

**Keynote Address by H. E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Investiture of Bishop David R. Daniels, Jr.
As President of the Council of Bishops
Of the Global African Methodist Episcopal Church
Columbia Metropolitan Center
Monday, June 27, 2011**

Bishop and Mrs. Daniels;
Congressman and Mrs. James Clyburn;
The Council of Bishops;
Senator Pinckney and Other Members of the State Assembly;
Mayor Benjamin;
National, State and Local Government Officials;
Fellow Compatriots, Family;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;
Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Let us begin by giving thanks and praise to Almighty God for his many blessings bestowed upon us as a people. Without Him, nothing can be achieved. With Him, all things are possible. And so we give God the glory.

I bring you heartfelt greetings, on behalf of my Government and people, on this historic day for Liberia, and for the AME Church worldwide. This was a trip I had to make, given the magnitude and significance of this event. Having made this commitment to Bishop Daniels two years ago that I would be here, this is a promise that I am proud to keep.

What a distinct honor it is for me to be in Columbia, South Carolina, today, rich in its history, its people and its culture, to witness the Investiture of a son of Liberia, Bishop David R. Daniels Jr., as President of the Council of Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. We are witnessing history in the making, a first for someone from our tiny country.

But Liberia cannot claim Bishop Daniels all to itself, because this City, too, has been his home. It is where he earned degrees, from Allen University and the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, and it is here, in this great State, that he pastored at six AME Churches as he ascended in his ministry.

I congratulate you, Bishop Daniels, for serving your Church and congregation so faithfully and with such dedication that the Council of Bishops elected you to lead the flock. Today is a day for giving thanks and celebrating the achievements, the commitment and the resolve of this honorable member of our spiritual family.

Bishop Daniels is a trailblazer in every sense of the word. He was elected the 124th Bishop of the AME Church in 2004, in Indianapolis, Indiana, becoming the first West African to be so elected.

A believer in positive change, the Bishop has brought stability and excellence in leadership not only to the AME Church of Liberia, but as head of the 14th Episcopal District that includes Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo-Benin. He is the first Bishop, since 1928, to serve two terms in this position. With all of these firsts in an exemplary career, it was only a matter of time for him to rise to where he is today.

Bishop Daniels is also President of the Liberia Council of Churches. Under his skilled leadership, the LCC continues to be a just and effective instrument for the harmonious co-existence of our people and for good relations between all religions and denominations.

ABOUT LIBERIA

That this Council of Bishops has selected a dynamic Liberian as its President compels me to say something about the country from which he hails. I will talk to you about Government's partnership with faith-

based institutions and, more specifically, about the ministry of the AME Church in Liberia.

Liberia, as many of you know, was settled by freed slaves who sailed from these shores, some, no doubt, from this very State, seeking a better life in a land where people of color could truly be free. Since declaring its independence in 1847, Liberia, Africa's oldest Republic – this year celebrating its 164th Independence Anniversary – throughout its history has played a major role in the emancipation of the African continent and in international politics. Our tiny country, the size of Ohio and a population of about 3.6 million, has produced astute politicians, statesmen, economists, educators, and clergy – as evidenced today – many of whom in this room, who have contributed so much to our national development.

But over the years, Liberia took a wrong turn, one which led to over two decades of chaos and destruction, before the country finally righted itself. What we faced, when we took office in 2006, was almost total destruction, hence the need for total reconstruction of both state and society. The nation was gripped by economic distress, social decline, and political disarray, and the Liberian people were battered and filled with deep cynicism and despair.

And so, five years ago, we began a historic journey, determined to build a nation where peace, stability and a new culture would unite us as a nation. But where do you start, when faced with thousands of priorities – the economy, security, basic services, governance, national status, national healing and so much more?

We acted quickly to address the myriad challenges, and by 2008 implemented a Poverty Reduction Strategy, under which we set out to consolidate peace and security, revitalize our economy, rebuild governance and the rule of law, and rebuild our broken infrastructure in order to provide basic services to our people.

Our most immediate challenge was peace and security, and the presence of the UN peacekeeping force was a decisive factor in this regard. Their presence gave us the space we needed in developing our own security sector. We now have a 2,000-person-strong Army, properly trained and professional, trained, incidentally, through the support of your own government. We are expanding our capacity so that our police are able to address low-level crime and the disorder that may affect the quality of life of our people.

We have had successes in meeting our second challenge to revitalize our economy. Having started with next to nothing, we've raised the national budget from \$80 million to \$368 million, attracted over \$16 billion in direct foreign investment, improved our Central Bank reserves from \$5 million to over \$300 million, raised per capita income by approximately one-third, brought inflation down from 20 percent to single digits, and a GDP that has averaged 6.5 percent annually.

Probably our greatest achievement is our debt relief, under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. Of the \$4.9 billion external debt we inherited, unserviced for two decades, we have, in three years, relentlessly pursued a public financial management under a rigorous program with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and most of this debt is now gone.

