

# A MEDAL FOR ALL LIBERIANS

By Charles Nelson

**As President Johnson Sirleaf prepares to receive America's Presidential Medal of Freedom, how does it trickle down to the ordinary Liberian?**

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf often talks about turning Liberia in to a 'post-conflict success story'. Many a time, when such a reference is made by the President with such enthusiasm, one gets the feeling that the whole idea of turning Liberia into a success story is all but a glorious cliché designed by a politician's politician to calm the nerves of a nervous citizenry. But, thankfully, this is not the case! It is intensely refreshing to note that other nations



President Sirleaf says her accolades are dedicated to the children of Liberia

including the United States of America have glaringly noticed that President Johnson Sirleaf is gathering the ingredients which will lead to realizing the success story recipe. Undoubtedly, U.S. President George Bush's decision to

award the Liberian leader with the Presidential Medal of Freedom -the nation's highest civil award- on November 5, 2007, at the White House, is an overriding vindication that the Government of Liberia under the stewardship of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is creating a dramatic turnaround. President Bush has decided to award President Johnson Sirleaf with the Presidential Medal of Freedom because she has 'helped heal a country torn apart by conflict through perseverance, personal courage, and an unwavering commitment to building a more hopeful future for her homeland. The first woman elected president of an African nation, she has worked to expand freedom and improve the lives of people in Liberia and across Africa'.

But what is the Presidential Medal of Freedom? What makes it tick? What is the big deal about it being awarded to the Liberian leader? The Medal was established in 1945 by former

American President Harry Truman in 1945 to honor service during the World War II and later revived and expanded in purpose by President John Kennedy in 1963 through an Executive Order. The medal is awarded annually to recipients selected by the American President, either on his initiative or based on recommendations. When she receives the Medal at the White House on Monday, November 5<sup>th</sup> , President Johnson Sirleaf will join the elite group of honorees which includes former United States Presidents Ronald Reagan and John Fitzgerald Kennedy as well as the famous and influential Canadian-American economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, who produced four dozen books and over a thousand articles. The badge of the Presidential Medal of Freedom is in the form of a golden star with white enamel, with a red enamel pentagon behind it; the central disc bears thirteen gold stars on a blue enablem background (taken from the Great Seal of the United States) with a golden ring. Golden American Eagles with spread wings stand between the points of the star. It is worn around the neck on a blue ribbon with white edge stripes. When President Johnson Sirleaf wears the Presidential Medal of Freedom, it will solidify the already known fact that Liberia's image has turned the corner and that a renaissance is at hand.

However, there is another dimension to the matter that does not quite meet one's eye at first



To Madam Sirleaf, celebrating leadership means celebrating Liberians

glance. To all intents and purposes, what does President Bush awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom to President Johnson Sirleaf mean for the ordinary Liberian? If one has not noticed, it is imperative to note

that this will trigger a new and improved palpable sense of nationalism. It will ginger a nationalistic fervor that Liberia, which had been lowered to bended knee after undergoing plunder leading to rock bottom status, has come alive with the creation of a new dawn. It will instill a feel-good factor in all Liberians, giving hope and signaling the conviction that Liberians have the potential to achieve their fullest once the opportunity is given. Liberians

will be aware of the benefits to be accrued to them as a result of the accomplishments of President Johnson Sirleaf which symbolized the desires of the people when they exercised their democratic franchise two years ago. It will further vindicate the fact that Liberians should take the credit and be congratulated for their foresight and wise decision ultimately resulting in the enormous achievements by their leader.

That haven been said, the positive actions and ideals exhibited by President Johnson Sirleaf so far during her presidency has not gone unnoticed. Her long and arduous crusade in the fight for social justice has captured the imagination of many across the globe. In a relatively short period of her presidency, she has championed press freedom, going to arm's length to create the conditions for a vibrant media to continue to blossom. She has placed as a core feature, the need to create conditions to promote good governance and the rule of law and peace and security with the training of the new Armed Forces of Liberia as well as the restructuring of the national security apparatus. She has also allowed for religious and political tolerance as her government continues to imbue political inclusion and constructively engage all stakeholders. The Johnson Sirleaf Administration has also continued to fight for economic revitalization which is pivotal in its development agenda. She has also instilled a sense of self-dependence and hope in the ordinary grass rooters with the promotion of education and health for every Liberian. The onus is on us, Liberians should begin to see the presentation of the Presidential Medal of Freedom to President Johnson Sirleaf as a rallying point where we can all instill a sense of unity and togetherness in all our undertakings. We must see the Medal as a celebration of the greatness of the Liberian people.

**THE VICTORY IS OURS AND OURS ALONE!**