

**ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA
TO THE 65TH REGULAR SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 24, 2010**

Mr. President;

Mr. Secretary-General;

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government and Heads of Delegations;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to address this 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on behalf of the people of Liberia. I congratulate you on your election, Mr. President, as President of this august Assembly. We are assured that you will bring to the office your wealth of experience as a former President and Foreign Minister of the Swiss Confederation.

Let me express appreciation to your predecessor, H.E. Dr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, for the capable manner in which he conducted the affairs of the 64th Assembly.

Allow me also to extend highest commendation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his unwavering commitment to the Organization and his efficient management of its affairs.

I wish to congratulate President Jacob Zuma, the Government and people of South Africa for successfully hosting the 2010 World Cup for the first time on our African continent. You made Africa proud, and we, in turn, are proud of you.

Mr. President:

Some four years ago, I stood at this podium and told the story of a country exhibiting the symptoms of two decades of self-destruction: a criminalized

and collapsed economy; a suffocating external debt overhang; dysfunctional institutions; destroyed infrastructure; a pariah nation in a state of decay; a people in a state of despair. All of this translated into hundreds of thousands in refugee camps, equal numbers of the talented in the Diaspora, thousands of women, youth and children struggling for survival.

Today, I stand at the podium to report on the progress that can be made from the collective effort of a resilient people, a responsive partnership, and effective leadership.

We have come to report to you, with confidence, that Liberia is well on the way to recovery. In less than five years, our economy has experienced average annual growth rate of 6.5 percent, despite the drag on the two-digit potential occasioned by the 2009 global economic crisis. I can say to you, with pride, that having successfully carried out the reforms required under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, on September 17, at the Paris Club, the final segment of Liberia's \$4.9 billion external debt was written off the books.

I can report to you that we have opened the economy to put the private sector at the center of our development effort and thereby have attracted some US\$16 billion in private investment in the reactivation of our mining, agriculture and forestry sectors. A new potential lies recently in oil exploration.

Mr. President:

The results of reform in our security sector, enhanced by the continued deployment of the United Nations peacekeeping force, has stabilized the security situation in the country, with people moving freely around. The experience in this regard shows that peacekeeping and peace building can and should take place concurrently, and we are pleased that Liberia is now formally placed on the agenda of the Peace Building Commission to enable us to chart the way for a smooth transition for peacekeeping and peace-building to recovery.

Moreover, we have encouraged a vibrant environment in which people have exercised their inalienable rights to free expression, association, religion and access to the press without hindrance. Nobody has been molested on account of views expressed. Liberia has no prisoners of conscience in detention, nor does anyone have cause to flee in fear for their life or safety on account of their political belief or association. Thus, in promoting a liberal environment in which freedom, equity and equality are exercised as the best guarantee for peace, security and stability, we can boast of being counted among the governments that have demonstrated the commitment to good governance and proven respect for human rights.

Regionally, Liberia continues to demonstrate its commitment to good neighborliness, peaceful co-existence and respect for the sovereign integrity of other nations. We actively participate in sub-regional and regional affairs through the African Union, ECOWAS, CEN-SAD, and the Mano River Union. The Mano River Union is currently under Liberia's chairmanship, and this has allowed us to stay engaged with our members, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, as they embark upon their political transitions.

Mr. President:

We hail the recent breakthrough by President Barack Obama in bringing the Palestinians and Israelis back to the negotiating table, and holding their leaders to their words to fulfill their promise to remain engaged and conduct direct talks aimed at ending this long-running crisis.

Because we live in a global village, continued crisis in any Member State or region should warrant our concern. Moreover, an unending crisis contradicts the cardinal objective of the United Nations, which is the promotion of international peace and security.

In this regard, we suggest that the situation in Somalia warrants a Chapter VII intervention. Having gone many years without a stable constitutional government, the presence of pirates, extremists and other terrorist elements in that country should sound the alarm. The world needs to act promptly, as we cannot afford to see Somalia remain a haven of anarchists and extremists.

This is why our government supports the role of African Union troops in Somalia. We call for more troop deployment from other countries, and strongly support action in putting an end to the Somali quagmire. We also call on the Somalis themselves to accept dialogue and to go to the negotiating table to thrash out their differences and restore their country to rightful peace and dignity.

