

# REMARKS

BY

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

AT THE

**National Democratic Institute**

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All Protocols Observed:

I want to thank the National Democratic Institute (NDI) for bestowing upon me this honor, the W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award, which recognizes leadership, integrity and courage, and a dedication to democratic values and practices."

I am humbled both by the award's distinction, and be in the presence of such accomplished women, including the first woman to become an American Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, and the first woman to become Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi. I would also like to recognize the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone, my neighbours, who through their efforts have empowered the women of their country and encouraged them to play a meaningful role in their country's political life and culture.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the National Democratic Institute – an organization that I have known since the day I was released from prison in 1986- also to express my gratitude to Secretary Albright and Ken Wollock for their support as we rebuild our nation. NDI world wide staff, every day toil in the world's emerging democracies to ensure their success. I know NDI does not work alone, and that it partners with institutions like the International Republican Institute, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the Center for International Private Enterprise, the Solidarity Center, and the National Endowment for Democracy, in order to guarantee that the institutions of democracy can take root around the world.

To NDI then, and all of its partners, I take this moment to applaud your work.

I applaud your work even more because together, you all focus not just on elections, but the institutions of democracy.

Just a few days ago, I spoke at the annual AFRICARE dinner. I was in the company of other great American women including Mrs. Laura Bush, the First Lady, and Congresswoman Nita Lowey, the Chairwoman of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee.

At that dinner, I told the audience that my primary challenge was to create the institutions that will stand the test of time; institutions that will be the hallmark of democracy for my grandchildren's grandchildren."

I also noted that for too long, those watching Africa have focused on personalities, relying on one person, often one big man, to lead the way.

You in this room, who work to guarantee free and fair multiparty elections, know that for too long in Africa, it has been one man one vote, one time. But this mentality has failed Africa, undermining accountability and constitutionally defined government.

It is not about the individual, the leader, but the institutions they build.

Those of you who know Liberia's recent history, can appreciate that the Liberian people have the great people of the United States of America to thank for Liberia's chance at freedom, and its renewed national hope.

The off-shore deployment of US marines in 2003, Mr. Charles Taylor's flight into exile, the formation of a transitional government, the building of initial democratic institutions including the National Electoral Commission, support to civil society groups, the training of Liberia's nascent political parties, two rounds of free and fair elections in 2005 – were all accomplished with American support. I am confident that as we travel together on this long but fruitful road, we can rebuild Liberia so that it becomes a post-conflict success story.

On behalf of the Liberian people, at whose pleasure I serve, I want to recognize President George W. Bush, who made the courageous and unpopular decision to return US troops to Africa for the first time since 1993, when US troops evacuated Somalia. And I want to thank him and his Administration for continuing to provide generous support to my Administration in the area of healthcare, education, infrastructure and security so that we can show our people that there is truly a democracy dividend - that the most prosperous future for them and their families is one free of warfare and destruction.

I also want to recognize the generosity of the US Congress, under the leadership of my friend, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who granted me the honor of addressing a Joint Meeting of Congress in early 2006, and who has broken every bureaucratic obstacle to ensure that Liberia's needs can be met through Annual Appropriations, Supplemental Appropriations and now, as I understand it, through authorizing legislation that will set targets for Liberia for the next five years. Let me say what I truly believe and for the record, that it is in the US national security interest to support Liberia's re-emergence from a post-conflict country to a thriving democracy.

I have heard some argue that the policy of your great Presidents -- Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan - the policy of promoting democracy abroad, was relevant in its contemporary context, but no longer retains a place in the 21st century.

But I am here as living proof to tell you that if the U.S. were to lose its will and go quiet on issues of liberty and human rights, that this would shake the foundations of democracy around world.

I was told of a little girl in grade school in Liberia who was reprimanded by her teacher for not behaving and acting like a boy. Her teacher told her, "Don't you know you are a little girl and you should therefore be quiet and not rowdy like the boys?" After a little pause, the little girl turned to her teacher and said, "Be careful how you talk to me. Have you forgotten that our President is a woman?"

I still believe that DEMOCRACY is sacred. We should not allow countries to call themselves democracies, or to be accepted into global democratic institutions

when behind the rhetoric, liberty, personal freedoms, and civil rights fall pray to fear and repression.

We all know that democracy is not just about elections. It is about sustaining institutions of government and civil society that protect the individual over the State. It is about freedom of speech, and the inherent right to criticize State authorities. It is about due process and rule of law. It is about a level economic playing field, about the right to educate our children and practice any religious beliefs.

To achieve these goals we must support those institutions that provide the checks and balance in governments and in the society at large- those civil society organizations such as the media that serves as the watchdog, exercising freedom with responsibility; those institutions that represent the pillars of integrity to ensure the sanctity of choice, a far and speedy recourse in the violation of rights. We must ensure that our vulnerable youths can become part of and contribute to society once again through equal opportunity for education and skills learning. We must be responsive to the needs of our grassroots women by improving their conditions of work and formulate measures to protect our girls against rape and abuse.

So I ask the support of this audience today to ensure that I am not just remembered as the first elected women President of Africa, but as the leader who turned a post-conflict country crippled by twenty-five years of decline and a civil war, with more than 200,000 dead and one million displaced, into a symbol of stability and democracy where the free market and private investment can prosper, where an empowered people, free from dependency and violence, can take their destiny into their own hands.

Please translate your faith in my administration into the institutions that will live beyond my presidency, and serve Liberia far into the future.

Thank you.