

Statement by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

February 26, 2007

Fellow Liberians, I wish once again to thank you for the general support and the exceptionally warm reception given to me on my return from the Partnership Forum. The Forum was indeed a success although work has to be done to conclude arrangements with all of our bilateral creditors for the cancellation of individual bilateral debt and that of our major multilateral creditors. We are pleased that the United States through Secretary Condoleeza Rice took a strong leadership role in this regard and that Germany and the United Kingdom took similar action. We are assured that others will follow.

In addition to the debt relief, although this was not a pledging session, we expect additional bilateral and multilateral grant assistance on the order of aggregate \$350 million over the next two years which adds to approximately \$400 million already allocated to ongoing programs. We are pleased to note that new commitment includes the resumption or start up bilateral relationship with old friends such as France, Ireland, Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Rwanda.

The Private Sector Forum which took place on the third day of the Forum was equally successful. Over 350 persons participated with the highlighted participation of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation of the United States and private entrepreneur Robert Johnson who together will provide a \$30 million facility to support Liberian businesses in several areas of endeavor over the next 2-3 years. OPIC already has a follow up mission in town and Mr. Johnson is expected to lead a high-

power African-American investment group that will come at the end of April.

That day, the very widely consulted AllAfrica.com announced plans to open an online international news processing center in Monrovia. The office will also be used by the AllAfrica Foundation as a hub for healthafrica.org, an ambitious project to provide a broad range of information and services, as well as a pioneering facility to track and monitor funding for health in Africa.

Fellow Citizens, I am also pleased to report that on a one-day joint visit by me and President Kabbah to Conakry on February 20th, we were able to use the good relationship shared by our three countries in the Mano River Union to reach certain understandings which have contributed to the ECOWAS intermediation effort that has been announced.

After Conakry I responded to the invitation by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda to give the keynote at the 10th Anniversary of the Rwanda Women Parliamentary Forum which I launched in 1997 as the Director of the African Bureau of UNDP. We used the opportunity of the visit for bilateral talks in which I was joined by our Ministers of Defense and Internal Affairs to learn about the Gacaca Court and the robust decentralization and financial management systems which have made Rwanda a very successful post conflict country.

Fellow Citizens, I now want to say a word about corruption. There is absolutely no doubt that despite our commitment and utterances, we still have this cancer deeply embedded in our institutions. We must now deal ruthlessly with this by dismissing and where applicable, prosecuting those

who continue to engage in these practices. We also wish to note that while we are committed to do all that we can to foster peace and reconciliation, we can do no less than bring to justice those of past regimes who violated the public trust for whatever reason given, recognizing that in setting the standards of accountability, we do so not only for the past but for the present and the future as well.

Fellow Citizens, on another issue, I would like to advise all those concerned that the government will recommend implementation of the zoning laws which were relaxed to give squatters and those occupying public and private property illegally the opportunity to resettle. This relaxation has been misinterpreted and we now find illegal occupation of land such as those around our airfields and those in public buildings such as the Ducor Hotel and the several unfinished public buildings doing so with impunity. They should now desist and plan their relocation or run the risk of being evicted and their buildings demolished. The same warning applies to the petty traders who have returned to the streets and sidewalks.

Finally, Fellow Citizens, I accepted today, with regrets, the resignation of my Acting Chief of Staff, Minister Willis Knuckles. I accepted his resignation, which he offered not because of demands from those who sought to use this unfortunate situation for blackmail and who should probably review their own moral probity. Rather, I did so because first, I have sworn to uphold high standards in my own behavior and have made it clear to my staff and others that they will be held accountable for the same standards, and second, because I am in full agreement with those who do speak with moral authority that the behavior of Minister

Knuckles, while not illegal is improper and inappropriate for a public servant.

I used the word “regret” advisedly, as Minister Knuckles has been a friend and close associate for many years. However, my regret cannot extend to condoning improper behavior by a public servant who swore to uphold the tenets of our code of conduct, and to accept the higher scrutiny which comes with that role.

I believe that Minister Knuckles brought to his family and friends much pain, but one which should not be allowed to tarnish his long years of service and commitment to our beloved country. In all the faiths practiced in our country, there is room for redemption and forgiveness after remorse and penance.

I therefore urge all of us to reflect on this situation and use it as a lesson – and then to come together, to continue to work together – to accelerate the progress in achieving the collective vision we have for our country.

Thank you.