

very warm welcome from the Liberian people, from our young people, from our students, who lined the route and waved and showed flags. We're just so pleased and honored. Thank you, President Bush, for making this trip.

President Bush. Madam President, thanks. I've been looking forward to coming here ever since you extended the kind invitation to me. I do want to thank the people of Liberia for the warm welcome that we have received. I loved all the smiles and the enthusiasm along the route.

Most importantly, I want the people of Liberia to know, Madam President, the United States stands with you. We want

to help you recover from a terrible period. We want you to build lives of hope and peace. And under your leadership, that's exactly what's happening. It is my honor to have presented you with the National Medal of Freedom. It's the highest civilian award a President can give, and I did so because of your courage and your leadership. And we are so excited to be with you.

Thank you.

President Johnson Sirleaf. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:23 a.m. at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Remarks at a Lunch Hosted by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia in Monrovia

February 21, 2008

Madam President, I want to make sure I've got the following correctly: Here they call you the "Iron Lady," and here they call you "Ma." And I call you friend.

We are honored to be here. Laura and I are thrilled to be here with our delegation to end what has been a very productive trip to the continent of Africa. I can't think of a better place to finish than in—with our dear friend, Liberia.

It is easy to destroy a country; it is hard to rebuild a country. And I—Madam President, I want you to know that the United States of America supports you as you rebuild your country. We share a special his-

tory with Liberia. It's a history that is deep, and I want the people of your beautiful country to know that our help is just beginning.

And so, Madam President, I propose a toast to you and the strength of your leadership and the quality of your character. And to the good people of Liberia, may God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:54 p.m. in the Executive Mansion. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Johnson Sirleaf.

Remarks During a Visit to the Barclay Training Center in Monrovia

February 21, 2008

Madam President, you're right: We have met four times, and every time, I'm the better for it. [*Laughter*] I appreciate the

warm welcome we've received from the people of your beautiful country.

We bring with us the greetings and best wishes of the American people. I'm proud to be traveling today not only with a strong delegation, headed by my wife, but also the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice.

I'm so honored to be with your troops. I'm looking forward to the display of talent and professionalism we're about to see. I thank those who've worked hard to help them become professional soldiers, all in the cause of bringing peace and security to the people of Liberia.

Though we're over 4,500 miles from the United States, I feel pretty much at home here. In Liberia, you fly the "lone star" flag. [Laughter] Of course, I was the former Governor of Texas. [Laughter] We call ourselves the Lone Star State. [Laughter] Your capital is named for an American President, and, of course, I am an American President. [Laughter] The name of your country, Liberia, means "land of the free," and there is no place I feel more welcome than a land where liberty is love and the hope of freedom reigns.

This country was founded by former American slaves who came here seeking the freedom they had been denied in my country. Through hard work and determination, they established the first independent republic on the continent of Africa. The free country they built became a source of pride for her people and a strong ally in the cause of freedom. As the President said, Franklin Roosevelt came here in 1943 to confer with your great President, Edwin Barclay. Together, our two nations helped defeat the forces of fascism. Together, our two nations helped saved millions from lives of tyranny and despair.

In the intervening years, Liberia saw days of challenge and sorrow. You suffered the descent into dictatorship and chaos. Civil wars took the lives of hundreds of thousands of your citizens. Yet even in their darkest moments, the Liberian people never gave up on the hope that this great nation would once again be the land of the free that its founders intended.

In 2005, you reclaimed your liberty. You went to the polls and chose the first woman ever elected to lead an African nation. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has been a strong leader for the Liberian people. She has been a strong partner of the United States of America. I'm proud to call her friend, and I'm proud of the work we are doing together to help the people of this nation build a better life.

Together, we're fighting the scourge of disease. It is irresponsible for comfortable nations to stand by knowing that young babies are dying from mosquito bites. It is unnecessary, and the United States will continue to lead the cause to eradicate malaria from the continent of Africa.

We're working to lift the burden of debt so that Liberia can achieve her potential and unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of her citizens. We're working to help the children of Liberia get a good education so they'll have the skills they need to turn their freedom into a future of prosperity and peace. And today, Madam President, I'm proud to announce that the United States will provide 1 million textbooks over the next year, as well as desks and seating for at least 10,000 Liberian schoolchildren by the start of the new school year.

Together, with the help of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, we're working to heal the wounds of war and strengthen democracy and build a new armed forces that will be a source of security for the Liberian people, instead of a source of terror.

In all these areas, we're making good progress. You know, one of the things I've learned and I suspect the people of Liberia have learned, it's easier to tear a country down than it is to rebuild a country. And the people of this good country must understand, the United States will stand with you as you rebuild your country.

And you are making progress, and it's possible because of the iron will of the lady you lovingly refer to as "Ma." That

would be you, Madam President. [*Laughter*] I appreciate the fact that you've ushered in an age of reform, and you've opened up a new chapter in the relationship between our country. And as you mentioned, it was my high honor to welcome you to the White House last year and present you with America's highest civil honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

I'm pleased to visit your land. I thank you for the invitation. I thank the Liberian

people for courage and steadfastness and enduring faith in the power of freedom. With your continued determination, there is no doubt in my mind that Liberia will become a beacon of liberty for Africa and the world, and you will forever uphold the "lone star."

May God bless you, and may God bless the people of Liberia.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:34 p.m.

Remarks Prior to a Discussion on Education in Monrovia February 21, 2008

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. Mr. President, Mrs. Bush, fellow Liberians: We have been pleased that with the support of the United States Government to our education rebuilding process, we can now say that we're beginning to see the signs of progress.

Mr. President, today you will be listening to some of the beneficiaries who will be sharing their experience with you. They've been supported through the United States Agency for International Development, the President's Africa Education Initiative. Liberia currently receives assistance for adult learners, primary school students, school infrastructure, teacher training, the accelerated learning program, and improvement of higher education.

Thank you for being here with us. And thank you for all that you do, for helping us to rebuild our educational system.

President Bush. Thank you, Madam President. [*Applause*] Does that mean you want me to speak? [*Laughter*]

President Johnson Sirleaf. You speak a little bit, and I'll introduce the—

President Bush. Okay, good, yes. The President said, we have met four times since she's been President. I said out there at the parade grounds that every time, I'm a better person for it, since she's a—[*ap-*

plause]. This is the last event on the last stop of what has been a comprehensive trip around the continent of Africa. And it's a fitting—fitting that we talk about education as the last subject to discuss.

First of all, I just want you to know that, Madam President, we admire you, and we appreciate your leadership. I particularly appreciate your commitment to liberty and freedom. Now, the problem is, of course, it's one thing to be for freedom, but it's really important to have a healthy, educated group of folks to be able to realize the blessings of freedom.

And so our desire in the United States is to answer the universal call to love a neighbor and to help those—I believe to whom much is given, much is required. A lot has been given the United States of America, and I firmly believe it's in our national interest to help others not only realize the blessings of liberty but to fight disease when we find it and to deal with illiteracy where we encounter it.

And so our initiative on malaria or the AIDS initiative is all aimed at saving lives, which in essence helps save societies. And same thing with our education initiative. And so we really appreciate you all coming to share your message with us. I hope you're not nervous. [*Laughter*] I bet you're