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**Republic of Liberia**  
**Capitol Building, Capitol Hill**  
**Monrovia, Liberia**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

Delivered By  
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at the  
**WOMEN POLITICAL LEADERS GLOBAL FORUM (WPL)**  
Held at the  
Kigali Conference Center  
Kigali, Rwanda

Sunday, April 29, 2018

Permit me the liberty to express our thanks and appreciation to the following:

- His Excellency, President Paul Kagame; the Government and people of Rwanda for the warm welcome accorded our respective delegations since our arrival in this beautiful, historic City of Kigali. As we gather here this weekend, I am sure that each of us will never be the same, and will return to our homes more energized as change agents; knowing that if it can happen here in Rwanda, it is possible all across Africa.
- The President and Members of WIP, for keeping the vision of complete female participation across our one World, an international agenda;
- The President and members of the **MO IBRAHIM FOUNDATION**; for setting the bar for good governance and transparency across Africa; and encouraging AFRICAN Leaders to lead by example.

We are grateful for the collaboration which has made this weekend a reality.

It is my humbling duty, at this historic occasion, to bring you warm fraternal greetings from His Excellency President George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia; a true HE-for-SHE CHAMPION. It is his prayer that this gathering of WOMEN OF THE WORLD will extend the fire began by other HEROINES OF AFRICA, and SPREAD IT THROUGHOUT OUR WORLD, TILL NO WOMAN IS LEFT BEHIND.

As we consider the enormity of the task yet before us, may we kindly stand for a moment of silence, as we remember and pay homage to one of AFRICA's BEST - WINNIE MANDELA. Her life's legacy proves to us that **'...if we believe in our dreams and are ready to make the sacrifices to make them come true, we can do all but fail.'**

I thank you. Please have your seat.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen; I have been requested to speak on the topic "**Peacemaker and Power broker- the role of Women Political Leaders in Re-building trust**". This topic in its entirety may not be captured in this speech, but with deep introspection, let me endeavor to share my thoughts and experiences with you, as a learning curve for our deliberations.

Permit me to begin with our experiences from Liberia, the Nation of my birth and my second love; as my first is God; has set many positive examples of how Women leaders, put an end to the Liberian War; began a process of Peace keeping, Peace building and sustaining the peace; under the able leadership of Liberia's First Female President - Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Her leadership enabled our Nation to traverse difficult waters and reach calm seas. For this we will remain truly grateful.

Our history, though uplifting, is just one of many African success stories. For only two decades ago, the story of Rwanda's rise from the ashes, and how its women stood toe to toe in the trenches with their male counterparts to stop the carnage; and how they stood tall in rebuilding this great Nation, has now become the standard by which all Nations are held.

The most amazing feat is that they have become the first in not just one area, but in many - from national equality and unity, to women empowerment, to the fastest growing economy, to the greenest City in Africa, and is the example of a transparent and corrupt free Nation, amongst others. Because of the standards set and achieved it is now being dubbed the SINGAPORE OF AFRICA. What a great Legacy.

With the experience of these two Nations as a benchmark, I hope you will agree that it is not a misstatement to aver that **CONFLICT** - civil, regional, religious and sectarian violence, carries the greatest blame for the death, displacement, and hopelessness of people. And that underneath conflict, mistrust and the unrestrained contest for power and influence over the General good of others do inarguably breed conflict. As a result conflict inhibits the advancement of society and could plunge nations into deeper levels of crises.

The truism in this premise finds attestation in the African Union's carefully crafted instrument dubbed, **Common African Position on Effectiveness** wherein it is noted that, "**We are cognizant that most of the humanitarian crises on the African continent are conflict induced....**"

We have all thus been summoned here to reiterate the positive roles, in our constantly changing World - of how Women can continue to use the platforms we have to build trust and move our families, our communities and our Nations out of Conflict and into safe and secured Nations; an environment necessary for the development of Nations and peoples. This cannot be more clearly stated, than in the words of Kofi Annan who said and I quote: "**THERE IS NO TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**"

That being clearly said there is overwhelming quantitative evidence that women's empowerment and gender equality are associated with peace and stability in society. In particular, when women influence decisions about war and peace and take the lead against extremism in their communities, it is more likely that crises will be resolved without recourse to violence.

