

**PLENARY ADDRESS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE  
(LENGTH: 6 MINUTES)**

The President of the General Conference  
The Director-General of UNESCO  
The Chairman of the Executive Board  
Fellow Delegates  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring you greetings from Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia and the Government and people of Liberia. On their behalf, I would like to congratulate the new Director-General, Madam Audrey Azoulay, the new President of the General Conference from Morocco and the new Chairman of the Executive Board. We wish you success in advancing UNESCO's mission during your tenure. Liberia stands firmly beside you.

As many of you may know, my country is in the midst of a closely contested and peacefully conducted election. When the new President is inaugurated in January it will mark the first peaceful transfer of power in more than 70 years. That is no minor achievement, particularly in light of our troubled past.

As I prepare to leave office, this opportunity to update you on our progress and thank UNESCO for its steadfast support is particularly special for me.

UNESCO has been an invaluable partner as we have worked to rebuild our education sector after the devastating impact of years of conflict followed by the Ebola crisis.

UNESCO has helped us launch our efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal Four, aimed at ensuring inclusive and quality education for all. I want to particularly thank the UNESCO delegation who visited Liberia to hold a workshop with the Ministry and education stakeholders prior to the launch. UNESCO also provided crucial guidance to ensure that our "Getting to Best Education Sector Plan" was fully aligned with SDG4.

UNESCO's support for the Joint Program to Accelerate Efforts to Advance the Rights of Adolescent Girls in Liberia has also made a significant impact. Madam Director-General, I was heartened to see the focus on education as a catalyst for development and gender equality at the top of your vision for UNESCO. This is an issue that is of great importance for me and that is particularly close to the heart of our current President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. I am confident that our successors will be eager to partner with UNESCO to continue this effort.

Bolstered by support from UNESCO and other international partners, Liberia is getting our education system back on track.

We have been working to ensure that all Liberian children will have access to free, quality education by focusing on three crucial areas: improving the quality of teaching, ensuring effective monitoring, and exploring innovative solutions.

Having qualified teachers is essential for a good education system. Supported by international donors, we have gone county-to-county, vetting more than 15,000 teachers across the country. We have identified and removed nearly 1,900 “ghost teachers” from payroll, enabling us to recoup more than \$2.5 Million in savings per year. This can now be used to either train existing teachers or hire new, qualified, and energetic graduates.

As we improve the quality of teaching and management in our schools, it is essential that we effectively measure the impact this is having. To that end, we are developing a framework for School Quality Assessment, which will monitor improvement in school quality from Early Childhood Education up to Senior Secondary, and enable the provision of objective feedback to school administrators and teachers.

Finally, we are exploring innovative solutions to rapidly accelerate improvements in school management and teaching quality. One of our most ambitious reforms is a pilot program called Partnership Schools for Liberia – PSL for short. The program has already demonstrated tremendous potential, with students learning 60 percent more than their peers in other public schools. While the program itself has prompted international debate, one thing that tends to get lost is that PSL isn’t just about improving education in a small number of schools. PSL schools serve as learning hubs, where we can identify effective interventions that can be applied across the school system. And we are doing just that.

Much remains to be done, but we have made significant progress over the last couple of years, thanks to the support of our international partners and the dedication of Liberian educators.

As I look toward the end of my term, we are focused on ensuring that this progress will continue. We have established an Education Delivery Unit so a high-performing team is in place to implement priority reforms and maintain momentum into the next administration.

Finally, before I close, let me thank the World Heritage department, as thanks to you we now have a tentative list of sites to submit for World Heritage status. UNESCO is helping us work towards a day when Liberia is known for something more than just Ebola and child soldiers, by bolstering our education system, and showing the world our rich cultural heritage.

Thank you