

**Public Lecture by H.E. Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
on “Africa’s Economic Development: the Road Ahead”
Bingu Conference Centre
Lilongwe, Malawi
Monday, February 3, 2014**

Your Excellency Dr. Joyce Banda, President of the Republic of Malawi;
Your Excellency Chief Justice Richard Banda, SC (Rtd.);
Your Honor Congo Hastings Chitali, Vice President of the Republic of Malawi;
Right Honorable Henry Chimutu. Banda, MP, Speaker of the Assembly;
Your Lordship Justice Anastasia Solsa SC, Chief Justice;
Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
All Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers and Other Officials of the Republic of Malawi and
Republic of Liberia;
Mrs. Hawa Chidoli, Chief Secretary to the Government and All Senior Government Officials;
Members of the Liberian Delegation;
Madam Chila Multania, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps;
Hon. Paul Malinge, Acting Deputy Secretary General of the People’s Party;
Distinguished Participants;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am most honored to be here, to have spent the past few days with my dear Sister, the President of Malawi. Many of the older ones among you will join me in saying that it is with fond memories that I have returned to Malawi twenty years later, after having served as the United Nations Development Programme’s Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa – this time coming back to be able to participate in an official visit with your great President and with brothers and sisters of this nation. We appreciate the warm welcome and gracious hospitality that has been accorded our entire delegation throughout our stay.

Over the past two days, we have covered much ground. We interacted with market women. I had personal talks with President Banda on issues of mutual concern and interests relating to African development and the development of our two countries. We were honored at a State Banquet hosted by Her Excellency, the President, and Chief Justice Banda. We launched the Malawi Professional Women's Dialogue, aimed at promoting women’s leadership; and we participated, with great delight on yesterday, in launching Phase 7 of the Malawi Rural Electrification Programme, where we had the opportunity to share views with women, as we walked through their marketplace in Salima.

There are so many similarities between our two countries and people. We are still classified among the world’s least developed nations, facing challenges in building and expanding our economies, improving education and health care; promoting agriculture, institutional development, capacity building, as well as sustaining our environment. Our development

agendas have focused on addressing these issues in an environment of accountability and transparency that ensures an open society of social inclusion and political participation. We are exceptional in politics, as both of our countries are led by female Presidents! And we welcome to our exclusive club President Catherine Samba-Panza, the former Mayor of Bangui, who just two weeks ago was sworn in as Interim President of the Central African Republic.

Africa's Economic Development

Let me now say a few words about "Africa's Economic Development: the Road Ahead."

The consolidation of peace and stability in any country is inextricably linked to efforts that spur sustainable economic development and inclusive growth. A clear example of the peace dividend can be seen in the positive transformation of Africa in the last decade. Peace and stability has created the necessary conditions for investment and engendered economic development and social transformation.

Our history shows the incredible potential of women to lead and to resolve conflict, and to move a country from chaos onto the path of social and economic development. This is evidenced by the remarkable progress that has taken place in your country and my own, with women in leadership positions.

We also know that for Africa's economic development to become a sustained reality, the private sector, as the engine of growth, must drive the economy. No government can create the number of jobs that are needed to employ the thousands of citizens who join the work force every year. On the other hand, if the private sector and the nation are to thrive, we must have a conducive environment for investment in the exploitation of our natural capital, be it mineral, agriculture, petroleum or service sector.

One of the major impediments to growth in Africa – my country being a case in point – is the deficit in infrastructure. The absence of reliable and affordable electricity, the poor condition of primary road networks and deteriorated or non-existent ports facilities represent major constraints to private sector value addition, investment and overall national development. For economic transformation, which guarantees a future of prosperity and employment for our youthful population, it is paramount that we invest in infrastructure, giving priority to power, roads and ports, as well as to agriculture and forestry which have the potential to expand the economy for rural participation and for food security.

Throughout Africa, agriculture remains the key sector of the economy for job creation, poverty reduction, food security and income generation. Moreover, because the vast majority of our people depend on agriculture for their livelihood, we must continue to promote heavy public and private sector investment to ensure food security. It is through agriculture that we can deliver inclusive economic growth, long-term poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability.

