

Remarks by

H.E. Clar Marie Weah, First Lady of the Republic of Liberia

@ the 26th Extraordinary General Assembly of OAFLAD

Under the theme: "Twenty years in the service of the most vulnerable of Africa,"

Held June 10, 2022 at the International Conference Center of Brazzaville, Brazzaville, Congo

Her Excellency Mrs. Antoinette SASSOU N'GUESSO, President of OAFLAD, First Lady of the Republic of Congo, H.E Minata Cessouma Samate, Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, African Union Commission,

Distinguished Ministers of Government, Representatives of WHO, UNAIDS and other Partners

My Fellow esteemed Sister & First Ladies,

Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen

I want to thank you, my dear sister, Her Excellency Mrs. Antoinette SASSOU N'GUESSO, First Lady of the Republic of Congo, for the great work you have done for the past two years as President of the OAFLAD, and for hosting us in your beautiful country.

It is always a pleasing duty to address my fellow First Ladies, my dear Sisters in whom I am well pleased. I am grateful that the presence of God has allowed us this opportunity to gather at this 26th Extraordinary General Assembly to share our experiences and strategize on how we can do more for the transformation of our various nations and indeed our continent, Africa, after being in service for Twenty years. I continue to believe in the ideals and mission that have underpinned this organization and greet all of you joyously.

In Liberia, we have pushed, amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic, building upon our "She's You Movement", "She Cares, She's You" to engage in activities that would benefit the most vulnerable, seeking to if not eradicate, but certainly minimize the transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to child. Yearly

the Office of the First Lady of the Republic of Liberia has partnered with the National Aids Commission and UNAIDS to bring awareness to the people a strong campaign prompting them to know their status.

The humanistic passion that drives me and my office is one that seeks to end childhood HIV and keep mothers alive and healthy, for the health of Liberia and that of Africa are mutually intertwined, because what affects Liberia affects All of Africa, hence we must continue to push to make the difference albeit amidst challenges.

May I gently remind you that when we launched the She's You Movement in Liberia where we were pleased to have some of you grace that occasion, we simultaneously launched the Free to Shine campaign, seeking to address the growing complacency in the response to childhood HIV in Africa. As you are quite cognizant, the campaign aims to leverage the unique engagement and advocacy of first ladies in Africa, reinforcing the political commitment of African leadership, to end childhood HIV and to keep mothers healthy.

I am glad to report that though there are challenges, Liberia's progress in this area is steady, thanks to the supportive leadership of Liberia's President, my husband, His Excellency George Manneh Weah who continues to muster the political will and commitment to end childhood HIV and keep mothers healthy. The Office of the First Lady is appreciative of this great and seamless working relationship with the Presidency and all relevant agencies.

My esteemed Sisters and First Ladies of Africa, Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen, we are frequently referred to as the Mother of our Nations because of the deep and abiding love and compassion we possess for our people to see their lives transformed. Our people see us as conduits to lifting them from valleys of despair to buoyancy of new and spired hope and keeping their hope alive brightens the future of Africa.

In Liberia, we continue to keep the prospect of their brightened future alive though resource limitations plague us. However, we continue to raise awareness by in and around health facilities in targeting pregnant and breastfeeding women and their partners; working with women openly living with HIV, organizing empowerment sessions with HIV positive women for them to feel safe and comfortable to disclose to their sexual partners, something we feel is quite pivotal in this fight.

What we also continue that we have found quite impactful is to organize community sessions with women who are not in peer groups or treatment buddy to motivate them to organize in same and support the initial setup and functioning of the group. We are advocates with health authorities to consider different options to facilitate access to health services e.g. extended opening hours, community refills, etc.

While Liberia reports some successes, Liberia needs so much more support so that our efforts will reach more of our people across Liberia's fifteen counties, especially those in the rural areas, where getting to is quite difficult because of the lack of road-worthy vehicles, Motor Bikes and other essentials. On behalf of the people of Liberia, we are hopeful that changes will be brought about sooner rather than later.

My fellow sisters and esteemed First Ladies, Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen, it is always a pleasure being together where we can listen, learn and strategize in the interest of our people. May our time together at this assembly yield fruits worthy of consuming by our people. Congratulations to our newly elected OAFLAD president, H. E. Monica Geingos, First Lady of Namibia and our Vice President, Denise Nyakeru Tshisekedi, First Lady of the Republic Democratic of Congo, and congratulations to all the members of the steering committee. I know we are in good hands.

Thank You!!