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Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is the 24th President of the Republic of Liberia and the first elected female Head of State in Africa. She is serving her second term as President after winning the 2011 presidential election.

President Sirleaf has, throughout her career, demonstrated passionate commitment to hard work, integrity and good governance, advocating for the rights of women and the importance of education to provide a better future for her country and its people. She has revived national hope by strengthening the institutions of national security and good governance, leading the revitalization of the national economy and infrastructure, and restoring Liberia's international reputation and credibility.

After decades of fighting for freedom, justice and equality in Liberia, in 2011 President Sirleaf shared the prestigious Nobel Prize for Peace with two other women – fellow Liberian Leymah Gbowee, and Tawakkul Karman of Yemen. They were recognized, by the Norwegian

Nobel Committee, for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work.

Among her other distinguished honors are: France's highest award and public distinction, the Grand Croix of the Légion d'Honneur (2012), and the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development (2012). In 2007 she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor bestowed by an American President.

More recently, on September 28, 2013, before a crowd of more than 60,000 fans attending the 2013 Global Citizen Festival at Central Park's Great Lawn, President Ellen Sirleaf of Liberia received this year's Global Citizen Movement Award for championing the cause of gender equality.

Two days later, on September 30, in Costa Rica, the Liberian leader became the first sitting President and the first African to have her bust installed in the Garden of Nations of the United Nations-mandated University of Peace, joining such global icons as Mahatma Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt and others. The "Put Ma Ellen There" project was an initiative by 15 young Liberians, representing the country's 15 political sub-divisions, who believed that their President deserved to be in the Garden because of her significant contributions to peace and development in her country and the world, and worked towards its realization.

In October, President Sirleaf received the Entrepreneur for the World 2013 Award, in the Policy-Maker Category, presented by the World Entrepreneurship (Cette biographie est uniquement disponible en anglais)

Forum, which recognized her for leading the way not only for the African continent, but every policy-maker willing to transform his/her community. The Forum's founders added that, in the process of rebuilding post-conflict Liberia, President Sirleaf has strengthened national security and good governance, conducted the revitalization of the economy and, in so doing, restored Liberia's international reputation.

Over the past year, the Liberian President co-chaired a United Nations High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The Panel, which presented its report on May 30, 2013, was tasked with crafting a roadmap for global recovery and sustainable development.

Pleased with her leadership role on the African continent, the Liberian President was chosen, in May, by the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the African Union to chair a Committee of Heads of State and Government on the Post-2015 Development

Agenda, and to work towards an African common position to be embedded in the final post-2015 document.

At the 2013 African Union Summit, President Sirleaf was elected Chairperson of the African Peer Review Mechanism, whose mandate is to ensure that the policies and practices of its 31 member countries conform to agreed values in the areas of democracy and political governance, economic governance, corporate governance and socio-economic development. President Sirleaf chairs the Mano River Union – comprised of Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone – where she leads the effort for political stability, economic cooperation and regional integration.

The Liberian leader is Goodwill Ambassador for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in Africa; and is a Champion of many causes, including against Sexual Violence in Conflict. She is the recent past Chair of the African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA).

Born Ellen Eugenia Johnson in Monrovia on October 29, 1938, she is the granddaughter of a traditional chief of renown in western Liberia and a market woman from the southeast. She grew up in Liberia and attended high school at the College of West Africa in Monrovia, subsequently studying at Madison (Wisconsin) Business College, the University of Colorado and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government where she obtained a Master's Degree in Public Administration in 1971.

Her entry into politics came in 1972 when she delivered her now famous commencement address to her high school alma mater in which she sharply criticized the government, showing her determination to speak truth unto power. This was the start of a distinguished professional and political career that has spanned four decades.

Mrs. Johnson Sirleaf joined the then Treasury Department in 1965, rising to the position of Minister of Finance in 1979 where she introduced measures to curb the mismanagement of government finances. After the 1980 military coup d'état, she served as President of the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment (LBDI) but fled her country and the increasingly suppressive military government that same year. She traveled to Kenya and served as Vice President of Citicorp's Africa Regional Office in Nairobi, and later moved to Washington, D.C., to assume the position of Senior Loan Officer at the World Bank, and then as Vice President for Equator Bank. In 1992 she joined the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as Assistant Administrator and Director of its Regional Bureau of Africa with the rank of Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations.

