

**Remarks  
by  
H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia  
At Africa-China-U.S. Trilateral Dialogue  
On Establishing Best Practices for Corporate Responsibility in Africa  
Wednesday, February 24, 2010**

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**Excellencies;**

**Participants of the Africa-China-U.S. Trilateral Dialogue;  
Representatives of the Private Sector and Business  
Leaders;**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:**

**Thank you for choosing Liberia as the venue for your discussions on “Establishing Best Practices for Corporate Responsibility in Africa.” We wholeheartedly welcome you.**

**We believe that the organizers could not have selected a better venue for this phase of the Africa-China-U.S. Trilateral Dialogue. Your choice of Liberia has two advantages: First, this country has one of the longest traditions of corporate presence on the continent and, therefore, has had an ongoing dialogue with its corporate partners, with varying degrees of success**

**over the decades. Second, as a nation emerging from a devastating conflict – yet one endowed with tremendous natural resources – Liberia will certainly attract a great number of corporations, and we need right from the start to engage them in a dialogue.**

**If the list of participants is any indication, I have no doubt that the results of these two days of discussions will lay solid foundations for a new partnership between African nations and corporations doing business on our continent.**

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) may have taken a long time to get on our national agenda, but it is now here to stay. Just two weeks ago, ArcelorMittal and other companies launched a Corporate Responsibility Forum here in Monrovia, to mobilize private sector resources and facilitate public-private cooperation in support of Liberia's development initiatives. We see your presence here today as an extension of that Forum, even if the two events are not directly related.**

**Corporate social responsibility has gained momentum throughout our continent. As corporations open their doors, their primary objective is to make profit, for themselves and their shareholders. That is well and good! But as they earn profits, utilizing local resources and manpower, companies must also direct a portion of that profit, the source of that wealth into the development of the communities in which they operate. This means the support of programs that provide services to the community in critical areas such as education, health, basic infrastructure, and capacity building. It is in their best interest to do, not only to live in harmony with the community, but to be able to rely upon the educated and healthy manpower which their involvement would have created. This is an obligation, not a charity, because a healthy relationship between community and corporation is in everyone's interest.**

**On the other hand, if we expect corporations to be transparent and live up to certain obligations and expectations in our development agenda, we, as government, must be equally responsible, transparent, and accountable. We must as much as possible respect**

**the sanctity of contracts and have judicial systems that provide address when required.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

**One thing is clear: while Liberia has seen various manifestations of CSR, past governments did not articulate a clear vision and regulatory framework. Today, in collaboration with our partners, we hope to develop blueprints for CSR in Liberia so that we can reap even higher dividends on behalf of all our people and the firms operating in Liberia. The way to evolve such a system will be through ongoing and broad-based conversations between government, firms, civil society, and individual citizens.**

**As a way to start that conversation, and to offer some leadership on this topic, I would like to suggest a few values I think should drive our discourse:**

- **CSR must serve as a means for respecting workers' rights and adhering to the terms of collective bargaining;**
- **On a continent where the standards of giving back to the community have been minimal, it is my hope that CSR will be used to mend community-corporate relationships and provide avenues for helping the disadvantaged and disempowered;**
- **CSR must serve as a vehicle so that businesses that have not operated in a sustainable way, or given due regard to the environment, are encouraged to devise ways to adhere to high ecological standards;**
- **While forced labor and child labor have not been significant challenges in some parts of the continent, I believe that CSR will be one of the platforms for mitigating these societal ills;**
- **CSR should help promote engagement and collective bargaining between employees and**

**employers and prohibit discrimination in employment and at work, so that social and economic justice can prevail.**

**It is evident that the business that gains the best reputation is the one which shows responsibility towards its workers, towards the citizens of the communities in which it operates, and towards the society at large.**

**CSR is the bedrock for making the greatest profits. Long-term profit optimization hinges on CSR. It brings to life a company's corporate values. It is indispensable in giving companies a competitive advantage. CSR can be the greatest tool for poverty reduction all over our continent.**

**The good governance that evaded this continent for so long is finally taking roots. Therefore, it is important that corporate social responsibility, which was only sporadically applied, becomes a reality in Africa.**

**In closing, I want to thank all of you for making the trip and for inviting me to be a part of this history-altering dialogue. I wish you every success in this undertaking.**