

Opening Remarks

*Working out of Poverty: Decent Work approach to Development  
and Growth in Africa Workshop*

By H. E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia  
September 8, 2008 at Cape Hotel, Mamba Point, Monrovia

Madam Mary Robinson, Former President of Ireland; former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; now President of Realizing Rights;  
Mr. Mpenza Kabundi, Deputy Regional Director for Policy and Program and Representative of the ILO Director General;  
Mr. Jordan Ryan, Deputy SRSG, representing the SRSG;  
Hon. Samuel Kofi Woods, II, Minister of Labour;  
Heads of Delegations, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me extend a warm welcome to all of you to Liberia, and to thank you for travelling long distances and taking time out of your busy schedules to show your support for this country. It means a great deal to us that so many people are willing to join us in our efforts to achieve peace and development. I want to thank those who have spent time over the past few months, organizing this workshop. I want to particularly thank the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Realizing Rights: the Ethical Globalization Initiative, the Ministry of Labour, and all other partners for their support in organizing, supporting and funding this workshop.

Our special thanks go to my very good friend, Her Excellency, Mary Robinson, President of Realizing Rights; former President of Ireland and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for her continuous support to our efforts.

Madam Robinson, I refer to your communication in July this year in which you provided updates on your support to Liberia and

confirmed our joint commitments to the holding of this workshop in Monrovia. Thank you sincerely.

We would also like to acknowledge with thanks the role of the ILO in the campaign for Decent Work. The primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Decent work is the converging focus of all of its four strategic objectives: the promotion of rights at work place; employment; social protection; and social dialogue.

It is an honor for us in Liberia to host this important international workshop. It comes at a time when we have launched and commenced the implementation activities of our Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), now referred to as "Lifting Liberia". One of the Government's most important goals during the PRS period is to promote the rapid creation of productive employment that will reduce poverty, ensure peace and stability, and enhance the overall wellbeing of the Liberian population.

As this workshop deliberates on the issues of trends in labor markets, including employment, informality and the working poor; coherent policies for employment and economic growth; local economic development and employment-intensive investment approach for reconstruction and recovery; improved governance and social dialogue; and social protection and social safety nets, it is my hope that this workshop will take Liberia's commitment forward.

Liberians are anxious to build a new nation that is peaceful, secure, and prosperous, with democratic and accountable governance based on the rule of law, and with abundant employment and other economic opportunities. The next three years will therefore be critical. Success or failures rest in our hands.

The legacy of our civil crisis has left in its trails the overwhelming effects of not only unemployment but also vulnerable employment which subjects our citizens to inhumane and often degrading work conditions. We must work collectively to improve these conditions for both workers and their employers. This is why our Government sought the re-negotiation of various concession agreements, and continue to support the growth and development of responsible Workers Unions and Employers Association.

We must forge ahead as quickly as possible. We need to see results now and show people that peace, democracy, hard work, accountability pay off with real dividends. It is therefore my hope that this workshop will address all of the bottlenecks and constraints that will ensure results, and make this international event a memorable and meaningful one for all Liberians.

Madam Mary Robinson; Mr. Mpenza Kabundi, Mr. Jordan Ryan; Heads of Delegations; Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Our decent work agenda has well been articulated by the Ministry of Labour under its deliverable within the PRS. The Ministry has identified four strategic but interrelated objectives for the attainment of this agenda:

- Strengthening the national capacity for employment creation
- Strengthening labor administration
- Promoting a culture of constructive social dialogue
- Development of a labor market information and analysis systems

Each of these has been developed into Concept Notes with key activities, timelines and cost. It is my hope that this workshop will set the stage for your financial support to the Ministry. As mentioned by

Minister Woods, lots of work has been done, lot more is being done, and much more remained to be done.

While the greatest responsibility for the implementation of the outcome of the forum lies with our government, you, the partners have a shared interest in ensuring that what we gain here as a result of our deliberations is sustained. It is my hope that in the coming years, decent work as a concept will become a visible reality.

Again, thank you for the support provided and we look forward to working with you beyond these two days and into the future.

I pledge to you this government and my personal commitment in support of this workshop and its outcome.

With this said, I now declare this workshop on "Working out of Poverty: A Decent work approach to Development and Growth in Africa" officially opened.

Thank you.