We addressed the challenges of governance and the rule of law, most prominently the issue of corruption. In battling corruption, our approach has been systemic and preventive. We strengthened the principles of transparency by ensuring new procurement laws; by passing a Freedom of Information Act, the first country in West Africa to do so; by becoming fully compliant with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative; by strengthening our financial management laws; by restructuring the pillars of integrity – our General Auditing Commission and establishing the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission.

The punishment side of fighting corruption remains a missing link, as we had to face a judiciary that had become dysfunctional for so long that it will take a tremendous task to reform it and to make it work. We

are thus devoting our energy to judicial reform, a review of our jury system, as well as the prosecuting powers of our institutes of integrity.

We can also count success in rebuilding vital infrastructure and restoring the basic services of government. We are rebuilding schools, roads and clinics; restoring lights and water – all missing in our capital city for over two decades; we're expanding and modernizing our airports and seaports, both vital for economic activity; and we are renegotiating for the rehabilitation of our hydro plant, as power remains one of our major constraints to enhancement of our security efforts and to enable us to move from the export of primary products to adding value, thus moving us into an agro-industrial state.

Finally, we've had to address a country still traumatized. Our national spirit, our national identity, our communal trust had been undermined, requiring a process of national healing and reconciliation. The process has not been perfect, nor is it complete, but we believe we have made the necessary first steps in that direction, with the Church playing a pivotal role.

We have thus cleared enormous hurdles in just five years, but we still face numerous challenges. One such challenge is the continued volatility of our sub-region, which has experienced war in the past several years. We have learned lessons, we have changed the way we do things, and we have received a lot of assistance and support from the people of this country and abroad for the success that we have. Our success is also America's success.

GOVERNMENT'S PARTNERSHIP WITH FAITH-BASED INSTITUTIONS

It is Government's partnership with religious institutions which I will say a little bit about. Religion is a pillar of society. It fulfills a human yearning that we all share. Our 14-year civil war left manifold casualties in its wake: it bred hatred among people, tearing them apart, leading to schisms within religious communities.

The Church is central in our Liberian society. It has played a major role in nation building, from the day the settlers from these shores set out on

our Providence Island, to today. The history of our nation is linked with the activity of the Church. Liberia's Declaration of Independence, in July 1847, was signed in a Church, Providence Baptist Church, which this year celebrates its 190th anniversary.

Beyond providing spiritual nourishment to its members, the Church has played a crucial role in delivering services to the people. Throughout our nation's history, the Church has partnered with the State in providing quality private-school education for Liberia's students, and many of us have benefited from church-supported education and health services.

Engaging in education and health projects has been the mantra of our churches, while preaching the Gospel, adhering to the New Testament quote to let your shine so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven. The AME Church is no exception, especially under the leadership of Bishop Daniels. Bishop Daniels, we honor you today for what you have done in our country. Through your leadership, the Church has reached new dimensions in spreading the word of God and fulfilling the Great Commission.

Let us pass the torch, given to us by our predecessors, to the younger generation as we mentor our girls and boys to be good examples and committed future leaders. Our goal must be to help them grow in their faith and actively share in the love of Christ in their communities and their nation. In looking for role models for our children, let us look at this man of God who has dedicated his life to the uplifting of mankind.

THE AME CHURCH IN LIBERIA

The African Methodist Episcopal Church, founded in 1787, has been in Liberia for over 120 years, and its congregation constitutes a growing percentage of the worldwide total of 2.5 million adherents, spread over five continents.

The Church's work in educating Liberians is long-standing, dating back to the founding of the Monrovia College and Industrial Training School. Years later, in 1995, the Church established the AME University, which Bishop Daniels has integrated into our society. Dr. Jean Bell Manning serves as head of that institution, and today they are beginning to become one of the quality schools at the tertiary level.

Bishop Daniels has, with financial support from a Canadian foundation, built two schools: the Daniel Adams School of Excellence, in Royesville, Montserrado County, and the Topoe Town School of Excellence, in his village. His passion for knowledge has also prompted the Bishop to fund academic scholarships to enable AME pastors and their spouses to earn degrees, fulfilling his promise to have educated church leaders.

In the health sector, Bishop Daniels' vision for affordable health care for the people of Liberia resulted in the Jefferson-Adams Health Center, located in our nation's capital. Once fully equipped, it will serve thousands of people in underserved communities.

CONCLUSION

Our prayer for you, Bishop Daniels, as you lead this august body, is for you to provide Godly leadership, and for the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord to rest upon you.

In this regard, one small request to this Global Council: I understand our Bishop's tenure is coming to an end. But he's doing such wonderful work in Liberia, please keep him there for a little bit longer.

Congratulations to you, Bishop and Mrs. Daniels! You have earned, you deserve, this recognition; you deserve this special day and this special occasion. You have made your country proud, and I salute

you and commend you for your splendid efforts. May God Almighty continue to bless you, to bless the Council of Bishops, to bless the African Methodist Episcopal Church, as you do His work and spread His word.

May God bless us all. Thank you.