

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Bible Way Church at Atlas Road
Columbia, South Carolina
Sunday, June 26, 2011**

(Delivered extemporaneously, and transcribed)

Rev. Darrell Jackson;
Bishop David Daniels;
Members of the Clergy;
Officers and Members of the Bible Way Church Congregation;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I'm honored to join the Bible Way Church in worship this Sunday morning, awed by the number of worshippers so early in the morning. This goes to show that Bible Way is, indeed, God's way.

I'm delighted to be in Columbia, South Carolina, and the purpose of my visit is to witness tomorrow's Investiture of a compatriot as President of the Council of Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It is for our country a historic first, and I want to share in that joy and thank all of those of the African Methodist Episcopal Church who have selected him to serve in this position.

I want to thank you, Pastor Darrell Jackson. I understand that your message is one of economic development and education. That just syncs so well with what we do, for we have prioritized education in our country.

Many of you may know the story of Liberia, a nation founded by people from this country, I daresay many of them came from right here, in Columbia, in South Carolina, emancipated slaves who went back, seeking liberty, seeking justice, seeking the right to rule themselves.

And on this Liberia journey, becoming one of the first independent nations of Africa, they helped to promote the emancipation of our continent, but failed on this journey to be able to integrate with the native population, thereby sowing the seeds of discord that eventually would lead us to the death and destruction caused by civil conflicts.

But we want to thank God that he's given us another opportunity to renew, to rebuild, to reconstruct, and to start our lives all over again. And so today, our kids are back in school, we're building the roads, bringing water – all those things that make us a nation again, thanks in part to the United States.

I want you to know that your country is our number one partner; they've been there with us. Just a couple of days ago, I was in Washington, D.C., meeting with Secretary of State Clinton, and meeting with both the Democrats and Republicans in Congress to express the appreciation of the Liberian people.

More importantly, we have empowered our women, our rural women. Sometimes I travel to the most remote village, and I meet a woman, most times illiterate because she hasn't had the opportunity to go to school. But she will stand there and say to me, "Madam President, today I can go into a meeting and I can speak my mind. I can stand up with the men and I can express my views. I can go into the marketplace and I can be proud because you've built those markets for us, and you've taken us away from the sun and the rain; you've taken our commodities from the ground and put them on tables, where we can have our dignity back. Our children can now go to school, not only the regular schools, but you're helping to put those schools in the marketplace, so that as we work, and we earn our daily bread, our children are right next door or upstairs over us and preparing themselves."

Today, our country is proud to have come from the ashes of destruction, now moving to self-sufficiency, today claimed by all

to be one of the twenty fastest growing economies in the world, mobilizing investment.

I will close with one of the stories that has always remained with me, a very simple one, but one that just tells how far we've come, how our children now see the future, a future of hope and promise.

This was told to me by one of the United Nations agency's representative who went on a tour of our local villages, and she went to visit a school to see the progress of the children. And when she got there, there was a ruckus about fighting. A little girl and a little boy were fighting, and so the Principal came out and went to the little girl, and said to her: "Little girls don't fight; you're supposed to be quiet and calm. And so you're going to be punished because you're a little girl and you're not supposed to do that."

The child stopped, stood for a minute, paused. Then she turned around and went back to him and said: "Teacher, be careful how you speak to me. Just remember, a woman is President."

Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
Columbia, South Carolina

Sunday, June 26, 2011

(Delivered extemporaneously, and transcribed)

Bishop Daniels and Our Other Bishops Here;
Pastor Brailsford;
The Choir, Congregation, AKA Soros;
Liberians Here, Compatriots, Family;
Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We're just so glad to be here. We're here to join in the Investiture ceremonies tomorrow of our dear Bishop, Bishop Daniels; to say to him, on behalf of the Liberian people, and to say to you how much we love him, how much he has served our country, he's served humanity and he's served his God.

But I'm also glad to be here on this "Afrocentric Sunday," to be a part, to see you in African clothing, reaching back to the Motherland. Your Bulletin has talked about the origins of Africa, the industry of Africa, the sophistication of Africa, the prosperity of Africa. We also know that the New World was built on the blood, sweat and toil of Africans.

We know, also, that that came out of the infamous slave trade. And in 1885, in Berlin, the super-Powers took a map, and divided Africa into places that they would own. And there started the period of colonialism, the balkanization of Africa, the interruption in the evolution of our great empires – Songhai, Ghana, Mali, Zimbabwe – in a way, the descent of our great continent.

And in the next few decades – the liberation struggle, the rise of the "big men," the exploitation of resources – Africa went into decline. But I want to tell you that today there is a thriving Africa, that we've removed the shackles of despair; that today, Africa's growth rates that of any region of the world. That's because we've put in some sound economic policies, we've settled our debt issues, we've democratized. Two decades ago, there were three functioning democracies in Africa; today there are

eighteen, and several of them have reached majority. And so we can say to you that your homeland, that your roots, and that your future is now on the move.

I want to talk about Liberia, the place I love best in Africa. And before I do that, I want to recognize one among you, who's a paramount chief, Bishop James. I said to Bishop James, when he told me he was a paramount chief, I told him he goes to the top of the class, because we've got several grades of chiefs – we've got the town chief – my compatriots will know what I'm talking about – we have the clan chief, and then we have the paramount chief. And because he was made a paramount chief, we want to say to you that we're there waiting to receive you one more time.

