

Special Remarks

by

Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

**At Cross-Learning Initiative Conference on UN
Security Council Resolution 1325**

Tuesday, April 13, 2010

**Baroness Nuala O’Loan, Ireland’s Special Envoy for
UNSCR 1325**

**Sr. Armanda Da Costa, Director of Policy & Gender
Development State Secretariat for the promotion of
Equality of Timor-Leste;**

Ministers and Officials of Government;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Members of the United Nations Family;

Representatives of International Organizations;

Representatives of Civil Society;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Dear Friends:

I am pleased that Liberia is the venue for this third in the series of Cross-Learning Initiatives on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the previous conferences having taken place in Belfast and in Dili.

A very warm welcome to our distinguished guests from Ireland, who encouraged and sponsored this “twinning” arrangement in the implementation of Resolution 1325; and to our friends from Timor-Leste, who traveled a great distance to attend this meeting. We extend greetings, also, to the representatives of the United Nations family and to our other partners.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Liberia was in the throes of a vicious civil war when the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on October 31, 2000, and was, doubtless, a case study

for the Council as it deliberated the provisions of this now celebrated resolution. Today, Liberia, in its post-conflict recovery phase, exemplifies the principles, letter and intent of that resolution.

In a first-of-a-kind resolution on women, peace and security, the Security Council expressed concern that civilians, particularly women and children, accounted for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict. The Council reaffirmed the important role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts and in peace-building. It stressed the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in maintaining and promoting peace and security, as well as the need to increase women's role in decision-making in conflict prevention and resolution.

Additionally, the Council recognized the urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective into peacekeeping

operations, convinced that, with an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process could significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.

In adopting Resolution 1325, the Security Council set out a watershed political framework that makes women, and a gender perspective, relevant to negotiating peace agreements, planning peacekeeping operations, and reconstructing war-torn societies. It also made the pursuit of gender equality relevant to every Security Council action, ranging from mine clearance to elections to security sector reform.

My initial involvement with Resolution 1325 came about when the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) commissioned Elisabeth Rehn of Finland and me, as Independent Experts, to conduct an independent

assessment on the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace-building. It was an opportunity for us to improve the protection of women in armed conflict and to strengthen women's contribution to peace processes and to rebuilding their communities.

In fulfillment of that assignment, Elisabeth and I traveled to 14 of the world's conflict areas during 2001 and 2002, where we saw a continuum of violence that shatters women's lives before, during and after conflict: in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, East Timor (now Timor-Leste), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, Guinea, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and in my own Liberia.

Towards the full implementation of 1325, we called for:

- **Strengthened protection for women and measures to address violence against women and gender discrimination in conflict and post-conflict situations;**
- **Increased coordination within the entire UN system to ensure implementation of commitments made to women;**
- **Systematic monitoring, data collection and communications on the gender dimensions of conflict and post-conflict crises and assistance; and**
- **High-level and consistent commitment to gender equality and women’s equal representation in all peace-building activities.**

To give “teeth” to Resolution 1325, a number of countries around the world have adopted National Action Plans for its implementation, and have reached

out to sister nations to share experiences and learn from each other. Such is the case here. Our purpose here today is to continue the process of bringing together women from post-conflict situations to develop a unified message on 1325, to be presented to the United Nations as it observes the tenth anniversary, in October, of the adoption of that historic resolution.

Previous conferences in this Cross-Learning series have focused on aspects of the “Three Ps” of Resolution 1325, namely, increasing women’s participation, and encouraging the protection of women in conflict and post-conflict situation. Our focus, over the next few days, is to examine the third “P” – “Gender Perspectives” – and how best to incorporate a gender perspective in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

When we speak about the need for a gender perspective, however, we are not simply referring to

having women present at various stages; it also means including relevant gender considerations into legislation and policies to ensure women's empowerment and protection of their rights. Omitting these considerations endangers long-term peace and security, given women's recognized role as key stakeholders in any peace process. It is, therefore, significant that this conference is examining the gender perspectives of mediation, post-conflict recovery, and transitional justice, paying particular attention to international human rights and humanitarian law.

Liberia's Past and Future

Dear Friends:

Liberia's history shows the incredible suffering caused to women and children by the events of war. Our history likewise shows the incredible potential of women to persevere, to lead, to resolve conflict, and to

move a country from social and economic chaos onto the path of social and economic development.

In my Inaugural Address, in January 2006, I observed that, until a few decades ago, Liberian women endured the injustice of being treated as second-class citizens. During the civil war, our women bore the brunt of inhumanity and terror: they were conscripted into war, gang-raped at will, forced into domestic slavery. Yet, as I pointed out four years ago, it was the women, notably those who established themselves as the Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET), who labored and advocated for peace throughout our region.

I pledged, then, that my Administration would endeavor to give Liberian women prominence in all affairs of our country; to empower Liberian women in all areas of our national life; to support and increase the writ of laws that would restore women's dignity and deal drastically with crimes that dehumanized them; to enforce the law

against rape; to encourage families to educate all children, particularly the girl child; and to provide economic programs that enable Liberian women to assume their proper place in our economic revitalization process. I can say, proudly, that we have made huge strides in fulfilling those promises.

