

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
At the United Kingdom-Liberia Investment Forum Dinner  
Draper Hall, London  
Tuesday, June 14, 2011  
*(Delivered extemporaneously; and transcribed)***

Let me, on behalf of our team, say how pleased we are to be in this historic hall, even more pleased to be among all of you and say a big thank you to the group that has done this for us: Developing Markets Associates (DMA), African Matters Limited, Baroness Chalker, and the Honorable Minister.

As we hear about the numbers that have agreed to participate, it just puts us in a reflective mood, reflective of where we've come from: six years ago, when our country was classified as a failed state, when we had a collapsed economy, dysfunctional institutions, destroyed infrastructure, lack of confidence in ourselves and in our institutions.

When we embarked upon this journey we said, what do we do in the midst of this? There were priorities and needs that had to be addressed. But with a team like this, many of them in this room, we were determined that we were going to get it done. And so we started out with our vision, ensuring that there's peace and that peace would lead to prosperity.

Our first focus was, of course, growth because we faced an economy in virtual free fall for the past two decades. We pushed for that and, over the five-year period, our growth has averaged over 6 percent, despite the 2009 global financial crisis. We opened up our traditional productive areas – Liberia is rich in natural resources – and so our mining sector, our forestry sector... We've been extremely lucky in that we mobilized some \$16 billion in direct foreign investment in all of these sectors, but also we aimed at diversification, making sure that not only would we go back to mining, we'd go back to the traditional – rubber is Liberia's traditional product – and so trying to revitalize the rubber sector is an ongoing process.

We brought in investors from other places that were not traditional to us – Asia – investment in our agriculture sector, involving palm oil, and bringing investors from Sime Darby of Malaysia and Golden Veroleum from Indonesia, as well as our forestry sector.

We also knew that we had to be fiscally responsible. And so we had a cash budget; made sure we increased our revenue from \$80 million, which is where it

was when we started, to over \$360 million today. Taking on our debt has been a major success, under the HIPC program, when we tackled our external debt and arrears that had grown over two decades, including \$4.9 billion in external debt and \$1.5 billion in commercial debt, which we paid back at three cents on the dollar, including to some hedge funds.

We also made sure to put our banking system in order, and our reserves have increased from \$5 million, when we started, to over \$300 million today. For our banking system today, we not only recapitalized the banks but also expanded so that we have banking services in many of the rural areas.

With infrastructure, we had to start from scratch. There were no lights in our capital city for two decades. We were able to restore that and bring back water, and start to rebuild the schools and roads and the hospitals and clinics, to get things functioning again.

With governance, we had a big problem there too: a bloated civil service, which has required civil service reform that is ongoing; an open society, so that today all basic fundamental rights and freedoms are respected and promoted; our judicial reform is still an ongoing process. In security, we've built a 2,000-person professional army, and we're working on the rest of our security sector.

We still have challenges, despite all that we've achieved. A major challenge: unemployment, with thousands and thousands of our young people who were bypassed during the years of conflict and who have neither education nor skills. We are trying to ensure that we prepare them to participate and have a stake in the society.

Corruption: Again, we've tackled that in a number of ways. There are two aspects to corruption: there's prevention, and there's punishment. We've done a lot on the prevention side through better compensation, systems installation, institutional development, capacity building. On the punishment side, we still have a lot to do, in judicial sector reform. Let me say to you, because you're investors, that we depend upon you to also be a part of this fight against corruption. Because if you don't help us to do it, then we'll never achieve it. You've got to be the ones not to offer bribes because it's equally wrong from the payer as well as the receiver. So, we're still fighting that battle.

Again on infrastructure, we still have to do much more. Take the power sector, for example, which is one of our key priorities. Those of you who are IN business know that you need power to develop the infrastructure to carry on your business. We started off at zero; today we've got 21 megawatts, but that's grossly insufficient. It can hardly supply the needs of the capital city, let alone

the needs of the mining and other sectors. Getting our hydro plant working again is the most cost-efficient way to provide power, at 42 cents per kilowatt hour – clearly, beyond the capacity of the people we have to serve, the poor communities that need this for their security, and the businesses that need to operate in a cost-efficient way. So, we have to tackle that.

Concerning value-added: Liberia's history of enclave operations is something that we just cannot do, so we want to make sure that we promote agro-industrial activities, as a first step, assuming all the right things are in place in infrastructure, so that value added, at least, can lead Liberia towards manufacturing.

These are the things that we want to be working with you on, to make sure we meet these challenges. But, as we say, not only are we open for business, we're in business.

