed, among other things, that one of the lessons learned, as a result of Ebola and key to the Deconcentration process is that it is important to ensure that local capacity is adequate to support the transfer of public services to local jurisdictions. She said failure to have adequate local capacity is often a basis for recentralization. Madam Sirleaf noted that government is endeavoring to avoid this pitfall by exploring and seeking innovative ways that can respond directly to our national developmental and capacity needs to manage a system of government that is decentralized.

**Dr. Sawyer Proposes PAO and scrapping of Assistant Ministers positions**



Members of the Hightable

In an effort at public sector reform (to down size and right size Liberia’s bloated government), the Chairman of the Governance Commission, Dr. Amos Sawyer, has recommended the elimination of Assistant Ministerial positions in government Ministries. Dr. Sawyer also recommended the establishment of the Principal Administrative office, PAO, as one of the next steps in enhancing the professionalization and merit-based character of Liberia’s public sector. Dr. Sawyer made the recommendations

when he served as keynote speaker at the launch of the Public Sector Modernization Project held on February 6, 2015 at the Foreign Ministry in Monrovia. He made several other pertinent recommendations geared toward public sector reform in Liberia including:

- a) The establishment of a Public Service Commission that will take our public sector reform agenda beyond the civil service;
- b) Redoubling our capacity building, especially human capacity building initiatives to service our growing public sector needs. Improve LIPA's capacity building efforts giving it full attention, and also consider the convening of a national conference on corporate governance; and
- c) The need to break down the silos in our reform agenda created by circumstance which include the nature of donor interests, the struggles over turf and the nature of the reform environment, among others.

As government implements its decentralization plan beginning with the deconcentration strategy, calls for the reduction in transaction and operational costs have been paramount. President Sirleaf has, on numerous occasions, urged heads of government functionaries to coordinate and cooperate in cost sharing activities to reduce operational costs. Dr. Sawyer has also added his voice to the call.

*"We must do our best to reduce the transaction cost of gaining results. Turf struggles, turnovers in senior public sector positions, delays including those from the side of our partners all account for high transaction costs. A related challenge has to do with Liberians taking greater ownership of the reform agenda and programs in conformity with the Paris Declaration and all its amplifications. As we proceed with the successful implementation of this public sector modernization project and other reforms which are ongoing, we must lock in the process of transformation and this administration will consolidate a strong legacy."*

As we well acknowledge driving force behind Liberia's decentralization plan, Dr. Amos Sawyer, sees Public Sector Modernization as paramount to decentralization - addressing and effectively managing the machinery through which public goods and services are delivered. He noted that past and ongoing studies on Liberia's governance performance have all pointed to "flawed public sector as a major contributor if not the most important contributor to state failure and persistent underdevelopment."

Research analysis and other studies on factors that have helped shape Liberia's continuous state of underdevelopment show the dire need to address Liberia's state capacity. According to Dr. Sawyer, *"the paucity and weakness of state institutions and the inadequacy of human capacity ranked at the top of the list of factors"*:

*"In 2011 the Governance Commission and the then Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs undertook a Retrospective in preparation for the National Vision Conference of 2012. The Retrospective was the base scientific study that sought to provide foundations for sound and realistic scenario construction of possible futures for Liberia. Data informing the Retrospective was taken from at least 6 studies of various sectors ranging from population and demographic dynamics to the economy and political and governance processes to Liberia's social processes and educational system. Among the key questions asked were, "Where is Liberia coming from? What factors have shaped Liberia's past—leading us to where we are today? The Retrospective analysis produced some very important findings. Out of 66 variables identified and analyzed in addressing the question, the most important factor was STATE CAPACITY."*

The second and third phases of the public sector modernization project intends to support some of the



