



Advancing Gender Equality and Women Empowerment for Reshaping Societies: A Textual Meta-Functional Analysis of Helen Johnson Sirleaf's Selected Speeches

Issa Djimet

University of Doba, Chad

Kouago Abdoulaye

Adam Barka University of Abeche, Chad

Robert Mamadi

Adam Barka University of Abeche, Chad

Abstract - This paper sets out to examine Helen Johnson Sirleaf's selected speeches to construe the message assigned through thematic selection and ultimately understand how the orator tackles and ponders on gender matters through this. To carry out the analysis, it uses Halliday's metafunctional system of textual analysis to underline meanings beyond surface. The methodology adopted for the analysis is the mixed method, that is, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are applied. The description of Theme patterns revealed that experiencers, doers, carriers, behavers, sensors, bearers of actions and state (*I, Women, We, people, leaders*) are mainly thematized, followed by *challenges, bids* and *progress* in gender fight. In addition, place and time circumstances were much employed as message units by the speaker, leading to important Markedness of Topical Themes. As regards Themes types, there were more textual themes than Interpersonal ones. This signifies that the speaker carefully and locally developed the message, though with less attitudinal expressions towards gender. Through such a variety of topical elements, 'Iron lady' did a complete account of the gender related issues, showing whom it concerns in time and places, its solemnity, the challenges associated to it and progress achieved so far for the betterment of women life condition in societies.

Keywords: textual analysis, message, gender, progress, society.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it would be nearly unbearable or absurd to talk about a fair and just society without gender equality (Chimamanda, 2014; Matos, 2015; Sekouchi and Bouchebbah, 2022). The Gender Equality Advisory Council highlighted this during G7 Hiroshima summit in 2023, upholding that the world is better when women are involved in all aspects of life (GEAC, 2023). In the world democracies, advancing gender equality and empowerment of women and girls for shaping societies is more



than a necessity, it is an imperative. World leaders, civil rights activists and organizations hold conferences, debates and seminars to exchange experiences on how to build an equitable world where both males and females can have equal opportunities in accessing social structures at all levels.

Helen Johnson, being a female, knows better what it means being female in a 'male-made world' especially violent environment from which she emerged to the sphere of high leadership. She took advantage of her arena in many international instances to propound ways for building a fair world for all. As a learned person, she had the magnetism to relate the unheard voices and her words echoed beyond the borders of Liberia, a country where, once upon a time, military mannerism and unconstitutional acts were at the forefront of governance, with damaging impacts on women particularly (Botha, 2012; Katamba, 2022).

Helen Johnson fought for gender equality and women empowerment for better societies in her many a speech, of which her remarks at the United Nation general assembly on gender equality and empowerment of women on march 6, 2015 in New York and her speech to the annual summit of the women in Parliament Global Forum on "Reshaping Society through Female Leadership" in the European Parliament on November 27, 2013.

While some discourse analysts (Katamba 2022; Adegaju, 2020), respectively employed 'Presidential Rhetoric' and socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis to explore the way Helen Johnson mobilizes people for a common goal and ideology, this present work sets out to analyze the aforementioned speeches with a different approach, notably the textual metafunction analysis. It uses metrics described by Halliday and Mathiessen (2004) to show how Johnson uses discourse to produce, represent and change social realities as concerns gender related matters.

1. Theoretical Background

1.1. Functional Grammar

One of the tenets of functional grammar as propounded by Halliday & Mathiessen (2004) views clause as message. In the realm of metafunctional grammar, meaning can be attached and/or deciphered beyond sentence level through the selection or examination of the first element to come at the beginning of a clause – that is the Thematized element. It presents clause as basic constituent around which meaning is articulated. Each clause contains a Theme as the foremost part of the message and a Rheme as the last part of the message. Halliday (1985) defines Theme as the



constituent which acts as the starting point of the message or what the clause is going to be about; whereas Rheme is the last element of the clause in which the Theme is developed (Djimet, 2022). In other words, Theme refers to the first selection in a clause or the first constituent that comes at the beginning of clause. This element is generally a nominal group, an adverbial group, a prepositional group or predicator. Theme is then categorized into three types: Topical, Interpersonal and Textual (Eggs 1994). A Topical Theme is the constituent of the clause which has a Transitivity function such as actor, behavior, sensor, carrier, circumstantial elements (place, time, etc.). An Interpersonal Theme is the component of the message to which a Mood value can be assigned: finite (in interrogative mood) and adjuncts (vocative, mood, comment, polarity). A Textual Theme is the part of the clause which has a cohesive role such as Continuity Adjuncts and Conjunctive Adjuncts.