We think that Liberia is poised to be able to take off. We have one defining event that's left, and that's our elections, scheduled for later this year. If those elections go off well, and they are free and fair, and they are acceptable, ensuring that the people's choice, whatever that choice is, is respected, giving full mandate and legitimacy to the winners, then we think that Liberia will be ready. With all the things we have put in place, and the foundations that we have laid, we can move ahead. Be aware that Liberia is also now eligible for AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act), and perhaps some of you will take advantage of that. We are also a threshold country under the Millennium Challenge Account, which will take us one step further into the Compact arrangement which provides substantial resources.

There are all these opportunities, including opportunities in our fishing sector. Sorry I won't be here tomorrow, but I am confident that my team is here – my team is even better than I; they teach me from time to time. They will be here with you tomorrow, to share the details of some of the things we've mentioned, and to be able to listen to you, too, because we don't want only to talk about our prospects, our progress and our problems, but also to hear from you what are some of your experiences as you've been working with us and have partnered with us in the past few years. There are some issues you may want to raise, so we can know where we need to develop. We also want to listen to some of your ideas on how we tap the potential of the future of Liberia, how we build this partnership.

The private sector is the way we want to go. Decidedly, we believe that that is where we should place our emphasis, so that in the next few years we should reduce the size of government, enabling it to do only those things that it has to

do. We need a private sector that must not be like ways of old, in which you had extractive industries operating as enclaves. We have to have linkages, we have to have employment of Liberians, we have to make sure that there's sustainability in everything that we do. This is why, in our concessions agreements, we insist on corporate social responsibility, to make sure that those communities benefit in such a way that they, too, can become empowered, and they can become productive, and they can become active participants in the economic wealth of our country.

Thank you all for being here. Thank you for being able to get such a big group together, and, once again, for Liberia to stand up to say that we'll have 350 people who are coming to listen to our story, listen to our prospects, and share with us their ideas. That's a wonderful story that we could take back home, and we owe all to you – those who organized it, and those who have taken their time and their resources to be a part of it. Thank you for being here. Let's plan another Forum, in Monrovia, so you can have a chance to see what we are doing, not just to hear us talk about it, but to feel it on the ground.

Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
At the United Kingdom-Liberia Investment Forum  
Draper Hall, London  
Wednesday, June 15, 2011  
*(Delivered extemporaneously; and transcribed)*

Let me say a hearty good morning to all of you. Last night I bade goodbye to those who were at the dinner. When I travel, I usually consult the African witch doctor, to make sure to bring sunshine. But Ambassador [Wesley] Johnson's witch doctor proved stronger than mine because he influenced the cancellation of my flight early this morning.

I want to say a big thank you to Baroness Chalker of African Markets Limited, and to all of you who have sponsored this event. The response has been truly, truly wonderful, and we're so pleased that you've done it, and we hope this means that we can all now look forward to a stronger partnership.

Liberia has, over the past five years, maintained a certain amount of stability. We've known peace, we've been able to set our economic and fiscal houses in order, and now we're pursuing the growth which has been very satisfactory over the past five years, and we want to move on from that and begin to grow our economy to respond to the needs of our people, to fix our infrastructure, to get our governance issues straight.

I want to just go over with you some of those things in the private sector which we see as the main elements of our growth, some of the things that we are doing. I'll be leaving after this, but you'll have an opportunity with my team that will be here to take a look at some of those things and examine where we are, share with us some of your own experiences, and the business activities you have over the globe, so that we can ensure that we move along the right path.

As you know, Liberia is rich in natural resources; we have mining, agriculture, forestry – all of those under operations right now. In the mining sector, in which many of you are involved, you know that we have already opened three mining operations. ArcelorMittal has come in; they were the first one to start, and we're very pleased that their work has progressed so well that they'll be making the first shipment of iron ore out of the country in twenty years, and that will be next month.

A Chinese company is reviving the Bong mining operations and they're just getting started. We have the Putu Mines (in Grand Gedeh) that are being

operated – I don't recall the name of the company – but that's already past the exploration stage and they have concluded a Mineral Development Agreement.

We still have one mine that has not been subjected to the process, and our process is one that requires, in accordance with our new mining laws and our procurement laws, that we submit all of these to a fair and equitable process of bidding, and so we've held back on that last one, Wologesi – I'm quite sure many of you know of it. We've held back on that one because we wanted to see some of the others progress, but we're also looking at pricing trends and demand and supply trends, and we know that we've got to get the timing right, to make sure that we get maximum benefit from it. So that's under review.

