

**Address by Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
to the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
United Nations Headquarters, New York
Tuesday, September 24, 2013**

(As Delivered)

Mr. President;
Mr. Secretary-General;
Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, and Heads of Delegation;
Distinguished Delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to address this 68th Session of the General Assembly on behalf of the Government and people of Liberia, and to extend my warmest congratulations to you, Mr. President, and the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, on the occasion of your election as President of the 68th Session of this august body. I trust that you will bring your wealth of experience to bear on the work of this 68th Assembly.

In similar vein, I congratulate your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremic of the Republic of Serbia, for the leadership of the 67th Assembly and the initiatives he undertook during his tenure.

Let me also extend my special appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his inspiring leadership and his visionary initiatives that have mobilized the international community around many noble objectives. These initiatives engendered hope amongst the people around the world, especially the poor and marginalized.

Mr. President:

We are deeply concerned about the growing number of senseless violence around the world, as exemplified by the ghastly and cowardly murder of innocent persons in a terrorist attack on a shopping mall in Kenya. We commiserate with the families of all the victims and with the Government and sisterly people on such a terrible loss.

Mr. President:

Because we know firsthand of the profound destruction and lasting hurt implied in civil conflict, we also agonize with the people of Syria, particularly those innocent women and children who suffer most from such tragedy. In this regard we unequivocally condemn the use of chemical weapons in Syria and anywhere else in the world, and we call for concerted and renewed international efforts to stem the rising scourge of terrorism and other transnational crimes by action to control and eliminate weapons of mass destruction.

Relatedly, we welcome the communication revolution that has provided a broad cyber platform for the exchange of information. However, this should not provide the vehicle for the promotion of terrorism and the spread of unfounded and irresponsible information through unregulated cyber weaponry which threaten the security of nations, particularly fragile states, and open societies of freedom and democracy.

Mr. President:

Colleague after colleague that will address this Assembly will no doubt express pride for the tremendous progress in Africa. Our continental growth has averaged over 5 percent annually, surpassing that of other regions. Moreover, our economies are diversifying, our trade infrastructure expanding, our democracies strong and maturing, and our regional institutions strengthening and leading the processes of cooperation and integration. But the new Africa story is not just about growth, we see improvement in school enrollment, health indicators, in trade and investment. The share of people living in poverty is declining. Democracy, while still needing room for improvement, has become the norm rather than the exception and governance has improved significantly over the last decade.

We are equally pleased with the progress made in resolving conflicts in several of our countries, as we welcome the international support that has set Somalia on a trajectory of peace and development.

Mr. President:

We appreciate the strong collaboration among regional economic communities, the African Union (AU) and the United Nations, joined by the international community that responded robustly in the Malian crisis, thereby averting the threat posed to the peace and security in our entire region. The recent inauguration of a new democratically elected President in Mali is a clear indication that such cooperation is the surest path to world peace. We congratulate the newly elected President of Mali, H.E. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, for receiving the overwhelming endorsement of the Malian people, and we commend all stakeholders for respecting the outcome of the democratic process. We also salute the former Interim President, Dioncounda Traoré, and all partners for working to restore constitutional order within the stipulated time period.

Although Liberia still faces the residual challenges of our own conflict, and despite our size and limited military strength, I am pleased to report that a small contingent of Liberian troops is currently participating in the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Mali, MINUSMA. We view our role in this peacekeeping effort as a way of reciprocating, albeit in a small way, the countless demonstrations of friendship and goodwill that were accorded to us by Mali and other members of the international community during our dark days of war.

Once the epicenter of a regional war, I am pleased to note the neighboring countries of the Mano River Union – Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone – are at peace and engaged in consolidating the gains of stability to accelerate national transformation through regional integration. A new Mano River Union initiative will facilitate connectivity in our power and

transport system, thereby enhancing cross-border trade in which our market women are actively engaged.

Mr. President:

I bring you greetings from the Government and people of Liberia who are this year celebrating ten consecutive years of peace and progress. Over these ten years, our nation's pride has been restored and we have returned to the comity of nations as a respectable and responsible partner. With the support of the international community, especially the United Nations through its peacekeeping and peace-building efforts, we have rebuilt a new, ethnically balanced, professional army, increased the size and enhanced the professionalism of our police, immigration, and intelligence forces in line with our commitment to bear full responsibility for security within our border as UN peacekeepers execute a phased drawdown. In this regard, we commend the UN Security Council for the recent adoption of its Resolution 2116, which extended the mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to September 30, 2014. We fully commit to meeting all the expectations of the resolution, including continuing to take concrete steps aimed at developing and sustaining a self-sufficient and competent security sector, able to tackle violent crimes, sexual and gender-based violence and infringement of the rights of the ordinary person.

