

Special Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Welcome & Thanksgiving Service Marking Her Safe Return
From Visit to Tokyo, Japan
Held at Paynesville Town Hall, Paynesville City
Wednesday, October 17, 2012
(Delivered extemporaneously and transcribed.)

Thank you Ambassador Seah. Protocol has been duly observed.

Let me say a big thank you to all of you who have come out to welcome me back, to greet me; somewhat overwhelming for a working day, but I want you to know that I appreciate your being here.

It was a bit of a long trip, due to the distance, due to the inconveniences of commercial travel, but I'm glad it was a resulting trip.

As many of you know, I went to join the Annual Meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, on the urging of Dr. Antoinette Sayeh, our former Minister of Finance, who is the Head of the Africa Department at the IMF, who wanted me to bring an African voice into the high-level discussion on globalization. I also felt that some of my good colleagues at the IMF and World Bank thought I needed some intellectual resuscitation.

We used the occasion to bring to the consciousness of high-level financiers and officials that, indeed, in today's world, globalization makes us all interconnected. There's no escaping the effects of what happens in the developed countries when it comes to the underdeveloped countries; that in the world today we have three categories: those in the developed countries; those representing the emerging countries – those are the BRIC nations [Brazil, Russia, India and China]]; and what I like to call the frontier countries – frontier countries representing those who have the greatest potential for the expansion of global trade and global financial transactions.

And so what happens in the Euro zone today affects us. We are in the supply chain of not only the BRIC nations but the supply chain of the developed world, and until we can benefit from the increase of capital income and by the continuation of direct foreign investment, and by sorting out the global financial deficiencies, we will all not expand this global economic pie. I hope we tried to make that point very well.

We also used the occasion to focus on women and development; how women can play a more active role, a more participatory role, not just through humanitarian gestures of

micro-credits, but to move them up to the place where they can become full-fledged entrepreneurs of large-scale enterprises. It will be our challenge in each of our countries to formulate the policies and the interventions that will enable us to achieve that objective.

We know we have some programs here: the World Bank program on the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (EPAG), the 10,000 Women program of Goldman Sachs; and our own Central Bank programs. But they all seem to be small-scale and we need to something to work on them.

We used the occasion of the visit to do some bilateral work: to meet with the authorities, to hold some bilateral meetings – with the Emperor, with the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance – to be able to talk about Japan-Liberia relationship; to express appreciation for the support they have given us, but to focus particularly on two activities that have already been reported, I believe, in the local press, to try to put a timetable on their commitment to supplying a 10-megawatt generator, as well as the four-lane pavement of the Freeport to Red Light road.

You know how these things operate. The fact that they make a commitment doesn't mean they will start paving the road tomorrow. We know the commitment is real and is sound. Our purpose was to urge urgency and to try to set a timetable that will enable us to get these activities concluded, we hope, within the next two to three years. I believe they will be sending a mission out next month; they've already done the feasibility study anyway, it's just a question now of getting it to their Diet – which is their parliament or legislature – to get it approved, and so we had the occasion to meet with members of their Diet, on both sides, and to encourage them, also trying to get them to re-establish their Embassy here in Monrovia.

So in all respects, those things went well; I had some Ministers with me: the Minister of Public Works was there; the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Minister of Commerce, who was concluding arrangements for another supply of strategic commodities, and I do believe that they were loading, when we were leaving, the first shipment of rice that should be coming in for Christmas.

One of the most interesting things I witnessed was a doctor who was in a wheelchair, a Japanese doctor who has built hospitals in Japan and has started to construct hospitals in Africa. To see him in that state; talk about spirit, Pastor Brown [referring to the Rev. Dr. Herman Brown, Dean of Trinity Cathedral, who delivered the exhortation and special prayers], the spirit of promotion, the spirit of humanity, the spirit of giving. And to spend some time with him. He could not talk, but he has a system where he uses the Japanese

symbols with his fingers and his eyes, and they are able to translate what he had to say. I had with me Dr. Wvannie-Mae Scott-McDonald from the John F. Kennedy Hospital, and our session with him went so well. What he has promised is to support the establishment of a Dialysis Center and also an Emergency Center.

Because I am one of the three co-Chairs of the post-2015 High-Level Panel established by the UN Secretary-General, we also had some meetings on what we are going to do about the new global development agenda when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) reach their target date of 2015. We had meetings there and first determined that we should not take our eye off the ball on the MDGs; we still have three years to go.

Liberia may reach two of those Goals: the empowerment of women, I think we are on track to achieve that; the reduction in infant mortality, we've made good progress. When it comes to the partnership, I think that, too, we've done very well on. Reduction of poverty, we've made some impact, but to be able to reduce it by 50 percent by 2015 is a tall order. We need to concentrate now on which of those indicators we have the possibility to achieve, and to direct our resources into those areas so that we can achieve at least a few of them.

The post-2015 Agenda is likely to build upon the MDGs, being able to pick out the ones that we think can be carried beyond 2015 and then to include some of the new circumstances, such as climate change, sustainable development, obviously things like women's empowerment, youth employment – something which we made a very strong case for – are likely to be included in the Agenda.

But the Agenda is not going to be done by the Panel, and certainly not by the co-Chairs. It's going to come from a robust consultative process across the regions, working with UN agencies, working with civil society, to see if we can find what exactly the people want us to do.

Coming to the home front, we're glad to see that the Mo Ibrahim governance indicators are out, and they've indicated that two countries have done very well – I hope our media have been able to find that –Liberia and Sierra Leone have made tremendous progress. But I tell you that Sierra Leone is ahead of us. Sierra Leone is already in pre-transition. We were in the pre-transition stream; we have slipped because we keep fussing among ourselves. We need to be able to get ourselves back on track. Yes, we've made progress; yes, we've had some success, but we have not reached our potential – a potential based on our capacities, our commitment, our collective will can propel us to a higher level.

We are going to grow at a rate of 8.8 percent today, as per IMF estimates. But just think, Sierra Leone is going to grow at 25 percent. Extraordinary! That's because they finished their negotiations on time; they get the operations going; they get all of their things. If we do that, we can do the same.

And so, for me, it's time for THE BIG PUSH.

The Big Push for Peace. And peace can only come when there's peace in your own heart, peace within yourself. You then have peace with your neighbor, and you have peace with someone else. So that Big Push for Peace has to come from inside each and every one of us.

A Big Push for Reconciliation. Again, one has to recognize that Liberia belongs to everybody – big, small, rich, poor, Christian, Moslem. Whatever you are, you can't change the fact that you were born here, and you live here, and you are to be here. The Constitution gives you the right to travel, and that's fine; but by the end of the day, Liberia's success, Liberia's progress, rests in the hands of each Liberian. If we do not do it, nobody will do it for us.

A Big Push for Development. I traveled on that road [A.B. Tolbert road] today. Is Public Works here? I left the Minister over there [Japan]. I will not travel on that road again, in that state! The Big Push for Development requires that each of us has to carry out our responsibility to the fullest, whether you are Superintendent, whether you're an Assistant Minister, whether you are a Director, whether you are a Minister, whether you are a legislator. All of us have a part to play. And at the end of the day, this development that we're pushing for is something which affects each and every one of us, irrespective of party affiliation, irrespective of where you come from. If we build a road, or expand the power, or we increase water supply, it benefits you in your community, I don't care who you are.

The Big Push is coming. I understand that while I was away, Rev. [Emmanuel] Bowier said that I'm like "October rain." How he described it, October rain comes down hooooooo, and then it stops and the sun comes up. Well, I accept that characterization. So, let me end by saying, like October rain, lead, follow or get out of the way!