Moreover, a Theme can be labelled as Marked or Unmarked. In fact, Unmarked Theme is a 'normal' or 'typical' Theme as message component. Unmarked Theme is generally a Subject, Finite, Predicator, WH- elements at the beginning of a message unit, that is to say clause whereas a marked Theme is a component of the clause which corresponds to any other constituents from the Mood system. The usual type of marked Theme is circumstantial elements or a foregrounding of complement coming right before the subject (Djimet, 2022).

2. Method

The mixed method is employed to carry out this endeavor. This means that both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used to help compensate the shortcomings of each methods (Creswell, 2015; APA, 2020). The qualitative approach is meant for deductive analysis of the text through tally of tokens and conversion into percentage. On the same tokens, in-depth interpretation is done for more comprehensive understanding, thus providing an inductive or qualitative aspect of the analysis.

Following Matthiessen's postulate that Theme elements carry in them a message beyond the surface meaning they have, the selected speeches were split into meaningful segments known as clause, which constitutes the basic elements of the analysis. Numerals were ascribed to each clause from which Theme components were identified and quantified. Since a clause may contain more than one type of Theme, the different types of Theme (that is Topical, Interpersonal and Textual) were identified and categorized. Also, special attention was paid to sort atypical Topical Themes termed as Marked Theme. After tally, percentages were assigned to



entities to make them meaningful. Then, topicalized elements were clustered around contextual affinities in which they were used. Since each clause must contain one topical element, the number of clauses entails the number of Topical Themes.

3. Results

3.1. Theme Analysis of Text 1

This section presents findings of the analysis done on Remarks by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf at the United Nation General Assembly, High-Level Thematic Debate Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls for a Transformative Post - 2015 Development Agenda, New York, March 6, 2015.

Table 1 below presents the distribution of different types of Theme. It actually shows the number of clauses in which different types of themes are located in the text.

Table 1. Theme types distribution

Theme	Number	Total	Percentage
Textual	3, 14, 15, 18, 19, 26, 31, 32, 33, 37, 38, 43	12	27.27
Interpersonal	1	1	2.27
Topical	1 ... 44	44	100

As it can be easily inferred from the results above, 12 clauses carry Textual Theme out of 44 sorted. This gives 27.27%. It entails that the message was cohesive, tightly articulated. The analysis revealed only one Interpersonal Theme; this gives 2.27% and shows a state of concentration on the message to convey but not on whom receives it. But also, it is a result of the brevity of the address. Topical Theme types scored 100%. Knowing that each of the 44 clause which constituted the text must contain one Topical, the number of clauses entails that of Topical Theme; as such it is not much an analyzable unit in this case.

The next level of analysis was to categorize topical elements to deduce their significance from their occurrence. Topicalized elements were minutely examined and clustered in consideration of their contextual meaning as understood from the text. Table 2 below presents this distribution.

Table 2. Topical Theme distribution

Token	Number	Total	Percentage
I	1, 39, 40, 42	4	9.10
Women	3, 11, 12, 13, 23	5	11.40
We all	2, 5, 14, 18, 26, 29, 33, 35, 36	9	20.50
Call	25, 27	2	4.50



Circumstance of time	4, 7, 9, 31	4	9.10
Circumstance of place	8, 30	2	4.50
Summit, conference, events	6, 15, 38	3	6.80
Any other things	10, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 28, 32, 34, 37, 41, 43, 44	15	34.10

As it can be seen in the table above, *We all* is the most Topicalized Theme. It was used 9 times and represents 20.50%. The next element to be given more attention by the speaker is *women*; it was employed 5 times with 11.40%. The speaker did not much mention herself as Theme. *I* occurred 4 times throughout the text and gives 9.10%. The speaker made call for action twice (4.40%). Time circumstances were Topicalized 4 times (9.10) just like *I*. Place circumstances gained less attention. They scored 2 instances of occurrences (4.50%). Summits, conferences and events related to gender issues were referred to as well. These were used 3 times and provide 6.80%. Other items were Topicalized 15 times (34.10%).

The following analysis concerns Theme Markedness or Unmarkedness. This distribution is sorted in the table below.

Table 3. Theme Markedness and Unmarkedness

Themes	Number	Total	Percentage
Marked	6, 7, 8, 9, 31	5	11.40
Unmarked		39	88.60

Results revealed that very few Themes were Marked. Only 5 (that is 11.40) Themes are Marked as in clauses 5,7, 9, and 31 in the text.

3.2. Text 2

The second text under analysis is the speech given by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf at the Annual Summit of the Women in Parliament Global Forum on “Reshaping Society through Female Leadership” European Parliament, Wednesday, November 27, 2013.

