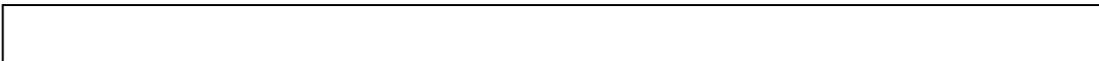




**PRESIDENT ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF**  
**REMARKS AT THE**  
**SUMMIT OF THE HEADS OF STATE**  
**MANO RIVER UNION**



Good morning to all. Dear colleagues, on behalf of the Government and people of Liberia, we welcome you. I also warmly welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, United Nations Office for West Africa; other officials and Ministers from our Member States. We thank the members of the Diplomatic Corps and other distinguished guests which have joined us for this opening ceremony. The presence of all of you is a manifestation of our collective commitment and desire to foster the development which our peoples so richly deserve.

Since 2008, when we agreed to revive the Union, we have seen slow but steady progress, despite initial challenges. Our Agriculture Ministers have made recommendations on how to achieve food security in our subregion, and have formulated a food security program which focuses on rice and cassava; we implemented the HIV/AIDS/STI pilot program in the border areas, with financing by the African Development Bank; we established joint border security and confidence-building units along our shared borders; and formulated and costed the operational plan on security. Moreover, we have finalized a strategic plan to guide the MRU's work.

Today, through our collective leadership, our economies are showing significant growth. Effective use of our natural resources in mining, in agriculture, and petroleum potential provides the basis for higher growth. Yet, greater efforts will be required to expand the private sector. These are now under way in all of our countries. However, we cannot obtain the maximum potential of growth unless we tackle the issue of infrastructure.

The need to strengthen the peace we enjoy today is even more urgent in the face of high unemployment rates, particularly among our youthful populations. The key, therefore, is not only to strengthen collaboration among our national defense and security systems, but also to invest heavily in energy, transport and telecommunications infrastructure. This will promote robust growth across the sectors of our subregional economy and trigger an increase in job creation for our people.

We want to commend the Secretary-General of the Union for the tremendous work she has done in identifying interconnecting infrastructure projects, particularly in power and roads, in all of our countries. She has also initiated dialogue with potential development partners who might finance such operations.

We commend our ECOWAS Chairman, President Alassane Ouattara, for his continuing efforts to maintain peace beyond our borders. Our challenge now is

to take action based upon the report that will be made to us, as a result of yesterday's Ministerial Council Meeting.

As you know, we have a unique opportunity to further our work in infrastructure because of the interest that the African Development Bank has placed on the Mano River Union and on fragile States. I had the opportunity to meet with the Bank's Senior Managers, and the Deputies who provide their financing, in Tunis, on February 20 and 21, and I urged them to accelerate their action on the initiative that has already been formulated to connect our Mano River countries through increased funding to address our substantial gaps in transportation and energy infrastructure. The results of that effort, and the efforts by all of our Ministers who have worked so hard in this regard, are now bearing fruits.

I made a commitment to President [Donald] Kaberuka to chair the High-Level Panel that will work on mobilizing the Bank's 13<sup>th</sup> Replenishment, a major objective of which is to support the initiative of the Mano River Union and fragile States. The importance of this regional approach will enable us to formulate action programs to achieve the economies of scales that will attract private capital and investment.

This is why our meeting today places emphasis on energy and road connectivity. This is also why our four countries are poised to begin implementing the West Africa Power Pool (WAPP) project, connecting us to an energy grid to supply electricity to citizens across the basin.

All of us are fully committed to our pledge to transform the lives of our citizens, as demonstrated in our collaborative efforts to drive forward our subregion's development. Indeed, it was such a pledge which got us elected to office. We appreciate the high expectations of our peoples, the anxiety associated with fulfilling them, and we applaud their patience and resilience as they collaborate with us. We are also grateful for the renewed commitment of our development partners to support us as we realize our vision for a vibrant and prosperous Mano River basin.

Again, let me welcome you to this Summit, as we look forward to frank and productive deliberations.

Thank you.