

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 correct: 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 history 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 save 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 war took the lives of hundreds of thousands