

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—[*applause*]. 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 not, because all you got to do is tell us what's on your mind. Just share your stories, and I think people will find that they're most interested.

But what you must know here in Liberia is that the United States of America is with you, and we'll stay with you because we want you to succeed. It's in the interest of the United States of America that Liberia do well. And so, Madam President, we are—[*applause*]*—*we're proud to stand with you. We're not going to tell you what to do because you're plenty competent. I believe African leaders can run African countries. But I do believe the United States of America can help. And that's exactly what we're going to discuss today, Madam President.

So thank you very much for that introduction. And Laura is thrilled to be here as well. She is the librarian in the family. [*Laughter*]

President Johnson Sirleaf. That's right.

[*At this point, the discussion continued, and no transcript was provided.*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:04 p.m. at the University of Liberia.

Interview With Reporters Aboard Air Force One

February 21, 2008

Press Secretary Dana Perino. So I thought the President and Mrs. Bush would spend a little bit of time with you, with their reflections, on the record. We don't have a lot of time, especially because Ben Feller [Associated Press] is not feeling well.

The President. I would say this is one of the most exciting trips of my Presidency. Exciting because when we first got to Washington, Africa was—parts of Africa were in turmoil, not much had been to arrest disease, there wasn't intense world focus on the continent. The second trip to Africa for me, the fifth for Laura, was a chance to herald courageous people in their efforts to deal with hopelessness. And what really made me happy was that the people of Africa have come to appreciate the generosity of the American people.

I had a couple of goals. One was to encourage people to continue to make difficult choices—democracy is hard work—but also assure them that we'd stay with them if they made the right choices.

Secondly, I wanted to highlight for the American people what the—that great compassionate work is being done. And I'll give you some—Laura can share some anecdotes too. You know, in the hospital in Tanzania, to see a 3-year-old baby survive a mosquito bite when years earlier probably wouldn't have was a very compelling moment for me.

To have the little orphans in Rwanda put on such a cheerless—a cheery face because somebody is trying to provide them love was inspiring to me. To watch their little guys play tee-ball—all of whom were orphans—against the little school and see how inspired they were, but also see the concern and care of their mentors and coaches, was very inspiring to me.

All of these programs are supported by the American taxpayer, and all of them matter.