

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, at Dinner in Her Honor
Hosted by the Baker Institute for Public Policy
Four Seasons Hotel, Houston
Friday, April 20, 2012**
(Delivered extemporaneously, and transcribed)

Dear Friends:

We are truly gratified to be here, to be a part of launching this new Lecture Series at the Baker Institute, to be among friends and partners, existing and potential.

When I said today that Liberia is at a crossroads, it's a very, very true characterization. We've come a long way in the past six years; we've been able to start the processes of reconstruction, of national renewal that has brought us along the path of maintaining peace and security; being able to tackle our gross underdeveloped infrastructure to restore it to functionality; to get our institutions functioning again in an effort to enhance our national capacity; and to put in place those tenets of good governance that will enable participation and accountability; to promote the civil society; and to build good relationships not only within our country but throughout our programs of reconciliation, and also with our neighbors.

We're very pleased to have come a long way in that regard, but we do have a very long way to go. In all the areas of our endeavor, we still have much to accomplish to get us to the place where we feel we truly, truly are a nation that is in a comparative state with our neighboring countries and other African countries. We are determined to forge ahead. Many Liberians are making great effort, through their talents, their skills, their resources, to be a part of this whole process of renewal.

We still have many challenges, the most important of which is our young population that had been bypassed by education, that don't have the skills to be able to benefit from the many opportunities that will arise over the next few years when all the investments we've put in place begin to turn into operations. It will take us a while to meet those challenges. Education is neither short term nor free! But we have to start on that. Vocational training is going to be one of the things that we will concentrate on, for those who may not be in a position to go through a long academic program.

We are also going to continue to deal with our infrastructure problem. It was mentioned today that, yes, we brought lights and water back, but just imagine that today we have only about 22 megawatts of power – hardly enough to even provide electricity to the capital city. But that's something that we've got to work on, and we're trying to work on that, because we know that without power, we cannot develop; no matter what the natural resources, you cannot progress from the export of raw materials to being able to process it to get value added for materials. So that's going to be a major preoccupation of ours.

Just managing expectations, particularly since it's been announced that the country has the prospect of oil, makes everyone expect that things are going to happen and that transformation will take place. But as we try to manage it, and try to bring realization to everything that we do, we also know that we have to do things. We have to be able to deliver to people some of the expectations. They have to see that the resources we have are going to be turned into more lights, more clean water, more roads, more schools, better quality education, more training for our young people. And that's going to take the collective effort of all of us who have been chosen to lead our people, and all of the partners with whom we will be working.

But we do believe that Liberia has a great potential if we can get it right on this crossroads, and we can put in place all of those policies and mechanisms and approaches that enable us to use the resources appreciably, to be able to move to the next stage of our development where, indeed, we've expanded the basic services to our people. The potential, not only for them, but the potential for all of our sub-region, is going to be great because regional integration and cooperation will be one of those places where we are going to put emphasis in the next few years, to be able to create the kinds of economies of scale where our small market might not be able to move it at the potential we want.

We have great hope in our country. We have committed to doing those things that will truly say that Liberia can be a model country; that we can stand up, we can move from dependency to self-sufficiency, from poverty to prosperity – all of those things that come with a collective effort and a collective commitment to be able to do the right thing and respond to the needs of the people.

Thank you for the opportunity you've given us to be here, to be a part of the relationship that is represented by those in this room – Chevron, the Baker Institute, Rice University. We hope that from here forth, we'll be able to look at this partnership and see how we can grow it together for mutual benefits.