With her country still very much at heart, Johnson Sirleaf resigned her UN post in 1997 to return home and contest the presidential election, and was ranked second in votes to opponent Charles Taylor. She went into self-imposed exile, this time to Côte d'Ivoire where she kept a close eye on Liberian politics. During that time she established, in Abidjan, the Kormah Development and Investment Corporation, a venture capital vehicle for African entrepreneurs; and Measuagoon, a Liberian community development NGO.

In 2003, when Charles Taylor was exiled to Nigeria and the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) was formed, Johnson Sirleaf was selected to serve as Chairperson of the Governance Reform Commission, where she led the country's anti-corruption reform by changing the reporting mechanism of the General Auditing Commission from the Executive to the Legislature, thereby strengthening and reinforcing its independence. She resigned this position to successfully contest the 2005 presidential election, resulting in her historic inauguration, on January 16, 2006, as Liberia's first female President.

During her tenure, President Johnson Sirleaf has built strong relations with regional partners and the international community, attracting investment of over US\$16 billion in Liberia's mining, agriculture, forestry and hydrocarbon sectors to provide jobs for her people. Her leadership led to Liberia's US\$4.6 billion external debt forgiveness in June 2010, and the lifting of UN trade sanctions to allow Liberia access to international markets. Under her government, the National Budget grew from a mere US\$80 million in 2006 to over US\$672 million in 2012, with an annual GDP growth increase of 8.7 percent. She has also attracted over \$5 million of private resources to rebuild schools, clinics and markets, and scholarships for capacity building.

Before becoming President, Mrs. Johnson Sirleaf served on many advisory boards. They include: the International Crisis Group; Women Waging Peace; the Synergos Institute; and the Open Society Institute for West Africa (OSIWA), which she chaired. She was a founding member of the International Institute for Women in Political Leadership; served, in 1999, on the Organization of African Unity (OAU) committee to investigate the Rwanda genocide, and chaired its commission for the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. She collaborated with Mrs. Elisabeth Rehm of Finland for a UNIFEM investigative report, "Women, War, Peace," on the effect of conflict on women and women's roles in peace building.

Mrs. Johnson Sirleaf is the recipient of other prized awards. So far, in 2013 alone, she has received the National Order of Benin; the National Medical Association of the United States Lifetime Humanitarian Award for Healthcare; the Year of Pan Africanism and African

Renaissance African Union Award; the Gender Is My Agenda Campaign African Women Pioneer Award; and was inducted as an Honorary Member of the LINKS, Inc., an organization of professional African-American women.

Other awards over the years have included: the Martin Luther King, Jr. Peace Medal and Alpha Award of Honor (2012); the African Gender Award (2011); Friend of the Media Award (2010); FUECH Grand Cross Award (2009); FAO's CERES Medal (2008); International Women's Leadership Award (2008); International Crisis Group Fred Cuny Award for the Prevention of Deadly Crisis (2008); James and Eunice K. Matthews Bridge Building Award (2008); American Academy of Achievement Golden Plate Award (2008); National Civil Rights Museum Annual Freedom Award (2007); National Democratic Institute Harriman Award (2007); Bishop T. Walker Humanitarian Award (2007); Gold Medal of the President of the Italian Republic (2006); Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger (2006); National Reconciliation Award (2006); International Woman of the Year (2006); and the International Republican Institute Freedom Award (2006).

Mrs. Sirleaf has been awarded honorary doctorates by over 17 institutions, among them: Tilburg University in the Netherlands; the Nigerian Defence Academy; the University of Massachusetts Medical School; Harvard University; Rutgers University; Yale University; Georgetown University; the University of Abeokuta, Nigeria; the University of Minnesota; Furman University of South Carolina; Brown University; Indiana University; Dartmouth College; Concordia University; Langston University; Spelman College; and Marquette University.

Among other accolades, the Liberian leader has been ranked among the top 100 most powerful women in the world (Forbes 2012); the first most powerful woman in Africa (Forbes Africa 2011); among the 10 best leaders in the world (Newsweek 2010); among top 10 female leaders (TIME 2010); called "the best President the country has ever had (The Economist 2010); and as one of the six "Women of the Year" (Glamour 2010).

President Johnson Sirleaf has written widely on financial, development and human rights issues, and in 2008 she published her critically acclaimed memoir, *This Child Will Be Great*. She is the proud mother of four sons and grandmother of eleven.



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