Table 4. Theme types

Theme	Number	Total	Percentage
Textual	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 18, 22, 23, 26, 30, 31, 35, 51, 52, 53, 71, 72, 84, 91, 94, 98, 99, 103	20	19.30
Interpersonal	1, 77, 82, 89, 92, 102	6	5.80
Topical	All clause items	104	100



Findings have revealed that Textual Themes occurred 20 times, corresponding to 19.30% through the use of conjunctions and the likes. This shows the text's coherence and cohesiveness. On the other side, Interpersonal Themes scored 5 instances of occurrence and this gives 5.80%. Naturally, Topical Themes give 100%, knowing that each clause must contain one Topical Theme. The discourse lays an emphasis on doers, sayers, tokens, behavers, sensors, carriers whose actions, behaviors, attitudes and utterances provide important cues to understanding the message.

Just like in text 1, Thematic elements which constitute the basic part of the message were examined and clustered considering their semantic value. These tokens are tallied and presented in the table below.

Table 5. Theme distribution

Tokens	Number	Total	Percentage
I	1, 2, 4, 23, 63, 104	6	5.80
Women	5, 6, 10, 18, 22, 26, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 58, 60, 64, 68, 71, 75, 86	18	17.30
We	7, 12, 14, 15, 30, 39, 47, 48, 52, 70, 77, 78, 82, 83, 84, 89, 92, 102	18	17.30
Leaders	24, 28	2	1.90
People in general	19, 21, 22, 51, 99	5	4.80
Time circums.	9, 20, 27, 34, 76	5	4.80
Place/liberia /africa	16, 25, 33, 35, 46, 57, 69, 73, 90, 91,	10	9.60
Other circum.	29, 37, 49, 50, 85, 88, 95	7	6.70
Bids	32, 36, 38, 45, 53, 54, 55, 59, 65, 66, 72, 79, 93, 94, 96	15	14.40
Challenges for equality	34, 56, 61, 62, 74, 97, 99, 100, 101	9	8.80
Any	3, 8, 11, 13, 17, 80, 81, 87, 103	9	8.60

Statistics revealed that the speaker centered the message on *We all* mainly. This token occurred 18 times and equals 17.30%. Similarly, the next token which bore an important part of the message is *Women*; it occurred 18 times and gives 17.30% of the textual elements used. The speaker did not much propound herself as the central doer, sensor or bearer of actions. Instead, few instances of use projected *I* as Topical element. This was employed 5 times (5.80%). *Leaders* occurred 2 times (1.90%). Also, *People in general* were involved as message unit 5 times (4.80%). Circumstances in which events happen were also pondered by the speaker. In fact, *Time circumstances* ensued 5 times (4.80%) but *place circumstances* (In Liberia, In Africa etc.) scored 10 (9.60%), twice more than *Time circumstances*. Other circumstances such as *Despite the correction of long years of neglect* in clause (29) occurred 7 times (6.70%).



The next element which was much given attention in the text is tokened as Bids. This was termed to group any progress or action in gender equality and women security and the likes. *Bids* is used 15 times (14.40%). Moreover, *Challenges for equality* occurred 9 times (8.80%); *any other things* Topicalized occurred scored the same (8.890%)

Lastly, Theme Markedness in the second text under analysis was dealt with as well. Findings are presented in the following table.

Table 6. Theme Markedness and Unmarkedness

Theme	Number	Total	Percentage
Marked	9, 20, 25, 27, 29, 33, 37, 40, 46, 57, 69, 73, 76, 90, 91, 95	16	15.40
Unmarked	Any remaining numbers	88	84.60

As it can be observed in the table above, the statistics proved that out of 104 Topical Themes, 16 (15.40%) are Marked or atypical. Topical Themes in text 2 are slightly more marked than those in text 1. Meanwhile, the 88 (84.60%) remaining themes are unmarked, typical.

4. Discussion of findings

Quantitatively, textual Themes under the form of *where, and, yet, as, but, then, that, as* in clause 3, 14, 15, 18, 26, etc., scored 27.27% in texts1; while elements such as *since, but, that, when, furthermore, however, and, until, nevertheless, for*, in clauses (5, 10, 13, 18, 25, 51, 53, 75), in text 2, scored 19.30%. These textual elements show that the message carried in texts 1 and 2 under analysis is logically elaborated, extended and enhanced; it implies a state of preparedness and neatness of the speaker. Even though Textual elements do not carry semantic meaning, they largely contribute to the cohesion and logical flow of ideas. Mindful of that, the speaker links ideas tightly in expressing relationships of cause and effect, concession, contradiction, etc. Interpersonal Themes scored 2.27% and 5.80% in Text1 and Text 2 respectively. The speaker does not comment on her message, nor does she question her audience, in which case it would generate interrogative finite but not polarities items as Interpersonal Theme. This superficial use of Interpersonal entails her application on the main message to deliver, the precision and brevity of the message, but not much on whom is listening. Topical Theme are not analyzable units in this section but in the following.

