

**Remarks by Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf,
President of the Republic of Liberia
At the Annual Meetings
Of the Women for Africa Foundation
Madrid, Spain
November 16, 2015**

Your Majesty

Mayor of Madrid

President de la Vega

Members of the Advisory Board and the Board of Trustees

Special Guests

Officials of the Spanish Government

Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I thank you, Your Majesty, for the warmness of your greeting and I thank the officials of Government for the kind courtesy in welcoming us on our arrival.

It is with great pleasure that I am here to join the other Advisory members of Mujeres Lideres Y Africanas (Women for Africa Foundation) in this Annual Event.

Across the globe women have demonstrated leadership at all levels in every area of national endeavor – in the home, in the village, in the community, in the nation. At the top level of political leadership, the numbers have been few, but the role they have played in changing their own environment and the world is well documented in history.

Africa too has registered great women leaders in every country, with strong showing in several countries – in South Africa, in Kenya, in Nigeria, in Tanzania, to name a few. Rwanda stands out with the highest number of Women in Parliament throughout the world. Liberia is proud to have broken the glass ceiling.

Women leadership today covers every sphere of society, challenging and breaking through traditions in the church, in private companies, in sports, in the highest level of Government. The topic of this year's Annual Event Women, Leaders and Africa is thus very appropriate.

This year has been momentous for setting the course for world development. After more than two years of robust consultations involving all stakeholders around the world, in September, at the General Assembly, the nations of the world adopted the new global development agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to replace the Millennium Development Goals. This was preceded in July by the Financing for Development Conference which produced the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and we head to Paris next month for the segment of the final Agenda which aims to conclude the Kyoto Round and its agreement on the support required for the preservation of our planet including management of the effect of Climate Change.

The overarching theme of the SDGs is the elimination of poverty so that no one in society is left behind. As the one bearing the face of poverty, we should call for substantial support for the programs that will be designed under Goal 3, the Empowerment of Women.

I am proud to have served as one of the three co-chairs of the 27 member panel designated by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki moon to lead the initial process that led to the finalization of the goals.

The African Union declared this year as the year of Women Empowerment and the President of the Commission, Dr. Nkosana Dlamani Zuma, launched several initiatives for women participation in the processes of peace and development. We applaud all nations that responded to that initiative.

I would like to say a few words about our President of the Foundation Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega who has responded to that call. I had the occasion to meet her when I made an official visit to Spain in the early years of my Administration 2007 when she was then a Vice President of the Republic.

Although her tenure ended, she has never slowed down either in world leadership or her concern and support for the women in Africa.

The establishment of the Foundation which provides basis for continuity in support to African women go well beyond the usual approval of a project to address a problem or need in one country or the other. The networking that comes from this institutional approval has immeasurable value.

In Liberia, the Stop Fistula is a program of assistance to women who suffer discomfort and rejection from the society because of a condition of permanent urine incontinence. In partnership with the Saint Joseph Catholic Hospital and four health centers over 200 women have had their dignity restored. Some 1000 women and girls have been assisted in pregnancy to prevent the disease.

I want to thank the doctors of the St. Joseph Catholic Hospital who rendered exceptional service to my country during the period of our fight against the terrifying Ebola virus. I also want now to recognize the team of doctors in this room who have given volunteer service to the women of our country. They were just there a few weeks ago.

Maria Teresa you were always with us in spirit and in communication when we suffered. When the disease was over, you visited when others feared to do so. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to commend all members of the Advisory and Trustee Board for their support, advocacy and contribution to the work of the Women for Africa Foundation. We are made stronger by you in the struggle for gender equality across the world.