

**Remarks by H.E. Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
At AU Heads of State Luncheon to Popularize African Women's
Decade Themes and Fundraising to Support Fund for African
Women, with Focus on Agriculture and Food Security for 2012
19th African Union Summit
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
July 14, 2012**

Fellow Heads of State and Government;
Development Partners;
Gender Advocates;
The Private Sector;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

As we partake of this delicious luncheon, let us spare a thought for the people who made it possible. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization's Women and Population Division, women produce between 60-80 percent of the food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world's food production.

Our purpose here today – in year 2 of implementing the themes of the African Women's Decade -- is to raise funds in support of the Fund for African Women. It is this Fund which is instrumental in implementing the activities proposed under the ten Themes of the Decade, this year's being "Agriculture, Food Security and Environment."

Through this Fund, the African Union Commission is mobilizing financial resource to support development programs and projects for women to fight poverty, close the gender gap, and halt the marginalization of African women. To date, the Fund has supported 53 grassroots projects from 27 AU Member States.

This year's theme is very apt, considering the effect of climate change on the environment, agriculture and, therefore, food security. It renews our collective commitment to ensure sustained food security in Africa. The theme is also appropriate against the backdrop of the enormous burden placed on women in agriculture and food production. Without achieving food security, we cannot have sustained improvement in human development.

UNDP's "African Human Development Report 2012: Towards a Food Secure Future," shows economic growth rates at 6.5 percent between 2004 and 2008, and recovering to over 5 percent for 2010 and 2011, despite the plunge in 2009. Many countries also succeeded in raising expected years of schooling, and life expectancy at birth. However, the story of Africa's fight for food security has been very different, with chronic malnutrition still high, particularly in East and West Africa.

Food security is at the top of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), dealing with eradicating poverty and hunger. According to the Population Reference Bureau's policy brief *Population and Food Security: Africa's Challenges*, more than 60 countries are making progress toward achieving the MDG hunger target: to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Dear Friends:

The aim of the African Women's Decade is to advance gender equality by accelerating implementation of the Dakar, Beijing and AU Assembly Decisions on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, and its objective is to reinvigorate commitments to accelerated implementation of agreed global and regional commitments of gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Fund, as has been stated, is instrumental in implementing the activities of the Decade. What we want to say here is that while the 1 percent contribution

by AU Member States to the Fund is highly appreciated, this amount is insufficient to meet the aspirations of African women. We therefore hope, along with popularizing this year's theme, that we can, at this luncheon, raise monies to support the Fund for African Women in implementing the Decade's themes, most especially this year's theme of Agriculture, Food Security and the Environment.

Soon after she became President of Malawi in April, my sister, Joyce Banda, paid a visit to Liberia. As the two female African Heads of State, and advocates of women's rights, we pledged to use our positions to improve the lives of women across the continent and to champion the African Women's Decade.

I therefore call upon all stakeholders present – including fellow Heads of State, AU specialized agencies, UN bodies, regional economic communities, AU organs, AU partners, airlines, banks, and women and men in the public and private sectors – to join hands and provide the needed resources to implement the Decade meaningfully.

I thank you and the floor is now open to receive your pledges.