

Statement by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at Third Africa-European Union
on Investment, Economic Growth and Job Creation
Topic: "Governance and Human Rights"
Tripoli, Libya, November 30, 2010

Brother Leader;

Excellencies and Colleagues from Africa and Europe;

Heads of Delegation;

Special Guests;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very pleased to be here, participating in this Third Africa-European Union Summit, which will build upon the strong bilateral relationships that exist between African and European countries.

Let us congratulate ourselves, the leaders of Africa and Europe, for initiating this Summit back in 2000 in Cairo. In Lisbon, in 2007, we resolved to build a new strategic political partnership, overcoming the traditional donor-recipient relationship and building on common values and goals in pursuit of peace and stability, democracy and rule of law, progress and development.

We launched the Africa-EU Partnership on Democratic Governance and Human Rights, and adopted the First Action Plan (2008-2010), in which we agreed to enhance dialogue at the global level and in international fora; to promote the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and support the African Charter on democracy, elections and governance; and to strengthen cooperation in the area of

cultural goods, cultural interaction, and twin programs between museums from Africa and the EU.

At this third Summit, our objective is to strengthen the Africa-EU partnership, capitalizing on lessons learned and providing a solid framework for long-term, systematic and well-integrated cooperation in the areas of investment, economic growth and job creation.

Let me join others in extending sincere thanks and appreciation to Brother Leader and to the Government and People of the Great Socialist Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for hosting this Summit here in Tripoli, and for the warm hospitality always accorded us whenever we visit this beautiful country.

Excellencies:

As Africa celebrates 50 years of independence, we can reflect on the revolution that has taken place over these five decades, as detailed in Steven Radelet's book, "Emerging Africa." Fifty years ago, he writes, the great wave of independence movements raised enormous hope for democracy and competent, accountable governments.

Citizens anticipated that the new governments would reverse the dictatorial practices of the colonial rulers and instead would work on behalf of all citizens to bring prosperity and development. Many independence leaders pledged to protect political freedoms and civil liberties and introduce constitutions that would enshrine political pluralism.

But this did not happen. Nascent pluralistic systems gave way to authoritarianism and military rule. Power became concentrated in strong executives, with weak judicial and legislative branches easily co-opted to go along. Authoritarian governments allowed little

dissent. They curtailed civil liberties and political freedoms, outlawed opposition parties, seized control of the press, weakened auditing and other public financial control mechanisms, and dismantled the few remaining institutions of restraint and checks on power.

The repressive political hand was matched by a strong economic hand, with government-imposed wide-ranging controls over the economy, including price regulation, fixed exchange and interest rates, bloated civil service, subsidies. A deeply intertwined political and economic system provided the root causes of the African development crisis.

Since 1990 – in just twenty years – the change in Africa has been nothing short of remarkable. Our continent has gone from almost no democracy to almost half under democratic rule.

In the early years, the changes were rapid. Between 1990 and 1994, 38 African countries held competitive elections – quadrupling the number of the previous five years – and the average share of legislative seats held by opposition parties tripled from 10 percent to 31 percent. In 29 of those 38 elections, the position of head of government was openly contested following a period in which political competition had been denied.

This transformation is fast becoming a tsunami across many African countries. Dictators are being replaced by democracy. Authoritarianism is giving way to accountability. Economic stagnation is turning to resurgence. And, most important, despair is being replaced by hope – hope that people can live in peace with their neighbors, that parents can provide for their families, that children can go to school and receive decent health care, and that people can speak their minds without fear.

This progress is all the more extraordinary because so many of the countries are among the poorest in the world, and it was long thought that democracy wasn't really feasible for low-income countries.

The record shows clearly that Africa's improvement in good governance has had a positive effect on growth and investment. This has meant a steady rise in per capita income and purchasing power parity. Increased income has led to an increase in investment and trade. Annual investment has grown to 20 percent of GDP, a significant portion of this derived from external sources in the form of Direct Foreign Investment.

According to the African Economic Outlook of the African Development Bank, in the three years before the 2009 global recession, Africa had achieved an average annual growth of around 6 percent. In 2009, the growth rate declined to 2.3 percent but is expected to rebound to 4.5 percent in 2010 and 5.2 percent in 2011.