Representatives of international organizations at the Launch of the Public Sector Modernization Project

core areas of civil service reform which have been carved out of the broader civil service reform agenda, and the broader public sector reform program. *According to Dr. Sawyer, Phase 2 is the Improvement of pay management by introducing a civil service remuneration structure that is equitable and transparent, and the strengthening of payroll management to ensure effective payroll controls and reduced risk of fraud. Phase 3 seeks to address the mandates, organizational structures, internal institutional arrangements, business processes and human resource capacity challenges of select ministries, agencies and commissions.*

Dr. Sawyer observed that the Sirleaf government, over the last ten years, has made considerable achievements in public sector reform. Those that immediately come to mind include:

- a) the establishment of the General Auditing Commission,
- b) the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission,
- c) the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, LACC,
- d) new policies and soon-to-be-new legislation on land rights,
- e) the creation of the Liberia Revenue Authority,
- f) the new Ministry of Finance and Development Planning,
- g) a new Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection;
- h) The passage into law of a new Code of Conduct—after six years of efforts, among others.

Dr. Sawyer however, wants the links among these reform achievements to be strengthened. At the same time, Dr. Sawyer has described the Governance Commission a good collaborator in the national reform agenda because it is at the intersection of policy and program design, and policy and program implementation. The GC has a mandate to look more closely at government functionaries and institutional performance, reinforcing each other and delivering as one, now and over time. Dr. Sawyer recalled the similarities of reform agendas of Governance Reform Commission and that of the current Governance Commission.

*“Beginning at the beginning, when you, Madam President, were the Chairperson of the Governance Reform Commission, the commission’s approach to reform recognized the importance of the various parts of the reform agenda from a systemic perspective.*

*Decentralization, legal and political reform, public service reform, economic governance reform and the building of a system of public integrity were all considered multiple sides of the same coin. And they all take their inspiration from our National Vision which in turn inspired our strategy for national reconciliation and transformation. This perspective remains fixed in the GC's approach today so that in our partnerships we try to be helpful as we remind us all that building institutional synergies, building human resource capacity and learning the lessons from past initiatives are imperatives if reforms are to be sustained."*



Dr. Sawyer delivering the keynote address

Dr. Sawyer gave a historic overview of public sector reform in Liberia, dating as far back to the 1960s. Some, he said, were successful while others were not. For him, the Governance and Economic Management Program (GEMAP) put in place in 2005—2006 was the most successful, and of a slightly different genre than the others.

*"Its intention was to kick-start financial management and governance systems that were being created. I might be wholly wrong but it seems to me that lessons learned from its limited success has led to the formulation and implementation of what I believe to be among the most successful capacity building support programs today—that is Governance and Economic Management Support program. I am of the view that GEMS is matched only by the Peace Corps among the successful USAID support interventions in Liberia that readily come to mind."*

However, the success of the public sector modernization project will depend upon how it succeeds in building institutional synergies, building human resource capacity and how it heeds the lessons of the past.

**STATEMENT OF PROFESSOR AMOS SAWYER  
AT THE INDUCTION OF OFFICIALS OF THE CONGRESS FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE (CDC)  
CDC HEADQUARTERS, February 28, 2015**

Mr. Speaker of the House of Representatives and Members of the Legislature her present,  
Senator George Manneh Weah, Political Leader of the CED & Senator of Montserrado County,  
Officers-elect of the CDC

Leaders of other political parties here present

Chief Zanzan Kawah and members of the Council of Chiefs and Elders

Platform Guests and Eminent Citizens

Ladies and Gentlemen

I accepted the invitation to this important program of the CDC for several reasons and I am pleased to be here today.

First, the CDC is a major political party in our country. Over two presidential elections it has been the runner-up party forcing a second round. So, over the last decade the CDC has been a major electoral force that cannot and should not be ignored.

Second, in the most recent senatorial elections, your party won at least two of 15 hotly contested seats, including the highly publicized Montserrado County senatorial contest and your political leader became a senator from Montserrado County. Montserrado is the county where our capital city, Monrovia is located and Montserrado is where about a third of our nation's population lives.