I must emphasize that as part of the first series of steps of conflict prevention, there is a need for states to focus on the elimination of poverty, the provision of opportunities which create success stories for its citizens, and create the environment for advancement, education and innovation.

At the same time, states have a responsibility to promote the rule of law, ensure that respect is accorded to all, and peaceful co-existence in diversity is vigorously pursued. Such ends can be met with much ease only if and when we utilize the full potential of the entire populace.

At the World Humanitarian Summit convened by the United Nations, in the Turkish City of Istanbul, May of 2016, the top priority of stakeholders convened at that Summit was **Core Responsibility One**, the demand for **POLITICAL LEADERSHIP TO PREVENT AND END CONFLICTS**. The four counts listed under this Core Responsibility called for parties to pursue the following:

1. Demonstrate timely, coherent and decisive political leadership
2. Act early
3. Remain engaged and invest in stability
4. Develop solutions with and for people

In the fourth count--**to develop solutions with and for the people**--a specific point was made for the need to "**Promote and require the meaningful inclusion of women and women's groups in political decision-making and peace processes at all levels.**"

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the roles that Women can play in REBUILDING TRUST are many. Allow me to list just a few:

1. Women can use their positions to prevent violence and provide security
2. Women can become champions of peace
3. Women can speak out and moderate extremism
4. Women can become part of systems of governance to strengthen peace making
5. Women can promote dialogue between conflicting parties
6. Women can become bridges to build trust
7. Women can become vital voices and raise issues that are vital for peaceful coexistence
8. Women can participate in forums and community dialogues in-the need for insuring gender equality
9. Women can broaden societal participation

Beyond their roles as intermediaries, women are adept at building coalitions in their push for peace. They frequently mobilize diverse groups in society, working across ethnic, religious, political, and cultural divides cracked open by conflict. In addition to this horizontal bridge-building, women also bridge the vertical divide between elites and the grassroots, which may in turn increase the chances that peace will last by promoting local participation and generating legitimacy.

In as much as these are general ways in which women can help in rebuilding trust; the onus is on WOMEN POLITICAL LEADERS TO BE THE CHAMPIONS. WE MUST BELIEVE THAT THIS IS OUR TASK, FORM A SYNERGY ACROSS THE WORLD, TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THIS IDEAL; AND USE OUR COLLECTIVE VOICES TO REDUCE CONFLICTS AND REBUILD THE TRUST NECESSARY FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE EQUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT. THIS IS OUR CHARGE TO KEEP. FOR THE FATE OF OUR ONE WORLD ALSO RESTS IN OUR HANDS.

EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED Ladies and Gentlemen, as we continue to advocate for the creation and enhancement of environments in which women can ascend and thrive in leadership at all levels of national governance in Africa, let each of us be reminded of the fact that our actions in public service are catalysts for public trust.

When give these unique opportunities to serve we must do so with integrity, commitment, dedication and transparency, in order to leave positive legacies for others to follow. As we look forward to a day when the African governance structures will be a replication of the Rwandan one, we have to continue the advocacy for greater inclusion and lead by positive examples.

For as we sit here, in the City which exemplifies true gender equality - Africa has no Female Heads of State; only 4 Female Vice Presidents; 12 Female Speakers of Parliament and low levels of female Parliamentarians - minus RWANDA which has a 64% lead. This proves that Africa is again lagging behind. Howbeit, we, the Women leaders of Africa must put all of our resources together to improve the current numbers. This can be done - if we remain committed to the ideals of gender equality in every Nation.

In spite of this fact, I have never been more optimistic than I am today; having been a witness to the fact that Africa can achieve accelerated development and women can be the fulcrum of change when given political leadership as evident in Rwanda. At least history is the judge that - "***Social Science Affirms that a Woman's Place in Society Marks the Level of Our Civilization***" - a quote by Elizabeth Stanton.

I am humbled by my inclusion at this event. I pray my words will serve to elevate our conversation.

I thank you.