

ADDRESS BY H.E. PRESIDENT ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF

AT THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS SUMMIT

United Nations, New York

Tuesday, September 21, 2010

Mr. President;

Mr. Secretary-General;

Excellencies Heads of State and Government and Heads of Delegations;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are here because we share a fundamental belief: that poverty, illiteracy, disease and inequality do not belong in the twenty-first century. We share a common purpose: to eradicate these ills for the benefit of all. And we share a common tool to achieve this: the Millennium Development Goals.

The MDGs are universal, but their impact will be greatest in the world's poorest nations, mainly those in sub-Saharan Africa, like my own country, Liberia. But it is also in Africa that we have seen the difference the MDGs have been making. They have mobilized the international community, donor countries, and governments around a common set of targets.

We have made progress. Eleven low-income African countries are among the top 20 performers. However, it is clear that the continent still has far to go. Yet, I know that if we intensify our focus and efforts, we will, ultimately, achieve them.

My message is this: As we renew our resolve in the year 2010, we must recognize the need for inclusive economic growth. We need rapid, stable, and sustained growth that creates jobs, especially for the youth and in sectors that benefit the poor, and expands opportunities for women.

The Goals are global, but their impact is local. Each country has a distinct context and unique vision of development. We must, therefore, take stock, listen to our people, and choose the path that will bring to life the vision of the MDGs.

In Liberia, we are implementing the Goals under a more challenging context. As we embark upon the process of rebuilding and renewal, we have focused on national reconciliation, rebuilding our governance systems and institutions, and reforming our security and rule of law sectors.

In spite of our unique challenges, we have remained committed to the MDGs. Our progress so far bears the fruits of this commitment.

Liberia has made appreciable progress especially on MDG 3 (gender equality and women's empowerment), MDG 4 (infant mortality), MDG 6 (HIV/AIDS and TB), and MDG 7 (access to clean drinking water and sanitation), and MDG 8 (global partnership for development).

We have shown that with improved coordination, appropriate policies, and strong development partnerships, Liberia has the potential to progress rapidly on several of the MDGs.

Despite the progress, substantial effort is needed to advance poverty reduction, achieve universal primary education, reduce maternal mortality and ensure access to sanitation.

In this regard, we face huge challenges in the areas of infrastructure and capital and human resources. We understand the interdependence and synergies among the MDGs, yet our challenging context makes it difficult to accord equal priority to all the Goals. It is therefore important that we focus on a subset of goals that are achievable.

As we move forward, we will focus on universal primary education, child and maternal mortality, and poverty reduction, through a modernized and linked agriculture sector. In this regard, our global partnership, with which we have been most successful, must go beyond aid to support enhancement in trade by the removal of trade barriers. This will break the link between aid and the MDGs.

Investing in agriculture, small-scale enterprises and infrastructure will help progress across all the MDGs. We are working especially hard to develop small and medium-sized enterprises, because they have the biggest influence on employment.

To enhance the productivity of the economy and sustain progress towards the MDGs, we must invest in human capacity and strengthen public and private institutions. One of the key drivers of success in

Liberia is that our policies reflect our people's priorities in such a way that each step is nationally recognized and owned. Combined with our efforts to rebuild security, control corruption, and provide quality public services, these measures will ensure that our long-term development goals are aligned with the MDGs and with our vision for a prosperous and independent Liberia.

As leaders, we intend to renew our efforts to look beyond 2015 to how we can consolidate, protect and accelerate the progress. The Goals are a means to an end to a more educated, resourceful, prosperous and empowered people.

I thank you.