

**Statement by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at Fifth Annual Liberia Foundations Meeting
Remi Rialto Room, New York
Monday, September 24, 2012**

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen: I see a lot of old friends here.

Thank you, Abby and Pierre, for hosting the 5th Annual Liberia Foundations Meeting. We are most grateful for the support that you and your colleagues here have given so generously to Liberia.

Over the past six years, as Liberia's young democracy has grown, we have come a long way in addressing our most serious problems. Since 2005, we have re-established a tradition of competitive elections. Opposition parties are strong and currently hold more seats in the National Legislature than the ruling party. The country can boast of a vocal press, an active civil society, and better protection of rights. While all of these achievements still require improvement and constant vigilance, Liberia has moved further than it has ever been on the democratic spectrum. The evolution of Liberia's democracy will, in turn, strengthen the country's development progress. In Liberia, democracy and economic development are equally indispensable and mutually reinforcing.

The vision for Liberia's future is as ambitious as it is simple. It is our goal to be free from official development assistance within a decade and to transform the country to a middle-income country by 2030. It is our goal to build a country that is peaceful, where the rule of law is upheld and economic opportunities abound.

This vision faces immense challenges: a low human resource base, the momentum of the social and political unrest of the recent past, and the still massive infrastructure deficit. Changes will take time, but the transformation is under way, buoyed by a people with confidence in the future and in a government elected to respond to their needs. The first six years lifted Liberia. The next six aim to lift Liberians.

Strategic involvement of our friends and supporters has been crucial to our progress so far, and will continue to play a vital role in helping us achieve our goals. Targeted support from funders, such as yourselves, is indispensable. Some 40 percent of philanthropic dollars to date, I am told by the Secretariat, have addressed basic social services such as education and healthcare and rebuilding infrastructure. Another 36 percent has targeted support for economic development work.

We need your sustained support in all of these areas, but especially in education. This is an issue that is critical for Liberia and for me personally. I have made education a centerpiece

of my administration. It is the fourth largest sectors in our National Budget for this fiscal year.

Education is also the first priority for the Secretary-General of the United Nations who, on Wednesday, will announce a critical new five-year global campaign called ***Education First***. With three years left to accomplish the Millennium Development Goals, this initiative seeks to add momentum to completing the goal of access to education and to expand the focus beyond 2015 from access to access plus learning.

Liberia has made headway in restoring the education system at all levels, but the task of rebuilding an education system is daunting. We still have serious issues of quality in our teaching corps, and **most** schools lack books and other educational resources. Without better qualified instructors and books to read and refer to, our children cannot become the teachers, doctors, entrepreneurs, and leaders that our country needs to move forward.

To help improve the lack of books and low reading levels of our students, we asked the Liberian Education Trust to begin a program of setting up school libraries and after-school reading programs. A LET library package includes several thousand new, age-appropriate books; a trained, supervised and full-time paid librarian; furniture; a computer, printer, generator; and one or two US Peace Corps Volunteer teachers. These Volunteers are able to show our teachers new ways to use books in and out of the classroom, and train teachers and students to use the computer to improve math and reading skills. These Volunteers also will run after-school and summer vacation reading programs for students. Within in the next few weeks, LET will have established eight school libraries with support from Pam Omidyar and Bob Johnson.

We want to offer the LET library package to all middle and high schools in the country. The LET package costs \$25,000 per school. I want to ask each of you to consider making a one-time grant to LET to support one library, and even two for those of you who can do so. Your support would go a long way to moving us toward our longer-term goal of being a middle-income country by the year 2030. Without a better educated citizenry, we will not get to where we want to be.

Our long-term vision is to eventually have community libraries and a National Public Library. If you are interested in supporting the National Public Library project, please let the Secretariat know.

Let me thank our small and dedicated staff of the Liberia Philanthropy Secretariat for the work they are doing.

Thank you, again, for your support. I am happy to take your questions.