

ADDRESS
BY
HER EXCELLENCY MADAM ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA
TO THE 67TH SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NEW YORK
SEPTEMBER 26TH, 2012

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

I congratulate you, Mr. President, and the people of Serbia, on your election as President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly. I assure you of Liberia's fullest cooperation and support as you carry out the responsibilities entrusted to you in steering the affairs of this Session.

I wish also to pay tribute to your eminent predecessor, His Excellency Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser of the State of Qatar, for his capable stewardship of the affairs of the 66th Session and the many bold initiatives undertaken in the interest of world peace during his tenure.

My highest commendation goes to the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, who continues to demonstrate sound leadership in the face of new and complicated challenges. He has begun his second term with renewed vigor and a clear articulation of the priorities which encapsulate the major concerns of the international community.

Mr. President:

The selection of the theme for this Session, which calls for the "Settlement of disputes by peaceful means," could not have been more appropriate. When we review the state of the world, we see an international landscape checkered by armed conflict, economic crises and environmental degradation. For those who have had the painful experience of conflict, including my own country, Liberia, this year's theme becomes very pertinent.

The cost of conflict in lives and infrastructural destruction makes us doubly appreciative of the value of preventive action to avert conflict. The need for conflict prevention takes on added urgency, because most conflicts are internal, engendered by

marginalization, inequity and injustice. It becomes imperative, therefore, to identify and remove those triggers of conflict before they explode.

Our Government's efforts to achieve the twin objectives of conflict prevention and peace consolidation are being reinforced through our engagement with the peace-keeping and peace-building architecture of the United Nations. In an environment of peace, we have prioritized actions aimed at re-establishing the rule of law by building the capacity of our institutions and processes for delivery of justice and security. We have formulated a roadmap for national reconciliation to ensure that peace is sustainable.

Our development partners, including the UN and its Specialized Agencies, have remained faithful to our national agenda. They have supported our priority programs for women's empowerment, increased agricultural productivity and food security, roads and infrastructure and jobs creation. All of the UN Agencies must be capacitated to provide the support to government programs in these areas. It is particularly critical for the new gender entity, UN Women, which is the youngest among them and whose viability must be assured.

We have made strong strides in gender equality, but much more must be done for girls' education and women's empowerment. Tremendous progress has been made in health care delivery. We are particularly pleased by the recent UNICEF report showing a sharp reduction in the level of child mortality. However, there are still many challenges to overcome before we can assure universal access to health care.

Mr. President:

Many developing countries, like Liberia, have structured their economies around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While some countries have made considerable progress in reaching some of these Goals, many others will be unable to achieve them by 2015. There is an emerging consensus that efforts must be accelerated to achieve maximum progress in the achievement of the MDGs over the next three years.

I am honored, and humbled, to have been selected by the Secretary-General as one of the co-Chairs of his High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. We are mindful of the difficulty of this responsibility, which requires us to propose a framework that builds upon, but goes beyond, the MDGs in the establishment of goals that are ambitious, but achievable. We know that the results of our work must reflect a broad political consensus of the public and private sectors and civil society as well. We know that defined goals should enable all people in all countries to be freed from the shackles of poverty through development that is sustainable.

Liberia remains fully committed to the ideals and purposes of the United Nations, and believes that the Organization should continue to occupy the center of global governance, by leading efforts to meet our collective challenges to peace, security and development. To meet this objective, the inter-governmental negotiations on Security Council reform need to come to an early and logical conclusion. My Government is

encouraged that an increasing number of Member States support the enlargement of the Council in both the permanent and non-permanent categories, which would ensure a fairer and more equitable participation reflective of the world's demography. In this regard, Liberia supports the African Common Position, based upon the "Ezulwini Consensus" as adopted by the African Union. [Applauds]

In the same vein, we must ensure that the General Assembly is revitalized to fully assume all the responsibilities entrusted to it in the Charter. After all, it remains the most representative body of the United Nations.

Mr. President;
Distinguished Delegates:

The high-level Diplomatic Conference on International Trade in Conventional Weapons, which ended recently in New York, sought to develop the highest possible international standards for trade in conventional weapons. However, strong national positions on this sensitive global issue prevented an agreement on a binding Arms Trade Treaty. Yet, nations of good will and nations which have experienced devastation from illicit trading and diversions of conventional weapons must continue strong advocacy, taking into account the full range of differences and disagreements. We would thereby encourage bilateral consensus-building ahead of new rounds of negotiations. At the same time, we are convinced that the final draft Arms Trade Treaty text, though imperfect and inconclusive, contains essential ingredients upon which future negotiations can succeed.

