



**Women's Foreign Policy Group
Washington, DC
October 16, 2006**

**Annual Luncheon Event
In honor of H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia**

Renee Poussaint: Welcome to the Women's Foreign Policy Group's Annual Luncheon Event, honoring President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. As you know, President Johnson Sirleaf this past January became the twenty-third president of Liberia and the first female elected head of state in Africa.

The President, an economist with a distinguished career in the public and private sectors in Liberia and internationally, has dedicated her life to fighting for justice, democracy, and equality. Today, the Women's Foreign Policy Group is privileged to honor President Sirleaf as a role model for women's leadership and for her efforts to rebuild and stabilize Liberia and improve the lives of its citizens, especially its women. After lunch, we will see some video highlights of the president's historic address to the Joint Session of Congress on March 15th of this year, and then we will hear from Ambassador Jendayi Frazer, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Now, I would like to introduce to you the ambassador to the United States from Liberia, Charles Minor.

Ambassador Minor: I'd sincerely like to thank you, Mistress of Ceremonies. I'd like now to address you in a very brief way. Your Excellencies here present, Madame Secretary, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, leaders of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, dear friends. Usually I believe it's an honor when people are asked to address such a gathering. For me this afternoon, it is with regret that I must appear before you and not my president in person.

Late last night, as we were discussing how to reorganize this day, it was suggested that I remove my beard and put on a wig, in order to be able to speak to this distinguished group. The reason simply is, President Johnson Sirleaf and her party arrived at Roberts International Airport to take the plane, but the plane couldn't land due to very, very bad weather in the tropic zone. So that's why she couldn't leave on time. We hope somehow that we will have a message from her before the end of our lunch.

Let me express how much the President regrets her inability to be here. All plans indeed had been made, but she still plans to come to the States and I'm sure many of you will be able to hear or see her. I do wish on her behalf, having been working with the directors and staff to put this event on, that Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first democratically elected president of Liberia, certainly appreciates the work that is done by

the Women's Foreign Policy Group, which she identified herself. Your recognition of our president and the honor you bestow on her is an honor for Liberia, and particularly the millions of women in Liberia. You also honor the women of Africa. From Senegal to Mozambique, from Cairo to Cape Town, women in our continent are proud that Ellen has broken the glass ceiling and captured the highest post in Africa's oldest independent state.

The circumstances of her rise to the presidency are also phenomenal. Liberia was practically a failed state. The long history of calm and stability had masked some underlying national problems: lack of total involvement of the entire population in the workings of state machinery; growth in the extractive resource sector without, unfortunately, equal amount of development; high rate of illiteracy, and trickling of economic returns skewed too narrowly down. Thus the country drifted into crisis after crisis, and then into civil war and destruction. For almost two decades, we drifted downwards. Thank God, with the help of the international community, led by the United States' current administration, a peace deal was brokered. A transitional arrangement came into being, and democratic elections were held. And as Ellen puts it, Liberians did the right thing. We elected her as our president to fix the broken state.

Ellen is well-prepared for the task. She's experienced, she's committed, and she's dedicated. She brings wide international experience and strong will, and is now well on her way to fulfill the promises made during her campaign. For many who have a gender concern, and I quote some of the campaign slogans: "Ellen is our man." For those who know that the task is Herculean, Ellen is an iron lady. And for those who believe the softer touch is required, Ellen is a grandmother of compassion who loves to see the smiles appear again on the faces of children in our country.

Mrs. Minor, who is here with me, and is making sure that I keep honest, so just before I end these remarks, let me confide that President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is determined to improve the well-being of all our people, and particularly our women. They are her strongest constituency. They will certainly get her attention, so all Liberian women will be empowered to better support their families, to participate more effectively in the activities of their villages, their towns, and our common country. I have always felt, and continue to believe, that women are far greater and more efficient managers of resources, and so Liberia is proud to have, in the most critical areas of our state apparatus, women at the helm. In finance, in commerce, in justice, in the police, women are in charge. And they are also second in many other agencies of our present government.

