

OPENING STATEMENT BY
HER EXCELLENCY MRS. ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

ON THE OCCASION OF THE GHANA-LIBERIA TRADE AND INVESTMENT FORUM,
ACCRA, FEBRUARY 20, 2010.

Mr. Chairman;

Madam the Minister of Trade and Industry of Ghana;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

This Forum could not have taken place at a more auspicious time. As you know we have just finished a Summit of the ECOWAS in Abuja, Nigeria. As expected, we talked and explored further ways and means of increasing intra-ECOWAS trade as an instrument of collective economic development. The fact is that despite whatever modest achievements that ECOWAS has registered since its creation in 1975, we should all be modest to accept that we could have done better to do business among ourselves.

I am extremely delighted that I have the opportunity of this visit to attempt to give meaning to the decisions that we took in Abuja. Our decisions during this visit to reactivate the Joint Commission of our two countries will provide the vehicle to identify means of facilitating trade and investment opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to place on record the gratitude that I as a person and the people of Liberia continue to owe to our brothers and sisters of Ghana. I recall with nostalgia the warm and extraordinary generosity that this country has always extended to Liberia since time immemorial. The critical role that Ghana played during the saddest chapter in our history will always remain in the collective mind of the Liberian people. President Rawlings was the most important instrument in this regard. His strong leadership, his unrelenting effort to save us from ourselves, to bring peace to our country makes him a hero to all Liberians. This was well demonstrated when he along with four other former African Presidents visited us during our Independence Day celebrations in 2008.

Given this background, nobody should be surprised that my Government's first major initiative in bilateral economic diplomacy in West Africa is with Ghana. My Government sincerely believes that Ghana and Liberia have immense opportunities to our mutual advantage.

Mr. Chairman, throughout my professional and political careers, I have ardently believed that Africa's development in the final analysis will come from cooperation between and among African countries. I pushed that agenda vigorously when I had the privilege to head the Africa Bureau of the United Nations Development Programme. I have, since becoming the President of Liberia, used any opportunity that I am offered to preach that message and today, I come to you with the same message. There is no alternative to closer economic and commercial cooperation among African countries. Our future depends on that and we should pursue that strategy with determination and conviction. I have come to Ghana to inform our brothers and sisters in this country that the new Liberia is ready for business and anxious to do business with Ghana. The tragic events of the 1990s that occurred in my country paradoxically opened new vistas at the same time. Every facet of the Liberian economy was a victim of those horrendous events; infrastructure was destroyed, plantations were destroyed, schools were destroyed, hospitals were destroyed and more tragically the Liberian spirit was broken. We have had to start all over again, but I can assure you that we intend to mend whatever was broken. Through very judicious and prudent policy measures, Liberia and Liberians are restoring hope into our national life. The investment climate has

become more and more clement, we are restoring our devastated infrastructure, we are restoring hope to broken spirits and we are proving to the international community that Liberians are very resilient people ready to look forward to a better future.

Liberia, coming out of war needs investments in all spheres of our economic life and ready to receive all investors with open arms.

I stand before you today to present Liberia to you – a country brimming with immense opportunity, a country with great potential and ready to offer appreciable reward for your entrepreneurial activity.

I make this move today out of my belief in the capability of the African to develop our own continent ourselves.

To facilitate your deliberations, I have come with a group of very senior government officials and industry leaders who can assist clarify matters that may be unclear to you. They will be able to give you first hand information regarding the path that we are charting.

I would in particular wish to acknowledge my personal faith in the SME sector. As you all know and as has been amply demonstrated the world over, the SME sector is indeed the real engine of economic growth. It employs a disproportionate percentage of our populations and so I have a special spot for that sector in my heart. Capacity building is another area that is dear to me. I am pleased to learn that EMPRETEC has been involved in the planning of this event. EMPRETEC, you owe me one – your support of Liberia is crucial. I am sure my delegation will hold discussions regarding the way ahead with them. We need to build a vibrant SME sector in the short to medium term.

I do not intend to make a long statement. I think the limited time at your disposal should be spent discussing the potential and the challenges of investing and doing business in Liberia. These are the real issues that have brought us here. I end this statement by assuring everyone here that Liberia is very ready to engage the business community in Ghana.

Thank you.