Liberia has known triumph and tragedy: triumph in the early years of our independence when we led the struggle for the liberation of Africa; triumph as one of the countries in Africa never colonized; triumph in receiving emancipated slaves that founded our country, the forefathers of many of you in this room; triumph to start the process of equality, and equity, and justice and freedom.

But we also failed in our assimilation and integration goals, and created a cleavage that, over time, would divide us – those who came from here, and those who were there – and that led to our descent into a coup d'état and, ultimately, into two decades of civil war, with the death and destruction that that entailed, and the tragedy of a nation, born dedicated to freedom and equality, found itself in chaos, death and destruction.

But we want to thank God today, first for the strong women of Africa, those poor women, those illiterate women, as was mentioned in the story "Pray the Devil Back to Hell," women who sat in the sun and the rain and challenged the status quo, challenged the militarism that existed, and said, "We want our nation back, we want our freedom back, we want to make sure that our children can grow in an environment of love and Christianity and peace."

And so with the support of partners, with the support of your country, we were able to have free and fair elections in 2005. And I want you to know that the women, the women of Liberia, said, "Our time has come; that a hundred and fifty years of male domination has come to an end." I'm proud that they gave me the opportunity to lead the effort of recovery of the renewal of the transformation of our nation. And today we can say to you that we started off with difficulties, a broken country, dysfunctional institutions, a collapsed economy, destroyed infrastructure, very little confidence in ourselves or in anything else, certainly not in the future.

But we put together a team that was committed to rebuilding, and we started off and identified those areas where we'd put our concentration: peace and security; economic revitalization; governance and the rule of law; infrastructure and basic services.

Today, we can say to you that Liberia is on the mend. We have rebuilt a new Army, and we're now into our eighth year of peace. We have put our economic house in order, so that today our growth rate has averaged 6.5 percent. We have resolved our debt. We inherited a \$4.9 billion external debt, not serviced for two decades, but today it's almost gone. We've taken care of our fiscal house by making sure that we only spent that which we were able to raise ourselves and through our partners. And so, today, we have a fiscal surplus equivalent to 2.5 percent of GDP. When I name those figures, some of my friends, my American friends, will say, "My goodness; we wish you'd come and show us how to do it." Our challenge, of course, is to keep it that way.

We also started to fix our institutions, our civil service, provide the freedoms, ensure that no longer will our country have political prisoners – I was one, so I know what it is to go to jail; I know what it is to be in an African jail. And so today, Liberians can seek their redress where it should, under the rule of law in the courts, as we rebuild our capacity, as we begin to send our children to school, as we fix our roads, as we bring back lights – public service lights for the first time in two decades.

When we turned on those street lights, in July 2006, children, who only thought that lights came from the lantern, or from a candle, danced in the streets. Children who only thought that water came out of a bucket, when it came through the taps for the first time, they were even frightened. The things you take for granted can make a big difference in the lives of those who are not accustomed.

Today our children... and I'll come back to that because the two precious groups we have are our children and our women.

We're building the roads and the schools and the hospitals. We're trying to get fixed; we've gone out and we've mobilized \$16 billion in direct foreign investment. Liberia is not a poor country; it's just been poorly managed. We are now reopening our mines – iron ore, gold, diamond; rebuilding our agriculture, trying to get our small farmers to go back to work and make sure our food security is in place, taking off all the sanctions and getting our forestry operations. And so the fundamentals are in place, the foundation has been laid to once again become a prosperous nation.

And the joy of all, our children. In my Inaugural speech, I said the greatest thing that I could do, the greatest satisfaction that I could have, was to make our children smile again. So today we go around in all the villages, and we stop to see the children smiling, to see them back in school in their uniforms. We've increased enrolment by over 40 percent, and the majority are girls, because we've emphasized that the girls have been neglected. The chance for an education when poverty is in the family, and they have to make a choice between the boy and the girl, the boy gets the privilege.

And our women, many years ago sex slaves, many of them seeing their husbands jailed and killed, many of them subjected to rape, bypassed by education. We have emphasized that we're going to make them get back their dignity.

And so we've taken some tough decisions, decisions that are being challenged. When we say rape will be a non-bailable crime, we are challenged by the lawyers, but we're going to stand by that. When we say women who cannot read and write will have an opportunity, so we have literacy programs that are going on. And their working conditions: whereas they sat in the sun and the rain, with their produce on a piece of cloth on the ground, we're trying to modernize their markets, and make sure that while they work in the markets, their children can go to school; their primary children, their infants, instead of being with them in the market, can be next door, getting an education. And so we have this program.

And I want to say thank you to all of those last night who have joined us in trying to build more schools for our children, and trying to improve the working conditions of our women.

We believe that Liberia, once a great nation, is still a great nation, and that our future is a future of hope, is a future of promise, is a future of prosperity. We're on the road, and above it all, we can thank God, because by His mercy and His grace, by His will, he has brought us from where we were, to where we are, and to where we're headed. I'm just an instrument of His will. We thank God for our mothers and fathers, and for what they did to bring us up, and we thank God that we're able, by the will of the Liberian people, to continue to provide the leadership for them that will bring to us the prosperity we deserve.

God bless you all.