We have the agriculture sector. Liberia is traditionally an agriculture-export country – oil palm, rubber. For rubber, as you know, Firestone is the largest company, one that's been with us for over eighty years. It is involved in a replanting program, so are other companies, such as the Liberia Agriculture Company (LAC) and others, and we're just beginning to start operations in a couple of others, all of them involved in reviving the industry because of the slaughter tapping over the years of conflict.

But we also went back to our traditional oil palm, which is one of our mainstays of the past, and there we've been able to attract investment from Sime Darby of Malaysia and Golden Veroleum from Indonesia. They have large tracts of land across two or three of our rural counties; their nursery operations have started, and we expect them to continue over a 25-year period, not only to produce food for export but also to do processing so that we can have value added.

In the forestry sector, again we are starting operations, but we're also very careful that we want to be a part of conservatism, and so we have a very tough forestry law that has a combination of commercialization, conservation, and community benefits. And so the sector has been slow in responding to these new requirements.

Other issues we could talk about include infrastructure, but again we're moving ahead in that. We have diamonds; as you know, we got the sanctions lifted, and operations in diamonds have started. It's largely alluvial deposits, but we're beginning to expand. We're part of the Kimberley Process, and so that also requires us to have a certain amount of discipline in how we exploit that natural resource. In gold, Hummingbird is here, and we just received some good news from them as to some of their exploration works, and we hope that in keeping with their request we'll be signing a mining development agreement with them

very soon to enable them to go to the next phase where they can start to produce gold.

In fisheries, we think we have great potential right now. Although we've just re-established our Coast Guard, they're still very weak, and the trawlers are out there in our waters, poaching as much as they can. That potential is there, and we want to ensure that we can reap the benefits. Perhaps some of you might find that interesting, that would enable us to get that resource for the benefit of our people.

There are challenges we face as we exploit these resources. One of the major ones is infrastructure, and we hope you'll see these challenges as such, and that they will represent some opportunities for you. Key among our infrastructure challenges are roads, power, and ports – both air- and seaports. We've started to reconstruct roads – as many of you know, we've committed ourselves to the Liberian people and to our partners that we are going to work with some of our bilateral and multilateral partners, and we're being supported very well by the World Bank in this regard, now that we've resolved our major debt problem and we can get concessionary facilities through the International Development Association (IDA) and also the African Development Fund and others. We started with the pavement of our roads, but you also know Liberia's weather is so difficult; the rains are so heavy that the capital cost of road construction is quite high. So it will take us a few years to get the primary roads paved, to which we have already committed. We hope that some of you who are contractors will also see that there's a very good deal not only investing but also if you have good construction companies where you can benefit from some of the financing that's coming from the World Bank and others, as the Chinese companies are doing.

In the area of ports, our major ports, we've just given the long-term management development arrangement to APM Terminals to start to do the Freeport of Monrovia, which is our largest, but we also have three other ports that really need to be rehabilitated and expanded and modernized, and we welcome the opportunity to work with someone on those on a long-term management arrangement or some other type of partnership, such as a consortium to be able to do this work. Those ports are very necessary for all of the operations we're talking about: being able to get the iron ore out of the country, or the agricultural products or the forestry products. The ports are vital. And the same for our airports: our main international airport is operating and functioning. We're attracting planes, but we know that it is going to require a lot of work to get it up to international standards.

We're bound by our commitment to good governance; we've had issues with that, inherited issues regarding transparency and accountability. But we insist that we're going to continue to meet those requirements. We want Liberia to be free of being charged with corruption, and ask all of you to participate in helping us to maintain the level of accountability that makes us not only creditworthy but also respectable in business; it gives us a reputation that says you can deal with us and deal with us fairly, equitably, and that we require no more than what our laws require.

I'm so glad that you are here. Be assured that Liberia will be a strong partner to you. We'd like for you to look at the potential, the details of which will be discussed with my colleagues who will be staying behind, and we look forward to seeing some of you in Monrovia, in-country, where you can go beyond what's discussed at this conference and obtain more details and actually see what's happening on the ground – the evolution of the country.

Our overarching goal is to make Liberia a peaceful and prosperous country under the rule of law. We've just completed our first development agenda, and we're now formulating the new development agenda which is a long-term perspective. On that we say that we expect, we are committed, and we're convinced that Liberia will be a middle-income country by the year 2030, with the proper allocation and use of our natural resources. I've gone one step beyond that and said that because we're focusing on the private sector, because we're going to be working with people like you in this room, to be able to exploit those resources in a proper manner, in an equitable manner, in a manner that brings value to all of our people. We are therefore confident that in ten years, Liberia will not need official development assistance.

Thank you all for being here. Have a good meeting, and I look forward to seeing you in Monrovia.