

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Induction Ceremony of Officers-Elect
Of the World Lebanese Culture Union (WLCU)
Monrovia City Hall, October 27, 2010**

President-Elect Ezzat Eid;
Officers-Elect and Members of the World Lebanese Culture
Union;
Members of the Business Community;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;
Dear Friends:

Let us praise God, first and foremost, for his many blessings
bestowed upon us and upon this country, our Liberia.

Thank you, Ezzat, for the invitation to induct the Officers-Elect of
your organization, the World Lebanese Culture Union (WLCU).

I am here because I concur with your description of the WLCU
as a major component and an integral part of Government's
effort to promote economic and development objectives. I
welcome your pledge of unflinching support to our drive to
move Liberia forward, thus promoting the interest and well-
being of the Liberian people.

I am happy to participate in this ceremony, recognizing the
strong bond of brotherhood and friendship which has long

existed between the Lebanese and Liberian Communities. Together, we have experienced good times, and bad.

Our Administration has painstakingly put in place the mechanisms to change Liberia for the better. The peace and stability we enjoy today, going on seven years, has encouraged Lebanese and other businesses to once again consider Liberia a safe place to invest their resources. We have also made strategic policy interventions to stimulate industrial and commercial ventures. Our Government remains pro-business and investor-friendly as long as such entrepreneurial ventures respect our laws and promote corporate social responsibility.

We encourage the WLCU and its new leadership to do the same – to give back to the communities where you live, in the way you do business, treat stakeholders, protect the environment, respect human and labor rights, and more. We call on all our Lebanese brothers and sisters to engage in their respective businesses without fear or favor, and in accordance with the laws of the Republic.

One way in which the Lebanese Community can build better relations with Liberians, I firmly believe, would be for you to get out of the general retail business. Let us see how we can work together to leave that side of business to the Liberian small traders, to enable them to earn a decent living. Focus, instead, on higher-end investments in factories, hotels, real estate development, wholesaling, and more. In that way, you will truly contribute to improving the living standards and doing your part to lift Liberians out of poverty.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Government cannot, by itself, achieve the vision for Liberia that is enshrined in our Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). To attain these goals, we need the private sector. We need transformative and sustainable investment, with employment and other economic opportunities, and we welcome initiatives aimed in that direction.

Your Culture Union includes businessmen and entrepreneurs who are members of our Chamber of Commerce. Despite the gains we've registered, we are aware that Liberia's potential for private sector growth and performance is undermined by reports of harassment of businesses, corruption, bureaucratic obstacles, and fiscal indiscipline.

As I stated, when I addressed the Chamber of Commerce back in May, both Government and businesses are at fault. We cannot stop unauthorized harassment by government officials unless business owners are prepared to expose such practices. We cannot stamp out corruption if businesses offer bribes or collude with Government officials to inflate prices, or take other measures to bypass our procurement laws. We also cannot reduce the level of bureaucratic obstacles if business owners continue to give in to offers to buy lunch or have legitimate taxes or utility bills reduced in exchange for a handout.

If our economy is to expand, if we are to attract private investment and capital, if per capita income or purchasing power is to increase, if employment is to replace dependency – mutually benefiting good government and businesses – we must fight against these unethical practices.

As validation that we are on the right path, just days ago, Transparency International (TI) released its 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index which shows Liberia making strong progress in the fight against corruption. Out of the 47 African countries included in the survey, Liberia ranked 11th. This represents an improvement of 19 places within a single year, moving us up from the 30th place ranking in 2009. Globally, Liberia climbed 51 places, moving from 138th to 87th in one year. Our Administration is making important progress in governance reforms targeted at controlling corruption. We invite you to join us as we endeavor to rid our Government of this scourge. Everyone will benefit from an expanding economy based upon transparent and accountable practices in procurement and financial management.

My Administration sees the WLCU, and, indeed, the Lebanese Community, as a strong and strategic partner in Liberia's development. In that connection, I commend your organization's plans to construct a hospital, a school, an office and recreational center to be used by the general public. These infrastructures align with our PRS objectives, and we will support your efforts in realizing these projects.

Along with your letter of invitation to me, Mr. President-Elect, you included an industrial manufacturing chain plan to stimulate the Liberian economy by establishing 32 different industries and creating more jobs and training for Liberians in those industries.

I also noted the incentives you listed as necessary to support the manufacturing plan, such as protective tariffs, duty free

privileges, and resident permits. These are matters within the purview of the relevant ministries – Commerce and Industry, and Finance, and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization. I will ask that these entities work with you on this matter.

President-Elect Eid;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are aware that many expatriates in our midst represent generations who have lived and worked with us in this country. We take note of their appeal that something needs to be done to recognize their proper status in Liberia. But, as everyone knows, that status borders on constitutional provisions which would have to be addressed within the context of overall constitutional reform. Your appeal regarding non-constitutional issues such as permanent residency is being taken under advisement by the Ministry of Justice.

In closing, let me say that as the WLCU commences a new chapter here in Liberia, be assured that our Government remains a strong partner. As you do your part to develop Liberia and transform the lives of its people, you will find an enabling environment in which to do business. I wish you great success in your endeavors as we strengthen cooperation for the development of our country, and your adopted home.

I thank you.