

# KEYNOTE ADDRESS

By

**Honorable Chief Dr. Jewel Howard-Taylor**

Vice President of the Republic of Liberia

at the

**Launch of the**

**WOMEN ON BOARDS NETWORK (WOBNL)**

**Liberia Chamber of Commerce**

Capitol Hill

Monrovia, Liberia

**Tuesday, September 18, 2018**

***Honorable Wendell Addy and the new Leadership of Liberia  
Chamber of Commerce (LCC);***

***Excellencies;***

***Officials of Government Present;***

***Members of the Diplomatic Corps Present;***

***Business Leaders and Other Eminent Personalities;***

***Distinguished Guests;***

***The Press;***

***Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:***

Good morning to all.

It is again an honor and a privilege for me to have been invited here this morning. I must admit that the words on the invitation again ignited my deep passion for the cause of women's economic and political empowerment and reminded me of the fact that, though our Nation has made some milestone achievements in this arena; the bare truth is that the number of Women who have broken the barrier are few and far in between.

As we each struggle with this phenomenon, I keep being reminded by social scientists and sociologists that social changes take a long time. The question then is - So how much longer must we wait for our male counterparts to see us as equals and partners?

The women of Liberia have been patient for this change to take place; and have waited for 171 years for a Nation that knows the value and contributions of half of its population; yet continues to stand in a place where it feels that though women are able and capable, it is not quite yet time.

The long running crusade for gender equality; not only in our Nation, but across our world; is one that demands the full and concerted push from all sides, particularly from national leaders—males in positions of trust and authority and women who have made some gains in climbing the ladder in the public and corporate realm of governance, who have opportunities to hire, yet consistently choose males over females.

But today is a good day; so let's not cry over spilt milk. When we look at Boards of Corporations, one can see clearly, by virtue of the oversight role they perform that they are critical in our governance process, ensuring judicious use of resources, both human and financial; enforcing accountability, good governance and responsibility for the benefit of stakeholders.

Thankfully, today we have other governance tools, like Social Corporate Responsibility. In such a vantage point, one would think that those clothed with this responsibility would use this platform to fight not only for accountability but also for equality, thereby enabling our nation; one organization at a time; to begin a genuine thrust toward of true gender equality, and not fall for token positions.

### ***Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;***

Today is indeed a new day, when citizens out of their own accord would look at issues affecting the growth and development of our nation and seek to change the old ways which have held us down.

As such, I salute this new breed of conscious leaders of the Liberia Chamber of Commerce for this foresight and drive to actually begin to turn the tide towards greater equality. Please accept our sincere thanks and gratitude to you, our LCC President Wendell Addy, and your conscientious corps of officers for the vision and thoughtfulness you have shown by stating your willingness to invest in processes which will change the national narrative.

Let me seize the moment to convey to you warm greetings from His Excellency President George Manneh Weah, who, as I have consistently noted, is such a devoted He-for-She personality with a heart filled with deep concern, love and support for the welfare of women.

The launch of this movement, with the mandate to promote gender equality on the boards of public and private organizations, thereby enhancing corporate governance across the Liberian economy, indeed marks a remarkable undertaking. I can see, thru the eyes of faith, that this move of the LCC will begin a revolution which will open the doors for greater equality.

The dream couched in the theme "**33 by 23**" may deceive us at first sight, to be a goal in Utopia. But it is my earnest prayer; with a sense of common purpose, undiluted faith in this cause, and a determined resolve to stand to any odds, strengthened by your refusal to yield to distractions, we sure will reach the end sought.

After having spent 12 plus years in the National Legislature, out of which I had held the belief that the National Women's desire for greater equality could have become a reality; and seeing all of our hard work, hopes and desires blow up in smoke; I was confused as to where we would continue this fight; especially since the Branch clothed with the responsibility to make the laws which should govern all of us in an equitable way shirked from its duty to do so at the time.

It has been a heavy burden for me and many other women fighting for gender equality who seemingly have no place to seek redress, and who seem to not be able to get a new footing aright. And so upon hearing of this initiative by the LCC, it is a joy for me and others of like minds to join this new battle.

In our joy, I am reminded of the words of one of Africa's best son, the consummate global diplomat, the late Kofi Annan, which summarizes the cry of women and the soul of your intentions driving this initiative, for which I beg your indulgence to quote for your hearing;

"Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance." End quote.

As you have taken upon yourself this arduous yet rightful journey; let history count this day in memorial that a group of courageous men and women, picked up the baton to secure for themselves and prosperity a more equitable nation, where all persons are given equal opportunities to be a part of the national transformation process.

That being said; it is therefore indeed my singular honor to, on behalf of the great Women of Liberia, such as Nye Suacoco; Suzanna Lewis and Co; Mary Brownell; Teresa Leigh Sherman; Ruth Ceasar; Korpo Howard; the ever faithful women of AFELL; Cllr. Yvette Chesson Wreh; Angie Brooks Randolph; the praying Women of WIPNET; and Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, amongst many others; and in my own name, launch ***The Women on Boards Network Liberia (WOBNL)***.

As we begin this new cycle, let us truly commit to a cause greater than ourselves, to do all we can to insure that gender equality becomes a reality in our lifetime; keeping in mind that this time we will accept no other outcome.

For truly, as was said by Justine Greening, former UK Development Secretary, ***NO COUNTRY CAN TRULY DEVELOP IF HALF OF ITS POPULATION IS LEFT BEHIND.***

MAY THE DUTY YOU HAVE ASSUMED TODAY, BEGIN TO SET THE CLOCK ARIGHT, AND GRANT US THE BEGINNIG OF A BETTER, EQUITABLE AND DEVELOPED NATION.

I THANK YOU.