I tried this morning to see if I could find any of our officials in and around this part of the United States. Unfortunately, the nearest was in Europe, so she couldn't be here to share this responsibility. And therefore I regret again that the President isn't here, but please go on and enjoy your lunch, and have a great afternoon. I thank you very much.

Renee Poussaint: Thank you. I know that we're all somewhat disappointed, but there is going to be a great deal of the President's presence with us, as we anticipate, as the Ambassador said, hopefully a videotaped message, which by the magic of technology, if

it works, will be with us shortly. And we also have a tribute video and excerpts of her speech before the Joint Session of Congress.

If the President is the iron lady, I'd like to introduce a woman of steel. She is the Vice Chair of the Board of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, Gail Leftwich Kitch. She is Executive Director of "By the People," an initiative of MacNeil-Lehrer Productions, which uses public television to spur citizen dialogue around public policy issues. Gail, please come forward.

Gail Leftwich Kitch: Thank you very much Renee, and it's hard to know what to say after you've been told you're a woman of steel, but I'll try to follow through. It is a pleasure to be here and especially a pleasure to follow someone as accomplished and well-regarded as Renee, who has given so generously of her time in joining us today. We certainly appreciate her willingness to MC this event, and as many of you know, we are especially fortunate to have Renee Poussaint with us, given her strong involvement with Africa through her work as a documentary filmmaker and as an award-winning former television network journalist.

I want to acknowledge some very special people who are with us today, and in particular, thank our patrons, sponsors, and host committee members for helping us to make this event so successful. I want to first recognize our patrons: the Coca-Cola Company, Raytheon Company, CH2M Hill, General Motors, Maxine Isaacs and James Johnson, and Cynthia Helms. Let's offer them our response.

I also want to recognize today's sponsors: the Academy for Educational Development, NAFSA, the UN Foundation, Susan Rappaport, and Janet Mullins Grissom.

I want to thank our supporters: 3M Company, Lockheed Martin, Prudential Financial, the UN Population Fund, and the World Federation of Public Health Associates.

And our special friends: the Independent Women's Forum, Donna McLarty, Pamela Pelletreau, Nancy Rubin, Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP, and the Initiative for Inclusive Security.

In addition, I want to recognize the ambassadors and many embassies represented here today. I'll begin with the women ambassadors and chargés d'affaires who represent the following countries, and perhaps they might stand so we have a chance to see who they are. Colombia, Angola, Lebanon, Zambia, South Africa, Lesotho, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Trinidad and Tobago. Let's offer them a round of applause. And chargés include Portugal, Moldova, Mali, Cameroon, Cyprus, Sweden, Gabon, and Mozambique, and I don't want to forget our ambassador from Burundi, so I'm sorry that I overlooked him. Other countries represented are Croatia and Kenya, let's have them stand and give them our applause, please.

Now it's my pleasure to introduce the true woman of steel, as far as the Women's Foreign Policy Group is concerned, as you can imagine, given what you learned just now.

Our Executive Director, Pat Ellis, who is co-founder of the Women's Foreign Policy Group.

Patricia Ellis: Thank you all so much for coming. I'd like to start first by thanking Ambassador Minor for pinch-hitting and setting the tone for today's luncheon. Renee Poussaint and Gail, thank you so much, it's been such a pleasure working with you to move this organization forward. I also want to thank the entire board of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, I'm so lucky I have a fantastic board that's really engaged and has given so much assistance to today's event. A number of board members are here, and if you could just wait until I call everyone's name: Kathy Bushkin, Dawn Calabria, Donna Constantinople, Gail Leftwich Kitch, Diana Negroponte, Ponchitta Pierce, and Susan Rappaport. If you can all stand, let's give them a big round of applause.

Gail has mentioned our patrons and sponsors and supporters and special friends, so I'm not going to mention them again, but I just want to thank you again for your support, which we greatly appreciate. A special thanks to Dawn Calabria, Gail, and Michele Manatt for their hard work and to everyone else I mentioned on the board for really pitching in. Let's give everyone a big round of applause.