Mr. President:

We express our deep condolence for the death of the U. S. Ambassador and staff, as well as Libyan nationals, in the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi. All nations should be concerned about the spreading of violence in reaction to a film which demonstrates an unacceptable insensitivity to an Islamic faith. Even in such circumstances, we must all be mindful that democracy requires freedom – freedom of ideas, freedom of association, freedom of religion and, more importantly, freedom of expression. This often results in statements and actions that may offend. Tolerance, and not violence, is an appropriate response to prevent further violence. Liberia is a clear example that, were it not for our tolerance to the new-found freedom of expression, our country would be back in chaos.

While the majority of our countries are consolidating economic and social gains underpinned by democratic processes, regrettably some parts of our sub-region are still dogged by serious challenges that risk undermining the peace and progress of the entire region. We in Liberia, like many other countries in the region and the world at large, were particularly appalled by the unconstitutional unraveling, of democratic governments in Mali and Guinea Bissau in the early part of this year; and unequivocally condemned these attempts to seize power through unconstitutional means. Accordingly, Liberia endorses the decisions of ECOWAS aimed at the full restoration of constitutional order in both countries in the shortest possible time. Liberia enjoins the world community, particularly the Security Council, to buttress efforts of ECOWAS in restoring peace in our region, most

especially in Mali.

As Chair of the four-nation Mano River Union comprising Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and La Cote D'Ivoire, Liberia has committed itself never to allow an inch of its territory to be used to destabilize its neighbors. It is in this context that we categorically condemn all attempts to undermine the peace and democratic gains in La Cote D'Ivoire and are working closely with the Ivorian authorities and UN peacekeeping outfits in both Liberia and La Cote D'Ivoire to protect and consolidate the peace in our two countries. We call on all countries in our region to work in concert so that individuals intent on destabilizing some parts of our region are treated as enemies in all parts of our region.

Mr. President:

We are all part of a rapidly changing world in which the forces of globalization cannot be reversed. Our farming systems have to adjust to unusual weather conditions, our habitats have to relocate from traditional safe areas, our societies have to find responses to the distractions of the demonstration effect. Developing countries, like my own, must make globalization work if we are to achieve our growth targets and lift our people out of poverty. This means more commitment and effort on our part to create an environment that ensures economic growth based on mutuality of benefits and responsibilities.

Liberia, from its founding, is a complex nation, and the cleavages that led to decades of war still run deep. Our experience clearly shows that success has its pitfalls. Displaced citizens returning from refugee camps in the sub-region, and deportees from around the world swell the ranks of the desperate unemployed, thereby intensifying our vulnerability. Communities long deprived of basic services demand instant attention to their individual needs, thereby straining our capacity. Civil servants lacking a decent living wage for two decades rightfully clamor for more, thereby undermining the budgetary processes.

As Liberia moves forward into its tenth year of sustained peace, we can state with conviction that our country has turned the corner. Liberia is no longer a place of conflict, war and deprivation. We are no longer the country our citizens fled, our international partners pitied and our neighbors feared. Our stabilization efforts, over the past six years, have resulted in average annual growth of over 6 percent.

Revenue has more than quintupled; direct foreign investment of over US\$16 billion mobilized; an expanded fiscal space through unprecedented debt cancellation, infrastructure reconstruction and institutional rebuilding. More importantly, we have earned our rightful place as a country of hope and opportunity. The processes of change which have started will continue and will not stop until the country is placed on an irreversible path of sustained peace, growth and development. Our Vision 2030, resulting from a robust nationwide consultation, is a long-term program for transformation which prioritizes youth development, infrastructure, reconciliation and capacity development.

Yet our Government is keenly aware of the challenges to be faced over the next three years. United Nations peacekeeping forces are gradually being withdrawn from Liberia. In our discussions with various UN teams coming to Liberia – the Technical Assessment Mission in March, and the Security Council delegation in May – we have emphasized the need for a responsible transition, through a gradual process, occurring over a period of 3-5 years. We also seek the alignment of transitional activities with our budget cycle, reflecting Government priorities.

We wish to express appreciation to the United Nations, which has been a very committed and effective partner. We owe the Organization much gratitude for preserving an enabling environment for peace-building and state-building.

In closing, Mr. President, I wish to note that today, for the first time in two generations, Liberia has a second successive democratic government elected by the will of the people. Despite the distractions, local and external, our people are determined to take their destiny into their own hands, determined that our ambitious goal of making Liberia a middle-income country by the year 2030 will be achieved.

I thank you.