

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at the Official Launch of Book Titled “Goodluck Ebele Jonathan:
Champion for Women”
Banquet Hall, State House
Abuja, Nigeria
June 26, 2013**

President Jonathan;
President Banda and Mr. Banda;
Vice President Sambo;
The Deputy Prime Minister of Zimbabwe;
President Kufuor;
Senate President Mark;
The Ruling Party Chairman;
Distinguished Parliamentarians, Ministers, Officials of Government;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

President Jonathan, I do thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this historic event!

Our African culture has often painted an unflattering image of womanhood: a gender that carries a handbag, puts on *Hijab*, speaks softly.

Yet, as events surrounding this book launch take place, strong and efficient women leaders are emerging all over Africa, including President Banda and I, who are mere forerunners; there are many others on the way!

We take pride in proclaiming that the future is much nearer than many believe – both in Nigeria, in Africa and in the world.

We see evidence of this here tonight, with the number and caliber of women my Brother and Friend, H.E. President Goodluck Jonathan, has appointed to join him in transforming Nigeria.

By definitive action rather than rhetoric, President Jonathan has, indeed, given Nigerian women more prospects for inclusive and collaborative leadership.

It is therefore not surprising that out of the 188 countries recently surveyed, Nigeria ranks 23rd in terms of the mobilization and appointment of women to top positions in government. We applaud for the 14 Cabinet members that you have in your 46-member Cabinet.

We also know that President Jonathan has offered Nigerian women strategic and critical assignments that used to be the exclusive preserve of men. This approach clearly provides much better prospects for a transformative women leadership.

There has been a lot of talk in Africa about how to get more women into the top echelon of political appointments. The results are sometimes slow because of the traditional notion that women “take care” while men “take charge.”

Without question, President Jonathan is addressing the gender stereotypes that have created severe predicaments for women and women leaders in Africa.

In this respect, I can cite three predicaments, all of which put women in a double bind and can potentially undermine their leadership.

First, women are perceived to be either too soft or too tough to get it right. Well, try not paying your taxes in Nigeria, and see how soft women are!

Try what Mrs. Banda did when she was neutralized. She could have gone right back into her place, but she got on a plane, went around, told her story.

Come and celebrate with us, in August, when Liberia celebrates its tenth consecutive year of peace!

Second, they say women leaders face higher standards and lower rewards than their male counterparts. Today, we challenge that because we stand toe-to-toe as equal in every way.

Third, women leaders are perceived as either competent or liked, but rarely both. Well, many of us women leaders make sure we get it right, even if we are not liked.

The implication of the foregoing is that gender stereotypes misrepresent the true talents of women leaders, and can potentially undermine women’s contributions to the state, as well as their own advancement options. But, significantly, all of this has changed in Nigeria, and is changing in many countries across the Continent.

Let me say that President Jonathan has a desirable, professional bias in the “revolution” he is waging today, by accurately recognizing the innate power of Nigerian women in the transformation of society and unlocking and enlisting this power. Do you know why? Mr. President, lest we forget, you are also a scientist, so your perspectives and your worldview are devoid of sentiments. On behalf of Nigerian women, I salute you! On behalf of women of the world, I salute you!

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me now commend the publishers and expert team that put together this timely, sensitive and thoughtful work, which is central to tonight’s event. Without any doubt, this over 300-page book, entitled *Goodluck Ebele Jonathan: Champion for Women*, is an excellent exposé, in both the testimonies by eminent Nigerian women, and

pictures that exemplify President Jonathan's staunch dedication to gender equality as a centerpiece of his transformative leadership.

It is a compelling book that I highly recommend, not only to our women, but also to our men, to youth, and to policy makers everywhere, so they can have a better appreciation of how far the Nigerian woman, and, indeed, the African woman, has come under this dynamic leadership, and the challenges that are still ahead to achieve your agenda for transformation.

Thank you, for those who contributed to this book. We thank all of those who are featured in this book, for they will stand as true models for the many young women – even young men – who will want to follow in their footsteps to become leaders.

I now have the singular honor to launch this book, *Goodluck Ebele Jonathan: Champion for Women*.

God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

I thank you.