Third, observing your membership, though superficially, it seems to be overwhelmingly young and youthful. More than 60 percent of the population of our country is 35 years old and younger. Thus, your membership seems to be drawn substantially from the human resource pool upon which the future of Liberia depends. This segment of our population must always be engaged.

Fourth, as Chairman of the Governance Commission, I am all too aware that a stable society and a stable political party system are indispensable for sustaining a system of democratic governance. And so what excuse would I have for not coming here today to engage with a party that is one of the major parties in our political party system and a party that consists largely of young people?

So, today as you install your leaders and launch some other activities, I am pleased to have an opportunity to engage with you. Perhaps you might interpret my statement as a charge to you:

The right to be able to organize multiple political parties in Liberia is a right for which many have given their lives. Today, it may seem as commonplace as going to church or the mosque

unobstructed; but it required years of struggle, especially from 1955 when this constitutional right was taken away under political suppression to the 1980's when it was restored through struggle. We must cherish this right and act responsibly at all times to preserve our multi-party system in peace and to perfect it through artful and matured political engagements.

A strong party, like a strong individual must use strength to build confidence and productive working relationships. Issuance of threats can be a sign of weakness not of strength. It erodes confidence, it does not build confidence. It ruptures productive working relationships with others, it does not strengthen those relationships.

Let me also say something about leadership—and this is not mine originally. I heard this from the late Chief Thomas Kollie of Lofa 40 years ago. Chief Kollie said: “To be a leader you must be able to hold the fire coal when it is hot and then pass it to the people when it gets cold.” What did Chief Kollie mean? Leaders must bring down the temperature, not turn up the heat; they must cool the tempers not inflame the rage and the anger. Leaders must build upon today for a better tomorrow for all, including those who oppose or obstruct them today.

The strategies and tactics of political leaders must be appropriate for the political context and realities of the time. Since the ending of our violent civil upheavals, we have had two successful presidential and legislative elections; they have both been peaceful and legitimate, even with their imperfections. We have had several special elections; they have all been acceptable, even if imperfect. We are building a democratic electoral culture incrementally, going from strength to strength.

We have a Legislature that is vibrant and competitive—and sometimes even rambunctious—here meaning lively and full of energy. And I say this with deep respect for that body. The composition of the Legislature is as politically and ideologically diverse and you might find in democracies elsewhere on this earth. Yes, our Legislature has its flaws which must be addressed.

We have a Judiciary that has established its independence. Anyone can win or lose a case before the Supreme Court. But it too has its flaws which must be addressed.

We have an Executive that respects the law, held to coordinate with the Legislature and abides by the decisions of the courts and decisions of the electorate. Yes, we must continue to ensure that our President remain accountable.

We have a free press, wholly unfettered—even if sometimes falling short in some of its organs. We must also address the flaws of the media.

Today you are inducting new officers and launching a party building campaign across Liberia in an environment that is free and that accepts and respects political diversity. This is the context and these are the realities within which your party, the Congress for Democratic Change and other

parties are devising and implementing political strategies and tactics. You have recourse in the courts, the Legislature and the administrative organs of government. And your ultimate recourse is through and electoral process which has been tested and which works. Use these institutions and processes!

There is no constructive purpose to be achieved by threats to shut down or break down the institutions and processes of governance of our country. If you feel that the institutions are inaccessible, unfair or even of weak legitimacy, you must work to make them accessible, fair and of deeper legitimacy.

Let me also say, there is also nothing constructive to be achieved by hurling insults at the institutions and officials of our government. If you demean our institutions, you demean your own participation in them and you cannot expect for them to grow stronger. If you hurl insults at your leaders you disrespect the Liberian people. But you also demonstrate a lack of self-respect. Self-control and personal dignity are hallmark characteristics of good leaders.

And finally let me say, we, the Liberian people, have a stake in your success as productive, constructive leaders. We should offer you guidance where the national interest is at stake as we should to leaders of all parties in such circumstance. We should hold you accountable because too much is at stake for us all.

This is my charge to you. Thank you.