While the record seems to be clear that good governance fosters good economic policies, resulting in good economic performance, there are strong dissenting views. Paul Collier, in his well-acclaimed book, "The Bottom Billion," suggests that the advocates of good governance and good policies have been somewhat oversold. He states that good governance and good policies help a country realize its opportunities, but they cannot generate opportunities where none exist, and they "cannot defy gravity." Even the best governance and policies will not turn poorly endowed countries into rich ones unless new opportunities are discovered, and the economic space is expanded through cross-border or regional initiatives.

Thus as we celebrate these 50 years of the independence of many African countries, and Europe's 53rd year of regional integration, we

take note that Europe is today largely integrated while Africa remains balkanized with reliance on historical trading relations.

This is where the Europe and Africa partnership can make a difference. It is time to move away from the continued North-South colonial trading patterns and bilateral relationships based upon political and commercial objectives, to supporting regional industrial activities that will produce the economies of scale required for private sector growth. Underdevelopment of infrastructure, a current priority for Africa, continues to constrain the potential expansion in investment and the positive effect which this would have on regional integration and employment, particularly among the youth, which represents two-thirds, or about 66 percent, of the African population.

The promotion of interconnectivity and of African infrastructure – roads, energy, ports – remains a critical and unfulfilled goal under the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership.

On the other hand, the achievement of the interrelated goals of growth, investment and employment requires a stable political environment and the political will to stay the course of sound economic policies. For many of our countries coming out of conflict, total structural transformation is a must if sustainability is to be assured.

I can tell you, from experience, that this is not an easy task. For every sphere of national endeavor, timing and sequencing are critical to respond to raised expectations and to prevent reversals. It's not just aid and investment; African countries need to expand trade, and European countries must open their borders to much greater trade.

When we speak of governance and human rights, we go beyond the basic entitlements as the right to vote, the right to a fair election, freedom to express views on political issues and to hold government accountable for commitments made under national and international law.

Within this context, we look for the means whereby citizens and institutions can express this freedom with responsibility so as not to undermine the stability and development prospects of the country. The achievement of this goal can only come from enhancement in literacy and education, with room for greater collaboration between Europe and Africa in this regard.

Excellencies;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Africa's regional organization, the African Union, has become a stronger force for the promotion of governance as demonstrated by strong policies that reject the change of government through military means or by force. The Union also spends much time on more substantive development issues, drawing on the experiences and the research and analysis of the regional Economic Communities.

NEPAD, the Union's economic instrument for Africa's renewal, has, since the early 2000s, been preoccupied with efforts to improve the position of Africa in the overall international context. The commitment to Africa's development remains unfulfilled, but we are pleased to note the renewed commitment to Africa's development, as stated by Commission President Barroso. We need only to shorten the road from commitment to cash.

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is also an increasingly effective African initiative to improve Africa's processes and institutions of political, social and economic, and corporate governance.

Several benefits are derived from the African governance peer review process in the promotion of democracy and development in Africa. At the continental level, the process has provided African countries with a common set of metrics for assessing progress in the areas of political, socio-economic and corporate governance. It has also elevated the question of the quality of governance performance in member countries as an important – a vital – interest of the entire membership of the African Union. In Africa today, the principle of non-interference has been replaced by the principle of non-indifference.

At the country-level, the review process has demanded all-inclusive participatory processes of governance and is encouraging African governments to develop broader-based processes of national governance that involve civil society, the private sector, and greater emphasis on the involvement of women and the people of rural areas.

Today 29 out of 53 African nations have joined the APRM process. Since it commenced in 2005, fourteen countries have gone through the first cycle of annual reviews as of September 2010. At this pace, all APRM member countries will have done so by 2013, at which point a national program of action will be created for each.

In closing, let me say that although pockets of repression and authoritarianism persist, it is, in general, an exciting and encouraging time for Africa. We have put behind us the conflict and misery of the

past and replaced them with peace and opportunity. We know the challenges are great, but the partnership forged with Europe, a partnership based upon mutuality in respect and interest, will raise our hopes and grow our confidence as we deepen our economic recovery, build stronger democracies, fight poverty and build a brighter future.

I thank you.