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Life Size Potrait of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Unveiled At Havard University

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(CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS -- Thursday, May 15, 2014) As part of the campaign launch for the Harvard Kennedy School, known as IDEASpHERE, a full-length portrait of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, a distinguished alumna of the School's Edward S. Mason Fellows Program (MC/MPA 1971), was unveiled at a ceremony on Thursday. According to a dispatch from Cambridge, the full-length portrait is an amazing likeness of the Liberian President. It shows her dressed in her favorite color, green, draped in a beautiful green and gold sash and matching skirt made from cloth woven in Liberia, and her signature head-tie, also green, with a gold-jeweled brooch. The attire is accented by her signature single row of pearls and a pin of the Liberian flag, the Lone Star.



As for the President's expression, Artist Stephen Coit painted her with a soft smile, but with a reflective determination capturing her life of perseverance. Coit said he "sought to create a painting that would bring an ongoing presence of President Sirleaf to wherever it hung at the Kennedy School," for the thousands of future students who would see it.

It was in September 2012 that Dean David T. Ellwood, Dean of the Kennedy School, informed President Sirleaf that HKS wished to commission her portrait to hang in its Library as an inspiration to future generations of Kennedy School students. Upon her acceptance, the School commissioned Mr. Coit, also a Harvard alumnus, to create a full-length portrait of Liberia's and Africa's first female President.

The unveiling took place at a private reception in honor of President Sirleaf, hosted by the Women and Public Policy Program (WAPPP), one of Harvard Kennedy School's Research Centers. As President Sirleaf arrived at the Malkin Penthouse, in the Littauer Center Harvard Kennedy School, adoring supporters, mostly women, surrounded her to wish her well and thank her for all that she has achieved in her career and life. Everyone sought a photo with HKS's most illustrious alumna.

"Wow! said President Sirleaf, reacting to her amazing portrait. She went on to say: "A big thank you. Words cannot express the honor that I feel, and through me, the honor extended to women in Liberia, women in Africa, and I daresay women in the world, for the role that we all continue to play. I want to thank Jenny Mansbridge; she was a driving force behind this; Francine Lefrak; you, Dean Bohnet, who I'm told started the whole program of IDEASpHERE that we will all be participating in so many events." "I said to Stephen Coit, 'How did you do it?' I have to say that he sent me a note on the experience we shared when he did the painting. Am I right it's a painting? What he captured in the note he sent me really was a story of my life's journey, because he talked about darkness into light, humility in the midst of turmoil, perseverance, courage. Thank you." "I'm so deeply honored to join the other three persons which you mentioned, sterling women – I need to learn more about them so that I walk properly in their footsteps. And to all of you – the Women and Public Policy Program, the Women

Leadership Group – that have really supported these events. A few of you I had the opportunity to meet before and interact with. Just being back here with you is what keeps me going; that's the motivation and the inspiration when I can join all of you who have had such a big part to play in the success that I've had. And so, thank you all; it's been a wonderful occasion. I go back home, almost walking on water. Thank you, Dean."Earlier, in his welcoming remarks, Dean Ellwood said the event was to honor a most remarkable graduate and its only Nobel Peace Prize winner. She was an amazing leader who took over a country with many challenges, and had done an amazing job to make things work. With women like President Sirleaf, he believed there was hope for the world, after all. The commissioning of the portrait, he said, was also to make things right by including the portraits of more women at Harvard, especially that of the Harvard Kennedy School's most distinguished graduate.Dr. Iris Bohnet, Academic Dean and Director of the Women and Public Policy Program, thanked the people who had made the commissioning possible: Professor Jane (Jenny) Mansbridge, Charles F. Adams Professor of Political Leadership and Democratic Values, founding faculty Chair of the WAPPP, and the leader behind President Sirleaf's portrait, It had been Mansbridge's vision that made others realize that "seeing really is believing, and for our students to believe that they – the women students in particular – could also someday achieve greatness and maybe become a leader like you, Madam President. We need images of people like you." Dean Bohnet also acknowledged the Women's Leadership Board, which is supporting the WAPPP, and which has transformed the School, Harvard University, and was transforming the world.

Dean Bohnet pointed out that President Sirleaf would be only the fourth woman whose portrait hung in the Kennedy School, but assured that the School was acting rapidly in the right direction. Other portraits included Ida B. Wells, one of the early leaders of the civil rights movement, a Suffragette and journalist in the U.S.; Abigail Adams, the second First Lady of the U.S; and Edith Stokey, a faculty member at HKS. She was pleased that President Sirleaf's would be joining these women.

Finally, Dean Bohnet acknowledged the Artist, Mr. Coit, as a remarkable man and graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Business School, with a remarkable career in business, who, in 1997, decided to pursue his passion as an artist. He had done a number of wonderful portraits and paintings for Harvard University. Together, Deans Ellwood and Bohnet then unveiled President Sirleaf's full-length portrait, to the wows and ahs of the guests. Dean Ellwood joked that this would be the School's biggest portrait, counting for two or three! Following the unveiling, President Sirleaf participated in the Opening Plenary of the John F. Kennedy, Jr. IDEASpHERE Forum where, together with the former President of Mexico, Felipe Calderon, they discussed "Leaders on Leadership" before a capacity audience of some 650 guests and answered questions.

Below are some Photographs taken at this event:



Deans Iris Bohnet and David Ellwood about to unveil a portrait of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf at the Harvard Kennedy School



Harvard Deans Iris Bohnet and David Ellwood together unveil President Sirleaf's full-length portrait.



President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf speaks admiringly about the work of Artist Stephen Coit and thanks all supporters of the commissioning.



Dr. David Ellwood, Dean of the Harvard Kennedy School, addresses those gathered at the unveiling of President Sirleaf's portrait.



An elated President Sirleaf expresses her delight at the work of Artist Stephen Coit, also a Harvard alumnus, and thanks supporters and funders of the commissioning project.



President Sirleaf poses with Dean Iris Bolmet, who heads the Women and Public Policy Program, and Dean David Ellwood, head of the Harvard Kennedy School -2



President Sirleaf speaks about her portrait, just unveiled at the Harvard Kennedy School, thanking all who made it possible.

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