Liberia's National Action Plan

At last year's International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security, which I co-convened with President Tarja Halonen of Finland here in Monrovia, Liberia proudly launched its National Action Plan (NAP) for implementing Resolution 1325, becoming the first African country to do so. We need more African countries to follow our example.

Developed through a participatory and inclusive process, the National Action Plan was the work of many,

with consultations held across the counties and involving civil society, local NGOs, community leaders, and international partners, along with the various Government entities. The outcome was the crafting of a Plan to chart the course for empowering, supporting and protecting women in our society.

Government's initiative to develop this National Plan reconfirms our ambitions to keep women at the forefront of our reconstruction and security processes. It provides the framework and structure for monitoring and evaluating Government's activities relating to women's leadership, security and protection.

In addition to developing our National Action Plan on 1325, the Government, through its Ministry of Gender, established a National Steering Committee on 1325 to guide its implementation, as well as to provide oversight and accountability. A Secretariat, set up to coordinate

implementation, is developing a communication strategy to popularize and disseminate the Plan.

United Nations Agencies are supporting Government's efforts through four programs that complement the NAP. These joint programs aim at: preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence; promoting food security and nutrition by targeting women farmers in order to improve their livelihoods and their agriculture production capacity; promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment; and increasing youth employment and empowerment.

It also bears highlighting the fact that Liberia has the only serving female Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) and the first all-female Formed Police Unit deployed by India. Additionally, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), as one of the largest peacekeeping operations, has a clearly defined mandate to implement Resolution 1325, and its Office of

the Gender Advisor ensures that this mandate is actively pursued.

We are proud of the progress Liberia has made to push for the implementation of Resolution 1325. We also recognize that this process is not yet complete. Women have brought peace, but our peace-building efforts are not yet finished. We have returned to the farms, but we will push harder to grow more food for our country. Women are seeking, through adult education, what was never given to them as girls, but we are not done learning. We are leading the way to a new dawn, but we have big dreams yet to fulfill for this new day.

For all these reasons, we welcome this Cross-Learning Initiative on implementing 1325 as an opportunity to learn and reinforce Liberia's strong commitment to women's leadership and women's continued involvement in our reconstruction and security efforts.

Themes of the Monrovia Conference

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As this conference examines the themes of mediation, post-conflict recovery and transitional justice, let me note that Liberia has been active in all three areas.

Regarding mediation, we know that lasting peace will not exist in Liberia unless we continue to include all relevant parties in conflict mediation and resolution.

This is true from the highest levels of dispute resolution to the grassroots level where our citizens must also work to consolidate peace. Recognizing this, our Government will ensure that women's concerns are brought to the table, including in the deliberations of the newly formed Land Reform Commission, set up to settle land disputes and ownership. At the village level, civil society, the Government and our UN partners are working to establish village "peace huts," which provide

rural women with a safe and trusted place to bring their local concerns and problems. These “peace huts” collaborate with local traditional authorities and local police to find peaceful solutions and ensure that women are protected.

As to post-conflict recovery, and the role of women in peace-building and peacekeeping, Liberia has had to rebuild its entire police and military. Since 2006, we have made it a priority to increase the numbers of women in our security forces. As a nation, we have committed, in our Poverty Reduction Strategy, to have 20 percent participation by women in all security sectors by 2011. This year, all security institutions have introduced a gender module into their training manuals. The presence, here, of female peacekeepers, from India and elsewhere, is creating a lasting impression and helping to provide a female face to security in Liberia.

In the area of transitional justice, we acknowledge that gender-based violence continues to be one of Liberia's greatest postwar challenges and human rights violations. We are working at all levels to end impunity and address crimes against women and girls. In that connection, the Liberia National Police (LNP) has established 46 women's and children's support units at police stations across the country, which constitute an important step to stopping the culture of impunity for violence against women. The country's law against rape makes it a non-bailable offense and increases the penalty for the rape of minors to lifetime imprisonment. We also have a national action plan on sexual and gender-based violence and, in the past year, opened a criminal court in Monrovia specifically devoted to preventing and prosecuting the most serious cases of domestic violence and rape, and also established a

sexual crimes-based prosecution unit in the Ministry of Justice.

Conclusion

I highlight these accomplishments to show that Liberia is on a clear course towards the greater protection of women and the greater promotion of their role in society. It is this momentum which enabled us to come together in a consultative process to commit to a road map and plan for the full implementation of Resolution 1325.

That seminal resolution urges us to make use of the great development potential that lies within women and girls, a potential that is sadly overlooked in many countries. Although Liberia faces many obstacles – poverty, high illiteracy, sexual violence; one of the highest maternal mortality rates, severe trauma caused by the war, a completely destroyed infrastructure, and a host of other issues – we are determined not the make

the mistake of not harnessing the potential of one-half of our small population of 3.5 million. By engaging our women, we will implement 1325.

Once again, we are happy to be hosting you in Monrovia, affording us the opportunity to learn from each other, both in how we can do more for our own countries and how we can support each other. I wish you success in your deliberations, as you share experiences in order to prepare outcomes and recommendations that will feed into the report on implementing UNSCR 1325, to be presented to the United Nations in October.

I thank you.