While we acknowledge the rights of States to self-defense and the promotion of programs in support of national interests, we call on them to do so responsibly with respect for international public opinion, protocols and conventions surrounding such developments.

Mr. President:

At this week's Millennium Development Goals Summit, we reaffirmed Liberia's commitment to continue to work for the achievement of all eight Goals, although we are implementing those Goals under a more challenging context. Our national development agenda and programs on ensuring national reconciliation, good governance and the rule of law, national security, food security, and implementation of our Poverty Reduction Strategy are consistent with the objectives of the MDGs. Our progress bears the fruits of this commitment.

We are pleased to note the progress the world has made in the advancement of women. Today, there is greater representation of women in government, in political life, business and in civil society. Liberia's own effort was recognized on Sunday when we received an award for our progress on MDG 3, the empowerment of women. We also commend the Secretary-General for establishing U.N. Women, and we applaud the appointment of Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile, to take on this assignment as Executive Director.

We have five years left to do so. For us, it is not the target date that matters; rather, it is the commitment to achieving the Goals that is important to us. We therefore call upon our partner countries to support the realization of the Goals through strong global partnership as recommended by MDG 8.

We believe in the partnership that we have enjoyed from bilateral and multilateral institutions that have made our progress possible. We call upon all in this room to secure the strength of this partnership that benefits all of our countries by supporting the replenishment of the resources of the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

Mr. President, Excellencies:

Liberia's progress is not without challenges. The satisfactory security environment of which I speak is still fragile, and made more so by the political uncertainties in our sub-region. We also continue to face the tensions associated with the thousands of our youths who, lacking skills, are still unemployed. Moreover, we continue to manage the raised expectations in the demand from villages and communities across the country for essential infrastructure such as roads, schools and clinics.

Perhaps the greatest challenge we face is to go beyond the measures we have taken in formulating a public service Code of Conduct, in introducing new procurement and financial management systems in establishing and strengthening the pillars of integrity, all aimed at addressing long-standing corruption. Reform of the judicial system and efforts to change an inherited value system are additional measures that are under way.

Another challenge is Liberia's vulnerability to organized cross-border crimes, including drug trafficking and human trafficking, as a result of porous borders and limited law enforcement capacity with weak national security organizations. Against this background, we recently signed the Freetown Commitment on Combating Illicit Trafficking of Drugs and Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa. This should assist in promoting capacity building in the region to combat transnational crime.

Mr. President:

The root cause of civil crisis in Liberia has been the consistent failure of democratic transitions which would usher in governments elected by the people. With the support of the United Nations, multi-party democratic elections were held in 2005 following the end of the civil crisis. In keeping

with our Constitution, once again the Liberian people will exercise the right of choice as we are to hold elections in 2011.

The 2011 elections will mark a groundbreaking turning point. It will complete Liberia's transition to full constitutional rule and participatory democracy. This will be the true test of Liberia's progress on the road to development and its defining moment, which, if successful, will serve as proof that we can truly stay on an irreversible course towards peace and development. It is absolutely essential that everything is done to ensure a peaceful, legitimate and transparent process.

I wish to state categorically that my government is completely and fully committed to this objective, and we call on the international community to stay with Liberia on this last stretch. Already, the process leading to the holding of elections in 2011 has begun with the release of the elections timetable.

As a Founding Member of this Organization, Liberia remains inspired by the noble objectives of the United Nations in meeting the enormous global challenges. We believe in the ability of the United Nations to formulate and implement programs particularly aimed at raising the standard of living of people, forging global cooperation and solidarity, and encouraging dialogue to reduce tension and conflicts.

Mr. President, Excellencies:

In closing, we say again that Liberia is on the way to recovery. We have thrown off the label of a pariah state. We have restored hope to our people, credibility and honor to our national integrity, and won international creditworthiness and respect.

Our confidence in the future of our country is firm. Our new vision of a Rising Liberia seeks to move us to a middle-income country by the year 2030. This is an aggressive goal but we are determined, and through efficiency in the allocation and use of our natural resources, we will succeed.

We thank you, Mr. President and all the Members of this noble institution, for the support which has brought Liberia to this point of progress.