I also want to mention our in-kind supporters. I want to thank the Coca-Cola Company for providing the drinks that you saw outside, and also the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer for providing video which you are going to see; some excerpts of President Sirleaf's historic address before the Joint Session of Congress. We're really thrilled that everyone could be here, it's just an amazing turnout and an amazing gathering of leaders and ambassadors. I just want to mention one ambassador who we forgot to mention, the Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who is here.

We have leaders from international organizations, corporations, foundations, and non-profits. It just really shows the breadth of the Women's Foreign Policy Group family and friends and we're so glad everyone could be here. We are honoring a courageous woman world leader. She is a star, she is a real role model for women's leadership, and we're just really excited to show our support for her.

This event caps what has been an absolutely fantastic year for the Women's Foreign Policy Group. There were some slides being shown before, they were highlights of this year and I'm just going to run through really fast. This year we had some really senior-level women officials. We had the Foreign Minister of Croatia, we had Ann Veneman, head of UNICEF, and we had the ambassador of Austria actually acting in her capacity when they had the presidency of the EU. We had a wonderful Author Series with Andrea Mitchell, Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Sarah Chayes, and I'd like to announce the next one coming up. Karen DeYoung, who is sitting right here with us, Associate Editor of the *Washington Post*, will be speaking on her new book about Colin Powell, so we hope that you can all join us.

We had a wonderful series on the role of Islam with Carnegie scholars, so we really had a chance to get the historical, cultural, political nuances of so much of what is going on

relating to Muslims, and we all want to understand this better. The last two things I want to mention really quickly: we had our first UN Study Visit, where we were briefed by senior UN officials who dealt with everything from Darfur to Iran. It was so successful, and we're going to do it again this coming year. We hope you can all join us. And the other thing, near and dear to our heart, we did start up our mentoring activities again. We did a wonderful mentoring fair at Georgetown. It's a way that our members can give back to the next generation of women leaders. Our members come and sit at tables and students just come and ask any question they could ever think of. It's very relaxed and informal, and it's a huge success and rewarding on all sides. That's been really, really exciting.

I also want to announce the launch of our new logo which you see right there. We are so excited about this and our new banner, so please take a look at it. Before I close, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Emily Harter. She is the new Director of Communications and Development. I want to thank all the volunteers and interns; why don't you all stand there in the back so we can give them a big round of applause for all their hard work.

We need your support to continue all these great initiatives and we hope you will join as an individual, corporate, or institutional member and keep coming to our programs. I just want to thank you all again so much for coming here and invite you to continue eating your lunch. Thank you very much.

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Patricia Ellis: Excuse me for one more moment. I was just informed that the ambassadors of Chad and Gambia are here with us, and the chargé d'affaires from Lebanon is also here, so please welcome them. Thank you.

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Renee Poussaint: We're going to try to follow the schedule as best we can. We spoke earlier about a short video of highlights of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's speech before the Joint Session of the U.S. Congress on March 15th of this year, only a few months after her inauguration as President of Liberia. As we know, it is a true honor to be asked to address the Joint Session of Congress. And here is a piece of information that I'm sure will come in handy in your next cocktail party. There have only been 103 Joint Sessions of Congress in the history of the United States, dating back to Lafayette in 1824. And only nine women have been accorded the distinction of addressing a Joint Session of Congress. Let us now hear from the extraordinary President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on video: The national motto of Liberia - founded, as you know, by freed American slaves - is "The love of liberty brought us here." We became the first independent Republic in Africa. Our capital, Monrovia, is named for your President James Monroe. Our flag is a star in a blue field and red and white stripes - its one star makes us the lone star state in Africa. But our ties greatly exceed the historical connection. I stand before you today, as the first woman elected to lead an African nation. When I was a small girl in the countryside, swimming and fishing with twine made from

palm trees, no one would have picked me out as the future president of our country. I graduated from the College of West Africa and United Methodist high school. I waited tables to support my studies in the United States - college in Wisconsin and graduate school in Massachusetts. I went on to enjoy the benefits and advantages of a world-class education. So my feet are in two worlds: the world of poor rural women with no respite from hardship, and the world of accomplished Liberian professionals, for whom the United States is a second and beloved home. I draw strength from both. I ask for the continuing support of this Congress and the American people. I will make you proud - of the difference which one woman with abiding faith in God can do. God bless you.

