

Response by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

To the Theme:

“Towards Greater Unity and Integration through Shared Values”

16th Session of the African Union Assembly

Addis Ababa, January 30, 2011

Honorable Chair...

I. The context

There is no doubt that we would have made greater progress towards effective integration and cooperation if today’s debate on the theme, “Towards Greater Unity and Integration through Shared Values”, could have been tabled and appropriate decisions taken and fully implemented a few decades ago. We acknowledge with deep appreciation the candid and useful diagnoses and insights associated with our collective desire towards greater continental integration given our shared values as articulated by Commissioner Joiner and my Brother, President Atta Mills. We also identify with those pertinent issues raised and the challenges identified by my colleagues who have so ably responded to enrich our discussion and more importantly to strengthen our resolve.

The spirit of our debate today has demonstrated the immense power and viable opportunities that we, as a continental bloc, have within our grasp to bring joy and prosperity to our peoples. Today’s debate has also allowed us to fully appreciate the many internal and external **obstacles** that have consistently constrained our many efforts made over the years to adequately put in place and effectively execute

a Pan African Architecture on Governance. Today's debate has brought to the forefront the importance and imperative for us to rally around and place at the core of our individual and collective policies and actions those values and aspirations that we share amongst ourselves as well as those we share with our partners in the rest of the world. Today's debate has broadened our search for implementable **measures** that would fulfill our long-sought-after continental integration and cooperation for sustainable development.

II. Why has it taken Africa so long?

Our forefathers, urged on by Ghana's noble son, Kwame Nkrumah, rallied around a set of shared values, vision and aspirations to see our peoples and governments free from political colonialism. Together, the necessary sacrifices were made and collective actions taken, at times under very difficult and life-threatening circumstances and obstacles, to implement collectively defined measures so that their shared goal can be achieved. We all are today witness to the substantial gains our region has made as a result of these early decisions and the willingness of our past leaders to make hard choices.

Why has it taken us, the next generation of leaders, so long to forge and benefit from the power of unity? Why has it taken us so long to individually and collectively make those hard choices that will bring dignity to our peoples? Why are we ignoring the global events and the re-configuration and consolidation of global interests that are glaring at us boldly and holding back on taking some hard decisions? Why do we continue to debate the obvious need for a continental

government, yet shy away from adopting one? My submission is that, as we move deep into the 21st century, no country in Africa, nor can the continent as a whole, shy away from making those hard choices needed to control our destiny and emancipate our people from the shackles of domination and poverty. It is only when we are willing and ready to galvanize our political will and collective resources around those required choices that our overall desired goal of “enhancing cooperation and consolidating unity can be reached. Choices relating to establishing and operationalizing functional institutions with capacities to protect those values that are shared by each and every African man and woman must be made.

III. Coping with the inherent challenges

There are a few critical challenges that have continued to retard our progress along the way as African countries and the continent move towards our desired goal. Mustering our collective commitment to domesticate those well-cherished shared individual values, as well as those values that are rooted within our shared aspirations, presents a major challenge. The development of a normative framework, as we have done, is not the end of the story. We have to now speed up ratification, enhance our ownership and take the necessary actions that would ensure our effective implementation of tenets contained in the framework.

As we deal with the challenges, we must clearly differentiate those values that we share and those that we aspire to achieve. No doubt, at the individual level there are concrete, tangible and well-meaning shared values as articulated in the paper. They relate to how our societies are to be governed and be actively involved in our

political, economic and social activities. They speak to all of us giving respect for the basic rights and freedom of our people, irrespective of gender, location and age. They talk about accountability and integrity, participation and the choice before us is clear.

ECOWAS members have made and continue to make valiant efforts to apply these principles to realities and developments in our region. This is not only an approach of choice which we are pursuing, but obligations which fall within the framework of collective responsibility. This is why, for the most part, we have endorsed the move toward the establishment of the African Union Authority.

At the continental level, mounting the necessary response to coordinate activities in support of our shared value is a complex undertaking. Domestic institutions, policies and the respective engagements of many countries with external partners have intensified the complexities. What is of importance, as we extend our debate, is that these values are gaining importance in global assessments of progress, because of the inextricable link between political and economic governance as one must establish and preserve an enabling environment for us to move forward and forge strong relationships.

It is timely that we reaffirm our commitment to what has been presented as shared values. This is important because increasingly we find that these values are universal, and in an interdependent world they are an integral part of our engagements at the national, sub-regional and continental levels. We must seize this moment. We can wait no longer!