With consideration to the topicalized items, there is such a diversity as people, events, circumstances, etc. The speaker did not much refer to herself (5.80%). By this,



she expresses modesty of her personality and her consciousness that she is not the only carrier of actions, sensor or bearer of things related to gender equality for shaping societies. She actually means 'I have not come to talk about myself'. She mentioned *I* only when her personal action or behavior is solicited as in clauses 1, 2, 4, 23, 39, 63, 104 etc. _ *I reflect back on the past 120 years and I would have served and left a better country than I found.*

The token *Women* scored 11.40% and 17.30% in Text 1 and Text 2, respectively as core message elements. The speaker came to let people know women too can hold any position in socio-professional life (clause 3, 4, 5 in T1) and that respect of their rights and their empowerment brings socioeconomic changes as exemplified in clauses (75, 87, 86, 88 etc.). She intended to say that the main victims of violence in general and particularly gender-based issues are women first, not men _ *They bear the scars of conflict more than anyone else (Text clause 60).* The author is conscious about everybody's responsibility in women's life condition and that it is only with the contributions of all people that the situation can be remedied. This was shown in her use of tokens *We all* in Text 1 (17.30%) and Text 2 (20.50%); *leaders* (1.90%), *People in general* (4.80%). This was uttered in clause (2, 5, 14, 24, 26, 29, 33, 35, 36, 77, 78, 89, 92) _ *We (all) need to understand the root causes of discrimination and to tackle them head-on. we must create space for civil society to hold governments accountable, we must carefully examine our culture and social norms to understand why gender inequality is tolerated and perpetuated.*

Furthermore, the speaker regarded circumstances of time and place as other main factors to consider as far as gender is concerned. Through circumstantial Themes such as *In Liberia, In my country, Across Africa, In Rio, At a summit, Now, In a few months, In February 2013* etc. as enacted in clauses 7, 8, 9, 25, 30, 33, 73, the speaker means that gender issues are inherent societal problems regardless of space and time, without limit. Put another way, gender inequality does not only pertain to Liberia or Africa but it does concern countries worldwide; it is not only today or this year but it was before. Other circumstances such as *Summit, conference, events* that connect to gender issues were topicalized with a score of 6.80% and 6.70% in Text 1 and Text 2, respectively. This enlightens that the speaker was mindful and cautious about all things surrounding women life condition in the societies.

In addition, instances of action that constituted bids or progress in gender advancement, women empowerment and shaping societies and so forth, were much topicalized, for instance in clauses 32, 36, 38, 45, 53, 54, 55, 59, 65, 66, 72, 79, 93, 94, 96 with a score of 14.40% in Text 2. These Topical Themes are *Advances in gender*



equality, This hopeful and rosy picture, Advances in these areas, The Declaration, National programs to redress inequalities and, to cite but a few. These were core elements of the message. For, the extent of their thematization shows that the orator pondered on them. In fact, these are indicators that the battle for gender equality is being won, even though much is to be done.

However, the orator was conscious about challenges related to gender such as violence and unfair treatment towards women. In clauses 34, 56, 61, 62, 74, 97, she mentioned topicalized *Violence against women, These injuries, The economic costs to the victim's family, community and society, rape etc.*, with a score of 8.60%. By naming these ills, she clearly demonstrated her hobbyhorse; she told people that something is happening out there and called them to actions. Besides, the last category of thematized items is labelled as *anything*. This refers to token such as indefinite pronouns (*It, There*) and other tokens which do not have significant or specific value for this analysis. Such Topical elements scored as high as 34.10% in Text 1 and 8.60% in Text 2 correspondingly, thus showing diversity in message components in the speech.

Finally, the results proved that Topical Themes were 15.40% in Text1 and 11.40% in Text 2. Marked Themes in both texts are made up of circumstances of time and place. This implies that the orator's intention is to communicate about place (countries, continents) and time (now, times back). Ultimately, she means that gender inequality and boredoms are not only problems for Liberia, Africa but it is experienced everywhere in the world under any forms; it does not date from today but years or centuries back. Simply put, gender issues are limited neither in place nor in time.

