



**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**STATEMENT BY**

**HER EXCELLENCY MRS. ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA**

**AT THE**

**SEVENTY-SECOND REGULAR SESSION OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**ON THE THEME:**

**"Focusing on People: Striving for Peace and Decent Life for All on a  
Sustainable Planet"**

**UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK**

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2017**

**MORNING SESSION**



Mr. President  
Mr. Secretary General  
Excellencies, Heads of State and Government  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

This 72<sup>nd</sup> Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly is being convened at a time of historic transition in Liberia, and during a period of acute challenges to our global order. Today, we face the threat of climate change, the violence of terrorism, the risk and indignation of migration, and a nuclear escalation on the Korean peninsula. More over there is a race against time to accommodate a restless youthful population in search of opportunity and a brighter future.

Mr. Secretary General I congratulate you on your election.

Your progressive and creative leadership assures us of our commitment and your action to reform the United Nations for increased efficiency, better coordination and gender parity by 2021 at the senior leadership level. My delegation is also pleased with the initial steps taken toward the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I congratulate you, Mr. MiroslavLajcak, on your election as President of the General Assembly. Your vast experience and strong diplomatic skills assure us that you will steer the affairs of this 72<sup>nd</sup> Regular Session in an effective manner. The Liberian delegation offers you its full cooperation and support.

I would also like to recognize Mr. Peter Thompson of Fiji for his stewardship over the past year, which saw the launch of the Sustainable Development Agenda and the successful conduct of the first ocean conference.



Our theme this year, ***Focusing on People – Striving for Peace and a Decent Life for all on a Sustainable Planet*** is one which aptly captures a universal aspiration. I hope that at the conclusion of our deliberations, we will forge a consensus and renew our commitment as leaders to transform the lives of our people and meet our responsibility to our planet. The work of the United Nations has never been more important to the search for peace and the sustenance for global stability than it is today.

By its charter and purposes, the United Nations still represents the genius of our collective ability to live together in peace and harmony. It still offers great hope to a troubled world. Liberians bear witness to this truth, and remain grateful to the United Nations, and all of its organs and agencies, for the critical security interventions, and continued support toward Liberia's recovery and democratic aspirations.

Mr. President, eleven years ago, in September of 2006, I stood before this august body as the newly elected president of the Republic of Liberia, and, the first woman to be democratically elected as head of State on the African continent.

Today, I address you for the last time as I bring to closure my two terms of elected office. Liberia is just 22 days away from historic legislative and presidential elections. It will mark the first time in 73 years that political power will be handed over peacefully, and democratically, from one elected leader to another. This paves the way for the next generation of Liberians to lead the country into the future.

The election will signal the irreversible course that Liberia has embarked upon to consolidate its young, post-conflict democracy. Indeed, democracy is on the march in Liberia and, I believe, on an irreversible path forward on the African continent.



I thank all our partners who made meaningful contributions, financial and in-kind to ensure peaceful elections, and those organizations which will deploy observer missions to attest to the integrity of the elections process.

Mr. President,

I assumed office after 25 years of development reversal which was further compounded by a 15-year civil war. We have made great progress and laid the foundation for the next democratic government.

We have reshaped the Armed Forces of Liberia and the Liberia National Police, professionalized our customs and immigration services and small Liberian Coast Guard. We are proud to report that since the formal turnover of the security responsibilities to the Government, Liberia has remained stable, peaceful and secured.

We transformed the economy from a growth rate of less than zero to more than 8.7% in 2013, until the health crisis and plummeting commodity prices brought a downturn to our economic recovery. Liberia has adjusted, we are resilient, embracing diversification. Our focus today is towards strengthening the agriculture sector for value addition, and infrastructure development with emphasis on roads and energy for industrialization.

Previously dysfunctional public institutions now have the capacity to respond to the needs of our citizens through decentralized county service centers with ownership by strong local governments. And from the tragedy of the health crisis, we are strengthening our healthcare systems, prioritizing prevention and delivering capacity at the community level.



Impact is being felt. Life expectancy progressed from a low 47 years to a hopeful 62 years with reduction in maternal death from 1400 to 1100, an annual rate of reduction of 3.4%. Poverty rate has decreased from 63.8% in 2007 to 50.9% in 2016.

Infrastructure has been repaired and restored, and we continue to rehabilitate damaged roads and construct new ones. With the increasing provisions of electricity, potable water and technology, cities and towns are bustling with new life. It is now possible to receive voice and data on your phones and mobile devices from virtually everywhere in the country, at competitively low rates.

Liberia has enjoyed the benefit of multilateralism through full support provided by the United Nations, the African Union, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). From a pariah state, Liberia has gradually regained the confidence of nations and even risen to assume leadership roles in regional bodies, specifically ECOWAS and the Mano River Union.

I was personally privileged to play a role in the formulation of the Sustainable Development Agenda as Co-chair of Secretary-General BAN Ki-Moon's High-Level Panel on SDGs and in framing the Common Africa Position (CAP) as Chair of the AU's High-Level Committee.

Mr. President,

There is so much more to share about Liberia's post conflict transformation, how we have empowered ordinary citizens and a shared sense of citizenship, giving women, including market and rural women a voice and the rights to be heard. We have continued to transform the healthcare and education systems, engendered the



entrepreneurial spirit in our youth, our vibrant media and civil society. We are establishing trans-border development corridors to enhance regional trade and strengthening the rule of law to tackle systematic corruption. Liberia is experiencing the birth of a post-conflict artistic community, in song, hip-hop, painting, poetry, storytelling and fashion.

Liberia has come a long way. We could not have accomplished all of this without the world body, its political leadership, the generosity of its economic development support, humanitarian contributions, and, most importantly, the stabilization and security provided to our country through the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

I take this opportunity to applaud you, Mr. President, your predecessors, the member nations, and UN civil servants around the world who have sacrificed for us to see the very first generation of school-aged children growing up in an environment of peace, free of the violence of civil conflict.

Liberia's transformation was powered by a world community that made a shared commitment to deliver peace to a country, and a sub-region, beset by civil conflict and cross border destabilization. The UN and its partner nations were of one mind, and from that global unity, a new Liberian democratic state was born. Liberia is a post conflict success story. It is your post conflict success story.

Mr. President,

As I bid farewell to you today, and to my fellow Heads of State, I have a few parting thoughts. First, remember Liberia which is making valiant effort to apply the tenets of democracy. Consider the lives saved, the wealth created, the stability assured, because this



global body convened and led at a time of great uncertainty in our sub-region and around the world. I ask you and the member states to continue to lead, to spread the values of democracy, human rights, and good governance while strengthening solidarity for economic transformation and social resilience. It is often in times of transition that great leaders emerge and institutions are strengthened.

Secondly, I remind you that two years ago, the 70<sup>th</sup> Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Agenda containing 17 goals, which encapsulate the aspirations of member states to eradicate poverty and reduce, if not eliminate, inequalities within and between countries. Our commitment to achieving these goals must be unwavering because progress here is inextricably linked to ending conflict and sustaining peace.

Thirdly, real progress remains elusive in the lingering effort to reform the Security Council and make it more responsive to current global realities. The call for this reform must be pursued more robustly towards early conclusion. Africa's views are well articulated in the Ezulwini Consensus. Today, African nations are participating in strong sub-regional and regional bodies, which are evolving - adopting measures to secure and preserve peace and security, while strengthening economic integration.

The United Nations, as the preeminent world body must also continue to evolve, to more effectively serve the common interest of all Member States. You must continue to chart the way forward. In your capable hands rest the hope and aspirations for a more just, peaceful and humane world, for the sake of our people and our planet.

I thank you for your attention.