

**Statement by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at Plenary 5: “Inclusive and Resilient Society”
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Excellencies;

The cardinal principle of democracy and a pluralistic society is that nobody is left out of the circle of opportunity and responsibility.

In 1995, the World Summit for Social Development, in Copenhagen, defined an inclusive society as “a society for all, in which every individual, with rights and responsibilities, has a role to play.”

For the many decades and since the 1960s – the years of independence for many African nations – the emphasis has been on strengthening national governance and nationhood. In many cases, this has come to the detriment of individual rights. The result has been the creation of marginalization on a large scale, with the majority of the people totally excluded from the process. In many instances, such as in the case of my own country, we experienced growth without development.

The political and social turbulences that spanned three decades and across our young nations were primarily caused by the lack of inclusion by the political leadership.

Resilience and inclusiveness go hand in hand. A resilient society is one that has built-in defense mechanisms capable of thwarting challenges such as external shocks of any nature, disasters from natural causes and potential social crisis – a resilience that enables people to move from survival to empowering themselves through education, better health and the means of livelihood.

Exclusion and inequality also go hand in hand. Unless we deal with the root causes of exclusion and inequality, our societies will be fragile, and whatever system we build will not last or resist turbulence.

In the 1970s and 1980s, impoverished people in countries around Africa, and in many other parts of the developing world, welcomed unconstitutional change of government; even took part in civil wars that threatened the social fabric of their nations because they felt that they had no stake in the wealth of the nation and thought that whatever was coming to them could only be better than what they had at the moment.

In my own country, we witnessed one of the most destructive civil wars, where warring factions launched havoc on the society in general and destroyed whatever infrastructure that existed. Those who took up arms to fight thought they had no stake in what existed, and treated every educated or wealthy person as an enemy. Those who took up the gun felt that they had nothing to lose in the fight. They grew up in the margins of the economic growth and lacked basic education, never benefitted from social services, and foresaw no economic gains in the system.

Economic empowerment that gives every individual in society the opportunity to be productive at his or her potential and reap the benefits thereof; social empowerment that allows each person to feel included in the society they live in; and political empowerment that gives each and every person the right to fully participate in the political process with unhindered access to the tools to impact his or her life are all equally important in the building of an inclusive society.

The starting point is the elimination of inequalities based on such false and abstract notions of gender, religion, ethnicity and physical appearance.

So far, what we have learned from history is that poverty and exclusion are intimately intertwined. People who were marginalized on the basis of gender, race or religion in any given society were the ones experiencing poverty.

We have learned through the priorities set in the MDGs that by providing certain basic services in the area of education, health and empowerment, we can begin to eliminate many of the problems associated with inequality.

Looking forward and building on Rio+20, we can start to put together a new social framework that eliminates those things that instilled fragilities in our nations. The new post-2015 development agenda that is currently in the making, as well as the African Common Position, combined with the ideas coming out of TICAD V, can pave the way to a new social compact that ensures an inclusive and resilient society.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.