Renee Poussaint: What a wonderful, powerful presence. And now I would like to introduce Ambassador Jendayi Frazer, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs since August of 2005. She previously served as U.S. Ambassador to South Africa and as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director of African Affairs at the National Security Council. Welcome.

Ambassador Jendayi Frazer: Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Renee, and thank you Patricia, for inviting me. Thank you very much for allowing me to be one of the praise-singers for President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. I'm extremely proud and I feel very much blessed on this special occasion to honor Africa's first elected female head of state. I consider it a particular honor to have been invited to give the tribute to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. President Sirleaf, as you saw and you know, is a remarkable leader. She has a commanding presence and as you noticed in watching the video clip, she has the ability to mesmerize an audience. President Sirleaf represents a new beginning, bringing to an end the turmoil and strife that Liberians experienced during their fourteen-year civil war. She represents the hope for Liberia.

It's a welcome change in the storyline of Liberia's history; a truly exciting and unexpected turn of events, and it's been my privilege to have a front row seat as these historical twists have unfolded. I've had the opportunity, and recall many, many meetings with President Sirleaf over the four years when I served as President Bush's Special Assistant at the National Security Council, and during the past year since becoming Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. I remember when I first met Ellen. I remember her unassuming demeanor, yet her unrelenting determination to achieve a better day for Liberians. Ellen, as we called her then, is a person of incredible strength, drive, and determination. She clearly cares deeply about fellow Liberians and her most striking feature, her persistence, will serve her nation well.

Over the years in the midst of various ups and downs, setbacks and steps forward, Ellen had remained determined, hardworking, and focused. She knows that her country deserves the best, and she has dedicated her time, her effort, and her entire being to realizing that dream on behalf of all Liberians.

Even after being arrested for political reasons and having fled her country, Ellen remained hopeful and optimistic, envisioning her nation as it could be and should be. I remember well her clear vision in the darkest days when few others saw any bright hope

for Liberia. I remember calls from Ghana, when her country's future was being mediated by the International Contact Group for Liberia. I remember her call for calm following the first round of elections in October 2005. Always, always, she saw Liberia in a better state.

Ellen has both vision and an incredible sense of purpose. She exemplifies grace under pressure and a willingness to stand up for her beliefs even in the toughest circumstances. If there were glass ceilings, Ellen smashed through them. She is a woman who does not take no for an answer, and in doing so she made her dream everyone's reality. In her address to the Joint Session of the U.S. Congress which you saw, President Sirleaf described herself as a woman whose feet are in two worlds, having grown up as a poor girl in rural Liberia and earning a degree at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Her life experience mimics that of her country and helps her to connect to people from totally disparate backgrounds. A self-made woman, President Sirleaf is like a modern Cinderella whose fairy godmother has now made her inner grace and elegance visible to all the world. With her leadership, Liberia is being renewed, rising like a phoenix from the ashes of its long and difficult struggle.

I had the opportunity to witness the changes firsthand during the country's first round of elections, which I had the honor to monitor in 2005, and again earlier this year when I accompanied First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary Rice to the inauguration festivities in Monrovia. Both experiences were absolutely thrilling. In October 2005, the atmosphere was a little tense, but exciting. In January 2006, there was a special electricity in the air during the inauguration. Liberians' excitement was palpable as they awaited the swearing-in of their first chosen leader in many, many years. It was incredible to meet children who had grown up in the capital city without electricity and running water and had no expectations of either. Most of their parents were cautiously hoping for improvements in their daily lives and economic opportunities. And as all of you know, the lights have been turned on, and the water is starting to flow. And that's due to the leadership of President Johnson Sirleaf and the pulling together of the Liberian people.

Taken collectively, people's expectations constitute a tall order, but the Liberians have selected one woman who is up to the task. We know that there is still a lot of work to be done, and the United States government intends to remain actively engaged, but we rest easily at night, knowing that the people of Liberia who have suffered for so long now have the leader they deserve, a woman whose hard work, shining intelligence, and caring heart set her apart.

