

Statement by H. E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Millennium Development Goals Summit Side Event
On Sanitation, Water and Hygiene, "Addressing the Global Water
and Sanitation Challenge: The Key to the MDGs"
United Nations, September 22, 2010

President Wade of Senegal;

President Rahmon of Tajikistan;

Chairman Sonjica of the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW);

Secretary of State Mitchell of the United Kingdom;

Mrs. Otero, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs;

Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon;

His Excellency the Prince of Orange, Chair of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation;

Dr. Han Seung-soo, Chair of Global Green Growth Institute;

Mr. Anthony Lake, Chief Executive of UNICEF

Ladies and Gentlemen:

OR

Excellencies;

Colleagues;

Friends:

Thank you for inviting me to be part of this morning's discussion. I speak as the President of Liberia, and also in my capacity as Goodwill Ambassador for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) in Africa. My conviction that these are fundamental pillars of human development persuaded me to accept that role.

Ten years after world leaders agreed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we are encouraged to see that many are working hard towards a more equitable, healthy, educated, well-fed and, ultimately, poverty-free world. With the right partnerships, investment, and support, we can achieve a lot more before 2015.

Although optimistic about what we can achieve, I am, nevertheless, concerned. Despite the critical role sanitation, water, and hygiene (MDG 7c) play in enhancing progress on all of the other MDGs, the sector is under-discussed, under-prioritized and, therefore, under-resourced.

In Africa, current access to water and especially to sanitation is cause for concern. Only 26 of 54 African countries are on track to meet the MDG for drinking water, and only six are on track to meet the Goal for sanitation. In sub-Saharan Africa, more than 80 percent of countries are off-track for the sanitation target.

The majority of those without access to water, sanitation and hygiene are poor. Population growth, urbanization, industrialization, and climate change are all increasing demand and pressure on our water resources.

But despite huge challenges in coordination, investment and financial capacity, Africa has made the political commitment to drive the sector forward. The African Ministers' Council on Water, the *Sharm el-Sheikh Commitments on water and sanitation* and the

eThekwini Declaration on sanitation are all examples of this commitment.

While the MDGs were being agreed in 2000, Liberia was in the midst of a destructive civil war. When I became President in 2006, the country was just emerging from that war, and there was no policy on water and sanitation and any work being done in the sector was fragmented.

I am proud to say that although we still have a long way to go, we have made significant progress. Our Poverty Reduction Strategy emphasizes water and sanitation. Liberia signed the eThekwini Declaration in 2009, and has approved an Integrated Water Resources Management Policy. Our Water Supply and Sanitation Policy approves the formation of a number of key institutions.

These and other measures demonstrate our political will to put water and sanitation at the heart of national policy, but we still face many challenges. Although our healthcare system has become free for everyone, and child mortality has been reduced by half, as of 2008 only 1 in 4 Liberians had access to clean drinking water and only 1 in 7 had access to sanitation. Diarrhea – the number 1 killer of children under-five in Africa – is caused by poor sanitation and is responsible for almost a fifth of Liberia's child mortality.

The lack of access to sanitation and clean drinking water also frustrate efforts to address gender inequality. It keeps teenage girls out of school; it endangers the lives of mothers during childbirth; and it restricts women from engaging in productive economic activities because of time spent fetching water or caring for sick family members.

The Sanitation and Water for All partnership is an example of how donors and governments can work together to increase and better

coordinate aid on water and sanitation in poor countries – the kind of collaboration that could lead to real and sustained change.

But for the partnership to be successful, the commitments made by governments at the High-Level Meeting now require more concrete and substantive commitments from donors. The will and the willingness shown by African countries to tackle this challenge have to be matched by our partners.

I urge us all, as Heads of State convene to review the MDGs, to take water, sanitation and hygiene seriously. If we fail to address the causes of disease, such as lack of access to basic sanitation and safe drinking water, the rates of return on our investment in health will diminish, and we will continue to see our children die of easily preventable diseases. The poorest members of our society will continue to live in poverty, unable to contribute to the growth of our economies and the development of our societies.

As we discuss the priorities for the next five years, we should recognize that the MDGs are interlinked; that without progress on sanitation and water, progress on *all* the other Goals will be undermined.

As Goodwill Ambassador for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Africa, I speak for the continent – together with President Wade – when I say that the continent continues to be committed to the achievement of this goal. We urge our peers to prioritize water and sanitation and increase investment, particularly for sanitation and hygiene. Doing so will help us meet *all* our MDG targets and ensure that we look *beyond* 2015 to an Africa, and a world, where everyone has access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

I thank you.

Talking Points for WASH Side Event

- Africa has registered some progress, yet the current status of access to water, and especially to sanitation, is cause for concern. Currently, 26 of 54 African countries are on track to meet the MDG for drinking water, and only 6 countries are on track to meet the Goal for sanitation.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, more than 80 percent of countries are off-track for the sanitation target. Rural areas often have much lower access rates than urban ones, and the majority of those without or with limited access to water, sanitation and hygiene are poor and/or marginalized. Increasing population growth, urbanization, industrialization, and increased climate variability mean a heightened demand for water, and, therefore, an increased pressure on water resources.
- In 2008, we launched a three-year Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), which emphasizes water and sanitation under its Pillar 4 and guides our Government towards increasing access to safe drinking water from 25 to 50 percent by 2011; increasing access to human waste collection and disposal facilities from 15 to 33 percent; ensuring sustainability of 90 percent of water and sanitation facilities; and scaling up hygiene promotion in schools and communities in all 15 counties.
- We are also in the process of developing a five-year sector strategic plan, which assesses Liberia's progress on water and sanitation against the MDG targets, and paves the way to a Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp).
- We have increased funding to the sector from \$200,000 in 2006 to \$1 million in 2009-2010, but we still face a funding gap of between US\$88.5 and \$93.5 million. We are working hard to flesh out the necessary institutional framework, as outlined in our new policy. Additional resources will allow Liberia to carry out our ambitious plan for the sector, and make sure that clean water and sanitation reaches the poorest and most vulnerable.