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President Sirleaf Calls for Full International Support for Liberia's 2017 Elections

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Washington, D.C. – September 24, 2016: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has expressed the need for full international support to Liberia so as to ensure free and fair democratic elections in the country in 2017. According to a dispatch from Washington, President Sirleaf made the call on Friday, September 23, 2016 when she received an award from the Women's Democracy Network (WDN) of the International Republican Institute (IRI). She is among 10 women leaders from around the world being honored to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the WDN, which started in 2006 with a goal of increasing women's political and civic



leadership. President Sirleaf noted that the next election will be a defining moment in Liberia. She added that it will be the first time a democratically elected civilian president, representing the aspirations of a broad section of the Liberian citizenry, will turn over power to another democratically elected president. Indicating that she has no intention to manipulate the Liberian Constitution to hold on to power, President Sirleaf assured her government's full adherence to the constitutional process, and that she looks forward to a peaceful retirement in Liberia following the end of her tenure. The Liberian leader applauded the IRI for the critical support the organization has provided to build and strengthen Liberia's democratic system. She made specific mention of IRI's support to Liberia during the 2005 elections, the first following the devastating civil war in the country. "IRI, we need you to work with Liberia like in 2005. We need support not only in terms of money but training and best practices," she said, adding also that there is a need to encourage the people to vote and vote wisely. President Sirleaf described Liberians as a resilient people, who, faced with tremendous challenges in their recent history such as the civil war and the Ebola epidemic, managed to bounce back. "You cannot succeed if you are not prepared to fail," she said. "Success is failure turned upside down." President Sirleaf also lauded other organizations, which like the IRI, have contributed to the efforts to strengthen Liberia's democratic system. Earlier, President Sirleaf was presented the award by IRI President Mark Green, who is a former US Ambassador and Congressman, and IRI Board Member, Madam Constance Berry Newman, who is also a former US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa. Both Ambassador Green and Madam Newman described President Sirleaf as an inspiration to the world. In another development on September 23, 2016, President Sirleaf also served as a guest of honor when she participated in the special presentation of the Deborah Harding Women of Achievement Award at the National Peace Corps Association Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. Addressing conference attendees who crowded a large hall at George Washington University, President Sirleaf underscored the significant contributions US Peace Corps have made to the progress of Liberia and its people. She described as "noteworthy" the service that the Peace Corps have rendered to Liberia, adding that Liberians are pleased to receive the recent team of medical Peace Corps, the first batch of medical Peace Corps in the country. President Sirleaf then used the occasion to commend Dr. Deborah Harding, in whose honor the Deborah Harding Women

Achievement Award is named, for her tireless effort towards education. Dr. Harding is the founder and President of the Liberian Education Trust, a transition initiative to help rebuild Liberia's post-war education system. She is the founding Executive Director of the Peace Corps Institute, and she has served the Peace Corps in multiple roles over the decades as a trainer in 23 African countries, among others. President Sirleaf said that Dr. Harding, who was co-founder of the Network for Human Rights in Liberia in the 1980s, has been close to the cause of women in Liberia, including girls education. President Sirleaf congratulated the first recipient of the Deborah Harding Women of Achievement Award, Dr. Sara Goodkind, and admonished her to continue the effort to empower girls and women around the world. Dr. Goodkind is Associate Professor of Social Work, University of Pittsburgh. As a Peace Corps Volunteer in Romania in 1995, Dr. Goodkind received a small grant for funding a girls' empowerment camp with the goals of building leadership skills among girls, facilitating a sense of civic participation and responsibility. Today the "GLOW" program is in Peace Corps countries throughout the world building gender equality, leadership, aspiration, self-esteem, health, and volunteerism.





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