

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
At Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority's 64<sup>th</sup> Boule  
St. Louis Convention Center  
St. Louis, Missouri  
Sunday, July 11, 2010**

**Dr. Barbara McKinzie, International President;  
Sorors of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority;  
Representatives of Brother Fraternities;  
Governors;  
Madam Mayor;  
Ladies and Gentlemen;  
Dear Friends:**

**I bring you greetings from the members of Eta Beta Omega, Liberia's Graduate Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha, which, I am happy to report, is being reactivated after decades of civil strife in the country, and which pledges to be a most proactive partner as AKA extends a helping hand to the women of Liberia.**

**Let me begin by expressing my sincere thanks and appreciation Dr. Barbara McKinzie, International President, and to everyone who has been instrumental in making this Boule such a tremendous success.**

**I am proud to join in celebrating our Sorority's 102 years of service, at this Biennial International Boule here in St. Louis, Missouri, a city famous for its iconic Gateway Arch and hospitality, its culture, sports, beer and so much more.**

**It is with great humility that I accept our Sorority's highest honor, the International Service Award, which I know is not bestowed lightly, for you select for this Award people deemed to have made a positive difference in the lives of others.**

**I thank you, Dear Sorors, for this special recognition, and accept the Award on behalf of the women of Liberia, of Africa, and of the world – women who struggle for gender equity; who have come this far through perseverance, tenacity and a willingness to pay the price for what they believe; and who will not give up the fight until Sisters everywhere are treated as equals with men.**

**Wherever I travel – in Asia, Europe, or the Americas – women tell me that my story has inspired them, and their aspirations find resonance in my story. Together we share values of respect for human rights, freedom of speech, gender equality, protection of the environment, and so much more.**

**By the lives we, Alpha Kappa Alpha women, have chosen to lead, and the examples we set, we remain true to the purpose of our Founders to be of service to mankind, and most especially to help women and girls of color.**

**Throughout my career, I have regarded as a duty, because I was fortunate to hold leadership positions, to live by example and to be a role model for other women to know that if I could get to where I had gotten, they could too.**

**No doubt, it was in the spirit of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority's commitment to service which led me to a life of public service. For no matter how many times I found work in the private sector, and no matter how lucrative, I was always drawn to serve, whether as an international civil servant at the United Nations or, as an official of my Government, as a Minister and, finally, as President.**

**Everywhere, the women of Alpha Kappa Alpha – this sisterhood of gifted and talented Black women – are leaving their mark on the world in almost every profession. As women of substance and high achievers, we are employing our God-given talents to advance and lift others as well as ourselves. The precept of service remains this**

**Sorority's mark of distinction, and we will forever uphold those noble ideals.**

**Let me, in that connection, pay tribute to a fellow Liberian, Soror Angie Brooks, one of my role models and the first woman to serve as President of the United Nations General Assembly, who joined the Ivies "Beyond the Wall" in 2007.**

## **The Omega Project**

**Now let me turn to you, the Sorors of Alpha Kappa Alpha, and the solid commitment you have made for the construction of a desperately needed marketplace on the outskirts of the capital, to be called the Omega Market.**

**I believe that it is prophetic, rather than coincidence, that the project you have chosen to support is called Omega. One might be forgiven for concluding that it was named after the Liberia Chapter, Eta Beta Omega. We could not have planned it better had we tried!**

**Let me tell you what the Omega Project will do for the women of Liberia – women who are beneficiaries of the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund (SMWF).**

**When my Government took power, we found market women, as had been the tradition, sitting under makeshift structures, sometimes in the rain or the blistering sun, selling their fruits, vegetables and other goods on pieces of cloth spread out on the ground or on rickety tables. I committed myself to do something for the women who are my major constituency, and to change their working conditions and improve their lives by building proper markets – in other words, decent workplaces fit for trading and for learning. That's how the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund was born. The results you can see from the photos shown by Sekou Konneh, who serves as Executive Director.**

**The Omega Project came about as a result of the massive congestion around the area known as "Red Light." On any day, thousands of marketers sit just off the main roadway with their**

**goods, not only putting themselves in danger but also seriously obstructing traffic. In addition, hundreds of trucks and taxis, loading and off-loading people and goods to and from the interior, compound the chaos.**

**A survey concluded that the only way to decongest the area would be to relocate the market; the ideal location, because of its proximity to the existing open-air market, was the former site of a navigation transmission tower known as Omega, which was operated by the U.S. Government prior to Liberia's civil war. Other advantages to choosing this location are: the land is government owned; there is a large area of dry land; and there already are solid structures that will be renovated to reduce costs.**

**It was at a New York fund-raiser for the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund, in June 2008, that Alpha Kappa Alpha pledged \$500,000 for 10 rural markets, at a cost of \$50,000 each. However, when the AKA delegation, led by Barbara McKinzie, visited Liberia in June last year, I impressed upon them the urgent need for the Omega Market, and we agreed that instead of 10 markets, the entire \$500,000 would be committed to the Omega Project.**

**What will Omega mean for the market women of Liberia? A great deal! For one thing, they will have the services they require under one roof or in close proximity. Given the size of the Red Light market, the project is expected to assist more than 7,000 women. It will provide shelter for them to do business; it will provide a learning environment for thousands of their pre-school children, under the Early Childhood Program, because their mothers take the little ones with them to the market; there will be a clinic, proper sanitation and water facilities; cold storage for perishables; a bank and police depot; and ample parking for all types of vehicles.**

**Additionally, Omega will create opportunities for the women to learn, thereby providing them with added skills through business training. The Adult Literacy Program for Market Women will teach them basic literacy and numeracy skills over a six-month period. At last night's reception, I put forward a proposal for assisting market women to**

**extend their education through the elementary sixth-grade level by attending evening and night school.**

**The AKA donation will get this major market project started with a big AKA footprint, as we continue to mobilize to do all that we envisage for this multi-complex modern project.**

**This generous gift to the women of Liberia will expand and strengthen Alpha Kappa Alpha's presence in Africa, which since the 1980s has included funding for infrastructure projects, adopting villages and building Ivy AKAdemics.**

**The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will administer the Omega Market funds, and we have set up a joint committee of UNDP and relevant line ministries and agencies to oversee the construction. I want to assure you, Dear Soros, that Alpha Kappa Alpha's hard-earned money will be well managed and well spent. Given the source of the funding, our reactivated Eta Beta Omega Chapter is taking a personal interest to ensure there is transparency and accountability every step of the way. And we expect several of you to come to Liberia for dedication of the market when completed.**

**And so, I am here to applaud you, Soror McKinzie, and all of you Sisters of this wonderful Sorority for this demonstration of support for me. I thank you for all you have done and continue to do. The market women of Liberia thank God for you. And the people of Liberia thank you too.**

**May God continue to bless this benevolent organization, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and also to bless our sister nations, the United States of America and the Republic of Liberia.**

**I thank you.**