It is indeed an honor to have been a part of working with President Johnson Sirleaf. Now, watching her, supporting her, and as I said, she is one woman who has absolute access to the administration from President Bush to Secretary Rice. We had the opportunity to yet again meet with President Johnson Sirleaf, who very systematically, as many of you know who have worked with her, went down a long list to tell us exactly what we needed to do to support her in her efforts and the Liberian people in their efforts.

And so I'm very happy to be here, and I'm happy that the President isn't, insofar as I would rather have her on safe ground than flying in difficult weather today. We will most certainly have another opportunity to see the President and I would ask all of you to continue to pull together to support her as one of the most fabulous women leaders that we have today. Thank you very much.

Renee Poussaint: You thought you were going to get a chance to start talking to each other again, didn't you? No. And there's good reason to stop, because we now have a wonderful video about the woman we are honoring today.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on video: Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen. I am most disappointed that I am unable to join you today, as I had looked forward with great anticipation to the opportunity of a lively exchange. As many of you know, Liberia today is at one of those key moments when we must make and sustain strong efforts to ensure that we consolidate the potential dividends of our hard-won peace and arrest the long-standing economic and financial decline. Our policies must respond to the deep wounds of our civil war and enhance national governance while quickly introducing measures of structural reform and reconstruction.

We must base our approach on the core principles of democracy, accountability, free enterprise, good governance, respect for human rights, and equitable and balanced distribution of our natural resources. We must respond to the particular needs of our women, in the informal sector, who constitute the majority of the poor due to the lack of access to resources, and those professionals who need more access to leadership and decision-making opportunities. We are moving in that direction, with women in Liberia leading key government agencies, such as Finance, Justice, Commerce, Youth and Sports, and Director of Police.

We have already started the processes of reconstruction, based upon a strategy of four pillars. The first is enhancing security and consolidating the peace through the process of restructuring, institutionalizing, and professionalizing our security forces. The second is to revitalize our economy, based upon policies that aim at creating an investment climate that will encourage investment in our vast natural resources. In policy reform of our fiscal and monetary systems, we have successfully completed the first phase of an IMF monitoring program, and we are now concluding our interim poverty reduction strategy, which will lead to a full-fledged poverty reduction strategy and a relief of our \$3.7 billion external debt under the HIPC arrangement.

The third element of our strategy is improving democratic governance, by opening the political space, decentralizing resource allocation and decision making, fighting pervasive corruption, and strengthening our judicial system. The fourth pillar of our agenda is revitalizing social and economic infrastructure, with education at the center for renewal and reconciliation. In one of our small but important achievements, we have been able to restore electricity and pipe-borne water to parts of our capital city for the first time in fifteen years.

All of these accomplishments are just a beginning. Our mission is to make the Liberian government work again. We want to respond to the dreams of our resilient people. Their dreams are not complicated. They just want the simple things that most people take for granted. To live their lives in peace, to get a good education for themselves and their children, and to be able to provide for their families. But time is pressing. Our efforts, joined by those of our partners, in the next few months, the next years, and beyond, will determine the future course of this nation. If we wait too long to achieve the policy changes and reforms that are needed, or if our international partners wait too long to ramp up their support, then we may lose the best chance Liberia has had in a generation to end the conflict permanently and build a foundation for growth and prosperity.

Our appeal to you, our most important partner, the United States, to you who represent them and who serve as our advocates, is that we cannot let this happen. You have already made a major investment in Liberia's progress, for which the Liberian people are grateful. Together, we can make Liberia a success story. We can build a new Liberia from the ashes of an old and tragic past into a future of hope and promise. I hope you have a good meeting, I look forward to other opportunities in the future to be with you in person, and I thank you for this opportunity.

Renee Poussaint: Ambassador Minor has been kind enough to agree to come to the podium and answer questions. If you have a question, please indicate it with your hand so that you can receive a handheld mike, stand up, give your name and affiliation, and a brief question for the ambassador.

Question: Debt forgiveness for Liberia: What are we going to do about it?

