

REMARKS BY

**HER EXCELLENCY MADAM ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA**

**ON BEHALF OF RECIPIENTS OF THE HONORARY DOCTORATE (HONORIS
CAUSA)**

**HAIFA UNIVERSITY
JUNE 7, 2016**

Mr. President;
Mr. Chairman of the Board of Governors
The Rector – Haifa University
Chairman of the Executive Committee
Faculty
Fellow Honorary Doctors
Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of all of us, the recipients the degree of Honorary Doctorate of Philosophy (Honoris Causa), I wish to express profound thanks and appreciation for the honor bestowed. Each honoree has excelled in his professional discipline enabling us to stand as and a diversified group in knowledge and experience. I also take the liberty to say that we stand as a group with a commitment reflected in each of our life's work to the new global development agenda which will replace the Millennium Development Goals and lead to a new global partnerships where a transparent world order in economic exchanges will provide dividends for all. It is a commitment to a new paradigm of development which demands a shift in mindset, a recognition of the need to address the universality of issues such as inequalities, injustice, intolerance and marginalization.

In this regard, please permit me to applaud Professor Klaus Schwab whose World Economic Forum brings together an unprecedented array of leaders, scholars, officials, activists, practitioners, activists from Governments, international organizations, the private sector and civil society to debate and examine progress and discuss challenges to world development. The World Economic Forum, undertaken annually in Davos and more recently in Africa has no equal in quality of participants and content of discussions. There is no other gathering that has the influence and the power to change the world.

I will carry a lasting memory of each of my fellow honorees, their achievements and the immense contribution that they have made to a better understanding of the dynamics of a changing global environment.

We commend Haifa University's contribution to scientific research and academic excellence in the field of history and religion, the performing and creative arts, governance, philosophy, business and public service, all of which are anchored in a determined objective to enhance human development.

I am proud that I have been invited to join this sterling group of achievers and I believe that this is due in large measure to recognition of my historical journey to leadership and the ongoing process of democratic and economic transformation

of my country, Liberia. It is a journey of hills and valleys, of my various roles -- as activist, opposition political leader, commercial banker, development administrator and international civil servant. Through it all, I have tried to remain with a determined focus on the dream of bringing change to a nation quaint for too long. It is also the journey of a nation born in search of liberty and over one hundred years in search for sustainable peace and development.

In 2006, following a successful electoral victory in 2005, our Government inherited a collapsed economy, following a staggering 90 percent decline in Gross Domestic Product, the greatest by any nation since World War II. We also inherited an unsustainable debt level of more than 600 percent brought about by un-serviced debt for more than two decades. The nation was at the bottom of a very deep hole. This required immediate action to revive the productive sectors historically dominated by iron ore and rubber.

We negotiated and obtained the cancellation of an external debt burden of US\$4.7 billion in a record period of five years under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiatives – thus returning our country to the path of economic recovery by expanding the fiscal space to propel our agenda for inclusive growth and development. We invested in human capital, governance and infrastructure. The private sector, promoted as an engine, of growth, responded in foreign direct investment on the order of US\$5 billion in mining and large scale export agriculture over a multi-year period.

In 2013, we felt confident that we could boast of a nation reborn, a transformation from a failed state to a nascent democracy, progress in rebuilding infrastructure and educational and health systems, and enjoying one of the most promising growth record in Africa.

By the end of that year, we experienced the first shock, a sharp decline in the global prices of our two main exports, iron ore and rubber. Then 2014 Ebola struck, threatening not only to wipe out the progress, but our very existence. We were confused. Because our country had never before had an incidence of Ebola, our weak health system was utterly ill-equipped and unprepared. The tragedy also affected two neighboring countries, Guinea and Sierra Leone who together with Liberia lost over 10,000 citizens. While rallying the nation to take responsibility and charge of the crisis, I reached out to the United States, Liberia's main partner and to the international community pointing out that the disease represented a global threat which could threaten countries far beyond the borders of the affected countries. I am pleased that we were able to defeat the virus with the strength and resilience of the Liberian people and the communities

which responded to my call for them to take charge of their lives, livelihood and future. This was made possible by the robust response of the United States and countries throughout the world including several African nations which sent their own doctors, health care workers and citizens to join UN in the battle. I thank the State of Israel for the valuable support given to us during our period of tragedy.

Finally, let me say that I am particularly honored to have been chosen as the first Liberian to be honored by an Israeli University. I accept this honor on behalf of the Liberian people, particularly women in Liberia, in Africa and I dare say the world because as the first democratically elected President, I represent their expectations and aspirations. In this regard, let me pay homage to the many women of the world who blazed the path before us, including your own former Prime Minister Golda Meir.

Today, women are the driving force of an African continent that has made tremendous progress in the past two decades in laying the foundation for peace, security and unity on the continent. As a result, throughout the continent, safe for a few difficult spots, political pluralisms and the democratic process are more the norm than the exception. Our challenge for the future thus lies in the implementation of the New World Order, our Africa 2063 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goal which aims to improve the human condition and save our planet.

Let me close with the quote that is the epitome of my life story: "The strength of a woman is not measured by the impact that all her hardships in life have had on her; but the extent of her refusal to allow those hardships to dictate who she becomes".

Once again - thank you on behalf of the honorees.