

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE
BANQUET IN HONOUR OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA,
H.E. MADAME ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi: 11-09-2013

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome Your Excellency, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and your distinguished delegation on your first State visit to India.

2. Madame President, it is indeed an honour for us to receive you today. You are the first elected lady President in Africa, an icon of women's empowerment and though you are known as "the Iron Lady", you have been an angel of hope, optimism and change in Liberia .

3. Since your momentous election to the office of President for the first time in 2006, you have been on a Mission to realise your vision of freedom, democracy and peace in Liberia. You have toiled relentlessly to spread education, change attitudes and establish a new social order. Your Government has introduced and implemented wide-ranging reforms. You have made it a priority to foster gender equality and empower the women of Liberia with the right of equal participation in the decision making processes. You have used the resources of your country – which God has given you so amply, for the good of your people. Your steadfast determination and inspiring leadership has helped Liberia become a land of opportunity. You have, indeed, dramatically altered the course for Liberia, and are, today , a guiding light, an example of women's leadership that will inspire communities and nations not only in Africa , but across the globe.

4. Madame President, your visit to India is an occasion for us to celebrate the centuries-old relationship between India and the African nations. We have together evolved and shaped our long standing ties of

friendship and co-operation into a very comprehensive partnership. Today, we have moved beyond trade and investment to technology transfers, knowledge sharing and skills. The India-Africa partnership has been reinvigorated and is steadily acquiring new dimensions as we take it forward under the India-Africa Forum Summit process. Excellency, we see the Africa of today as a continent that is illuminated by the freedom, optimism and confidence that its people have in the power of their own potential. Guided by the wisdom of their ancestors, enthused by the vigour of their young generations, sustained by their rich diversity and natural resources and inspired by the vast horizons opening up to them, there is no limit to what Africans can achieve in terms of progress and prosperity. The continent is today at a thresh-hold, embarking on a path of sustained growth and poised to play a defining role on the world stage.

5. In this context, Excellency, we believe that India's own experience, since we emerged from colonial rule, could be of relevance to Liberia's socio-economic development. Our development partnership with Liberia will respond to your requirements as you choose your priorities and options - and forge your independent path of advancement and growth. In our current bilateral dialogue, we are rightly focussed on building capacity, human resource development , establishing institutions and helping to develop social and physical infrastructure. We remain committed to our work with Liberia and to leverage our strengths to assist in whatever way we can.

6. Indeed, Excellency, Your visit provides an opportunity for our two Governments to identify and agree on new programmes and initiatives that will bring our people closer together in collaborative programmes and partnerships. You had once said, Excellency, and I quote," *Our people's courage and patience are formidable, but their expectations are high*". I am confident that as you lead Liberia into a bright and optimistic future, our enhanced cooperation will bind us in a very successful and enduring partnership.

7. Excellency, you will receive the Indira Gandhi Award for Peace, Disarmament and Development for the Year 2012 tomorrow. This award is an apt recognition of your exceptional dedication towards your country and your fellow citizens. Your remarkable vision and leadership, grounded in the principles of good governance and accountability will, no doubt, generate and sustain transformative economic growth and development in Liberia. I was deeply impressed by one of your statements which I shall quote, *“Be not afraid to denounce injustice, though you may be outnumbered. Be not afraid to seek peace, even if your voice may be small.”* Your words and the success of your perseverance remind me of the words of Mahatma Gandhi when he said : *“A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history”*.

8. Excellency, I do hope your visit to India is enjoyable and satisfying. We wish you a very comfortable stay in Delhi. I look forward to our work together in the coming years.

9. Ladies and Gentlemen, may I request you to join me in raising a toast.

- To the health, happiness and well being of Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.
- To the well being and prosperity of the people of Liberia
- To lasting friendship between India and Liberia.