Due to our commitment and the resilience of the Liberian people, we have instituted a host of reforms intended to improve governance, enhance accountability, and create an enabling environment for the exercise of basic freedoms, including freedom of speech and the press. This has put the country on a path of irreversible progress which has enabled us to conduct two democratic presidential and general elections; and are thus, through our *Vision 2030*, laying a firm foundation for the transformation of our economy aimed at moving our country to middle-income status by the year 2030.

Mr. President:

Liberia has come a long way, but we know that we have an even longer way to go. We have done much in restoring basic services and infrastructure, but still have much more to do, especially in reducing our huge infrastructure deficits in power and in transport. We have done much in improving governance and strengthening our institutions of integrity, but still have much more to do in consolidating the culture of integrity and accountability in a society that is still beset by values occasioned by years of conflict. We have adopted laws and policies that eschew discrimination of any kind, to ensure social equity and equal opportunity, but still must do much more in promoting natural reconciliation and healing. We have done much in achieving an average annual growth of over 7 percent and attracted huge multi-million-dollar direct foreign investments, especially in our natural resource extractive sector, but still have much more to do in expanding growth and diversifying our economy, making it more resilient to internal and external shocks, and more responsive to the ever-increasing demand of our people for jobs and improved livelihoods. We still have much to do in continuing the reforms that will ensure equitable benefit from natural resource capital to current and future generations.

Mr. President:

All the policies and action that we have pursued in the past several years have enabled us to stabilize our overall national condition. We must now, over the next few years, take the hard decisions in addressing long-standing structural systems. We know that the transition from stabilization to transformation can be a long and hard road subject to brickbats from vested interests. We are bound to face criticism as we attempt to apply and respect the rule of law, as we challenge entrenched social habits, but we must change old mindsets and attitudes and we remain strong in this resolve, for it is the right thing to do.

Mr. President:

I was honored to have been selected by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as one of the three Co-Chairs of a 27-member High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons, tasked to make recommendations for a new global development agenda post-2015. The mandate of the Panel was to “advise the Secretary-General on a bold and practical development agenda beyond 2015” that builds upon, as well as goes beyond, the MDGs in establishing new goals which are ambitious and yet achievable. Last May, the Panel submitted its Report to the Secretary-General for his consideration. We are pleased that many of the principles we identified are emphasized in the Secretary General’s report, rightly titled, “A Life of Dignity for All.”

Today, more than at any other time, we have an opportunity to transform our world; to pursue an agenda that will eradicate poverty while at the same time sustaining nature to secure natural resources for future generations. The solutions of yesterday may not apply today’s challenges, so we must muscle the courage to take bold steps. I therefore call upon this Assembly to reflect on the emerging challenges we face, to boldly seize new opportunities, and to commit ourselves to a new global partnership that promotes economic and social transformations for an inclusive and shared prosperity for all.

In Africa we are working towards a continental consensus which will convey an African Common Position on the Post 2015 Development Agenda. I am pleased to have been asked by our African Union Summit to chair a High-Level Committee of ten Heads of State which will oversee and guide this process. We held our first meeting yesterday here in New York, and agreed upon a roadmap that will ensure a global development framework that is not only brave and ambitious, but one that reflects African priorities, a global agenda that creates an enabling environment for Africa’s transformation which includes infrastructure development, increased productive capacities, resilience to external shocks and enhanced statistical capacities that will accelerate creation of employment that is directed particularly to our youthful populations.

I am pleased to report that on September 2, I chaired and launched the High-Level Panel on Fragile States under the aegis of the African Development Bank (AfDB). Of the estimated 7 billion people in the world, 1.5 billion live in situations of conflict and fragility. This data

puts fragile states in the center of the new post-2015. We hold the view that the peculiarities and special circumstances of post-conflict nations should be accommodated by international partners. The achievement of sustained economic growth and development in these countries is critical in reducing their vulnerability to new political and economic shocks, fueled in many cases by high expectation gaps that need to be mitigated. We therefore call on all our partners to renew their support to the New Deal on Fragile States, which calls for stronger Ownership, Harmonization, Results and Mutual Accountability.

Mr. President:

I would like to close by expressing our gratitude to the United Nations family for sustaining our agenda of peace-building and sustainable development. Since its founding, the United Nations has had its share of challenges; but it remains the beacon of hope for the peoples of the world who thirst for peace: a world that is fair, a world that is prosperous, a world in which the uncommon dreams of all will have a fair chance of realization; a world where the weak can become strong; a world where no nation feels developed and powerful until all nations have their share of the global wealth. The leaders of today must rise up to these challenges. The future begins today. We must commit to a new global development trajectory that gives all of humanity a world of peace, dignity and prosperity.

I thank you.