Ambassador Minor: I think that's one of the best questions I've heard today, it's a very interesting question. The answer wouldn't come from Liberia, obviously, although Liberia is doing everything in its capacity to meet all the requirements for debt forgiveness. In the next 24 hours there will be meetings with the Secretary of the Treasury and the IMF, and the objective of those meetings is to work towards achieving, on our side, all that we should do to enable those who have to make the decisions to make them as quickly as possible and get Liberia on the road to recovery, of our debts. There may be others here who have some light to throw on that question, perhaps you can join me on that.

Question: Mr. Ambassador, following your president's noting the urgency of the immediate ramping up of adequate aid to bring living facilities on line that had been so eroded over fifteen years in Liberia. Are you successfully receiving, in a quick fashion, the aid that the president said was so desperately needed?

Ambassador Minor: There are two sides to the answer of that question. One, the capacity in Liberia to quickly utilize resources and two, the extent to which resources are coming in. I'll deal with the last part of the question. The resources that have now been received are primarily grants and official bilateral and multilateral support for Liberia. You are aware, though, that those are tied to specific areas of performance, and those

areas are being tackled as aggressively as we possibly can. There are other areas of specific needs which are of a more social nature, which the government doesn't have the capacity to meet adequately, and most bilateral aid will not be able to address those specific areas. This is why, particularly in the area of education, et cetera, you can not very easily pass money over to the government of Liberia, but there are institutions, there are foundations that are being established to help address problems, and I think the president of the Liberian Education Foundation is here. She is here, and we have a foundation that is now raising support to help with education. The first one million dollars of it is earmarked and is being spent and we do hope to receive some more. Another foundation is underway to assist with the delivery of health services, and we do hope that that also will be supported, so that those two sectors, those two priority areas, will be easily and very quickly addressed. The bilateral aid coming from the U.S. government, part directed by the United States Congress. You know they have a way of being delivered, they have all of the procedures and the bureaucracy, and one of the cries we have been giving out is to expedite the process so that these funds are spent relatively rapidly, and meet the basic needs of our people as quickly as possible.

So the answer is, yes, we are on our way, but not as fast and as quickly as we would like to see, because most of our people are in so urgent a need for those services and the time is running out. We do not have a honeymoon for the president. She must deliver, and deliver as quickly as possible. So your assistance to Liberia will all be welcome, and we hope that we can get much of it as quickly as we can.

Question: We all noted with interest this year that the Nobel Peace Prize went to the economist in Bangladesh who was credited with his approach to helping very poor countries, with microcredit. And I wanted to ask, to what extent is that approach being used in Liberia, as a way to begin to create jobs, and particularly, as we know, many of the workforce are young women.

Ambassador Minor: Liberia is open for business and assistance, and that's the slogan of one of our agencies. We are open for support for microcredit activities, and I believe we are now raising a small fund primarily for market, credit and especially a fund that will be invested in market women. That is on the way. The fund is not yet at the level we wish it to be, and if anybody wishes to contribute to that fund, we will be able to direct you to whom the contributions should be sent. We have here in this hall today the African Development Foundation, that is already working hard at trying to make some resources available to small and medium enterprises. We are hoping that other funds will be made available, from the government and from the private sector, to enable our small and medium enterprises to obtain the resources required.

But in addition to financial resources, the resources of the people are critical. So human capital is also vitally in demand. As you know, a large number of our people left the country due to the war, and we are trying to attract them back. The private capital is not flowing as the people are flowing back, so we need resources to ensure that they can borrow money, set up their businesses, provide employment, and meet the need of our people.

Question: Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if I could turn your attention to some of the issues in Africa that we are confronting now and get your comments. What do you think the United States should be doing to prevent further violence in Sudan, and also, what is your view on the situation in Somalia?

Ambassador Minor: Liberia is very concerned about the crisis parts in Africa. As you know, we have been at the core of the West African crisis, and we're doing everything we can to ensure that our country is at peace with itself and at peace with all our neighbors. We support the efforts of the African Union to ensure that peace comes to Darfur and the whole region. The question, of course, is that African countries lack adequate resources and so we are delighted that with the assistance of the United States, the United Nations decided to support a new UN force there that will supplement, or complement, the responsibilities that have been in the hands of the African force to ensure that peace is restored in Darfur.