We cannot speak about agriculture in Africa without highlighting the critical role our women play in the sector. Indeed, the face of agriculture around the globe, and particularly in Africa, is often female. African women comprise 70 percent of sub-Saharan African agricultural workers and 80 percent of those involved in the food processing chain. Our women labor in the fields that provide nourishment and income for their families; and they contribute to commercial agriculture by producing high-value fruits and vegetables for market. Rural women, in the informal sector, are the critical gatekeepers that, if given access, can transform agriculture and our economic productivity. We must put them all at the center of our food security program.

As was mentioned by President Banda, based upon the experience of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which was launched in the year 2000 when Africa did not have the opportunity to participate in the dialogue, in the discussion, in the formulation of the agenda, the Secretary-General of the United Nations decided that as we approach the end of the MDGs period in 2015, he would appoint a new group to determine a new development agenda.

I was privileged to be able to participate in this endeavor, as the UN Secretary-General designated me, along with the United Kingdom Prime Minister and the President of Indonesia, to chair a Panel of 27 eminent world personalities, including five Africans, to prepare a Post-2015 Global Agenda to succeed the Millennium Development Goals. The consultative process was robust, involving, in the case of Africa, studies and analyses by our regional institutions, workshops and dialogues with government officials, civil society and the private sector in all of our countries.

In parallel, as she pointed out, our own institution, the African Union, undertook a similar process to formulate a Common African Position for the Post-2015 Global Agenda. A ten-person Heads of State Committee of representatives of our five regions was constituted, and I was honored to chair the group. The draft Common Position, aiming at our own Agenda 2063, is to be reviewed by all of our Member States, by all of you, before we can take it into a formulation stage for final endorsement as a part of the Global Agenda. The Agenda calls for priorities into five pillars: (i) structural economic transformation and inclusive growth; (ii) science, technology and innovation; (iii) people-centered development; (iv) environmental sustainability, natural resources management, and disaster risk management; and (v) finance and partnerships.

However, in order to turn these priorities into reality, the draft document acknowledges that an enabling environment is a fundamental requirement, with building blocks which include peace and security; good governance, transparency and the fight against corruption; the respect of human rights for all; strong macroeconomic policy; and the development of the private sector. The document underscores the need to strengthen participatory processes; establish strong monitoring and evaluation processes; nurture traditional knowledge and build capacities for multi-sectoral development.

I was also privileged to participate in another endeavor organized under the auspices of the African Development Bank, which constituted an eight-person High Level Panel to review the

sources of fragility in Africa and make recommendations as to how they could be tackled. That initiative was subject to the same rigorous consultative process. The most important finding of the study is that fragility, which for most post-conflict countries like my own are so classified, is not restricted to a category of states, but to circumstances that can appear in many places and forms, in many countries, even those that are considered developed, with strong economies and much developed institutions. Fragility comes about when pressures in a society become too great to manage within the political and institutional processes, creating a risk that conflict spills over into violence.

In order that countries might build the resilience to combat fragility, Africa needs a transformation based upon inclusive growth through better management of our natural resources, more effective responses to youth unemployment, urbanization, and climate change, also a new paradigm of partnership going beyond that of the Millennium Development Goals, one that stresses shared values, ownership, and national responsibility.

You no doubt have recognized that the two processes, as to what Africa seeks in a new development agenda, are very much the same. The main objective of all of these formulators that have been put together through research, analyses, studies, consultations and dialogues says that the ultimate objective for all of our countries is to reduce or eliminate poverty and inequality in the society.

The long experience of marginalization of one group or the other, which has led to tension that has spilled over into violence in our society, must be addressed. This process is not one that is restricted to government officials, to organizations or institutions in the society, but is one that every African has to grasp and everyone has to make a contribution, not only to the dialogue, but to the implementation of the Agenda that has been formulated through this process.

Our continent is transforming rapidly, one may even say that it on the verge of a Renaissance. This is evidenced by the rate the growth which has exceeded other regions; is evidenced by the democratization that is moving on – the maturity of our politics – that is also recognizing the reality of youth unemployment and the risk that will put us all in a state of fragility and put us into violence.

I want to commend you for all that Malawi has done to avoid conflict. I want to commend my sister for what she has done in promoting women, particularly rural women, in agriculture.

I always say that for Africa, I am an optimist because I do believe that we have come a long way from where we were a century or so ago, and Africa's hope, I think, springs forever because of all of us who are so committed to having a better continent and better welfare for all of our people.

Thank you.