Liberia, as part of the African Union, is really working towards ensuring that all of the continent can be free of crisis so that people can begin to develop. But some of the basic underlying problems continue to exist in Liberia, and sending forces and sending relief is not enough. We've got to address the basic needs of our people so that the haves and the have-nots will not have these kind of clashes that result in the problems. But we are trying to work with the international organizations, and primarily the African Union, and obviously our relationship with the State Department here is extremely close, and I'm sure we would be prepared to do all we can, given the limitation of our own resources and capacity, to do what we can to bring peace to Darfur and the regions around it.

Question: On a more personal note, as the first woman president in Africa, and in her country as well, has there been a difference? It's often said, men and women lead differently, and I wondered if, against that background, has there been a special type of leadership, type of reception, type of effectiveness?

Ambassador Minor: With regard to effectiveness, I would say that we have seen far greater effectiveness in the last nine months since we've had her at the helm than we've had in the period immediately past. As for whether she is welcome, I believe that a large number of our people certainly appreciate her leadership and are supporting her efforts. Obviously, there are pockets who would not like to see us make progress, because those are people who were benefiting from the chaos of the past, and would like to see that happen again.

However, we strongly believe in the government that if we keep our focus, if we deliver what the people require, very soon we will have all Liberians supportive of the president. We don't have to worry about those who are trying to detract from what she's trying to do, obviously you have that in every society, and the government guarantees a right to free speech. We can criticize her. But we strongly believe that with the determination of the government and the direction that we are heading, all Liberians will benefit and we will begin to see a reduction in the kinds of comments and reactions we read from various

sectors that are opposed to her at the moment. But we believe that we have the majority supportive of her efforts.

Gail Leftwich Kitch: Thank you, Ambassador. Before I turn to some more remarks for a follow-up, and something more I want to do with the Ambassador, there's one thing I want to mention. Picking up on one of the comments that the Ambassador made about an opportunity for all of us to contribute to this effort, you will find on your tables envelopes which will allow you to supplement what we're already doing as an organization. The Women's Foreign Policy Group is going to be making a contribution to the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Market Women's Fund- I'll tell you more about this in a moment, but all of you have a chance to also join us in this contribution. If anyone of you know of a colleague of yours who might have already had to run out, you might want to pick up an envelope to give him or her a chance to contribute to this important work.

Now, let me go back to the formal part of the remarks, which is to say that this is the wrap-up of the program proper, but I certainly want to thank President Sirleaf, who won't be able to hear us, but knows that we're going to be offering her applause, for joining us today and for giving so much of her time. We come away with a better understanding of what the new Liberia faces and all of the efforts you are making to rebuild your country, and you of course as well, Mr. Ambassador, and change the lives of Liberians, especially women.

We salute the leadership of President Sirleaf and her courage and honor, and today we offer her an award as International Woman of the Year, and accepting the award on behalf of the President will be the Ambassador. We are very excited about this. This is our award, thank you Mr. Ambassador for accepting that for the President. We are giving this award in support of her efforts to change the lives of Liberians. The Women's Foreign Policy Group is also pleased to award its first international grant of \$7,000 from the proceeds of this event, so thank you to all of you who played a role in making those contributions.

We'll be making that contribution to, as I said, the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Market Women's Fund. The Fund is of special importance to the president and named in her honor as the first female president and granddaughter of a rural market woman. The Fund will strengthen all Liberian market women through provision of infrastructure, skills, training, and financial tools. As we said, contributions can be made in the envelopes which are on the tables, we can accept cash or checks, which should be made out to the Fund. Again, it's the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Market Women's Fund. Please drop your envelopes in the box at the registration desk or send them to the Women's Foreign Policy Group office.

I want to thank President Sirleaf again, and the Ambassador on her behalf, and of course thank all of you for joining us today. We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events and at our Annual Luncheon event next year. Thanks so much, have a great afternoon.

Ambassador Minor: I gladly accept this on behalf of our president and thank you very much, and regret again that she couldn't be here, but the weather prevented her plane from taking off with her yesterday. God bless all of you.