CONCLUSION

Helen Johnson Sirleaf inherited a country devastated by civil war. When she got in power in 2005, more than 15,000 United Nation peacemakers were still in the country, Liberia (Adegbite, 2019). She fought for building peace and justice including gender equality; she won the Nobel Prize for peace making by the way. In the light of the analysis done based on Halliday's theory of textual grammar, and following the interpretation and discussion of findings above, it appeared that former President of Liberia is neat, precise in her delivery. The variety of Themes (Textual, Interpersonal and Topical), that of Topical items (*I, Women, We all, Challenges, Bids etc.*) and their Markedness, which embodies an emphasis, unveils the orator's stronghold in communication about gender concerns. Her thematization



enclosed all circumstances, challenges, progress in female life and her mentioning of all stakeholders in gender questions proved her awareness about the problem at hand. Therefore, she pleads and calls for gender equality in order to build a new world with balanced access for both women and men. This fight is multidimensional. First, it is socio-cultural, for inequality starts in societies' cultural embodiment and legacy. The collective imagination about gender inequality must change for advancing gender. Second, it should be legal or judiciary in that laws made by governments and right movements reduce injustice and violence done to females. Finally, it should be coordinated widely in time and space because it is a global phenomenon through ages. The world has become a global village where any unjust action (injustice) somewhere constitutes a threat everywhere. Helen Johnson did highlight these things in her talks, calling people for collaboration and action for a better world, knowing that no one acting alone can achieve success in such a fight.

REFERENCES

- Adegoju, A. (2022). Manipulative rhetoric and post-war reconstruction in president Johnson Sirleaf's first inaugural address. *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 19 (1), 105 – 118.
- Adebite, A. (2019). *Language dynamism: a cross-cultural analysis of political language dynamism: a cross-cultural analysis of political discourse*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Syracuse University.
- Botha, M. (2012). African leadership and the role of the presidency in African conflicts: A case study of Uganda's president Yoweri Museveni. Unpublished Thesis, Stellenbosch University.
- Creswell, W. J. (Eds) (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. London: SAGE Publication, Inc.
- Djimet, I. (2022). Language use as a means to construct realities: Theme patterns in Joe Biden's speech on the anniversary of the capitol attack. *European Scientific Journal*, 18(13), 29-42.
- Egins, S (1994). *An introduction to systemic functional linguistics*. London: Pinter Publisher.
- Gender Equality Advisory Council. (2023). *Gender mainstream for an inclusive, peaceful and just society*. G7 2023 Hiroshima Summit.



- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An introduction to systemic functional grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K., and Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar*. Oxford: Hodder Arnold.
- Katamba, M. (2022). The rhetorical analysis of president Hellen Johnson Sirleaf's inaugural speech as the first Africa's elected female president. *Akdeniz Havzası ve Afrika Medeniyetleri Dergisi*, 4(2), 71-82.
- Samben, C. (2021). Gender equality and its importance in society. *African Journal of Gender and Women Studies*. 6(3). Retrieved, September 18, 2021, from www.internationalscholarsjournals.com
- Adichie, N. C. (2014). *We should all be feminist*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Matos, J. (2015). Women's rights in public address: A feminist rhetorical critique. *Colloquy*, 11, 1-22.
- Sekouchi. L. & Bouchebbah. Y. (2022). *A Rhetorical analysis of Hillary Clinton's speeches: "Key-note speech" (2013) and "Women's rights are human rights speech" (1995)*. Retrieved, December 7, 2023, from Re-searchGate.

APPENDIX

1 H.E. SAM K. KUTESA, PRESIDENT OF THE 69TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

H.E. MR. BAN KI-MOON, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

MS. PHUMZILE MIAMBO- NGCUKA, EXECUTIVE -DIRECTOR OF UN WOMEN

H.E. HON. KOLINDA GRABAR-KITAROVIC, PRESIDENT OF CROATIA

H.E. HON. AHMET DAVUTOGLU, PRIME MINISTER OF TURKEY

MS. SIVANANTHI THANENTHIRAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASIAN-PACIFIC RESOURCE & RESEARCH CENTRE FOR WOMEN (AAROW) NOHELIA PROTECTED (YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE)

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

MR. PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND MADAME EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, I thank you for the invitation. 45 I could do no less than respond favorably to join you and the Women of the World in this truly monumental year.



2, we came together in Beijing, 17,000 governments from all over the world and 26,000 activists to envision a world 3 *where* women and Girls have equal rights, freedom and opportunity in all spheres of life. 4 This year marks the 20th anniversary of that historic event, when 5 we adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

6 At a summit in January in Addis Abba, members of the African Union promoted a stakeholders' consultation on the progress and challenges relating to women advancement, In the year 2015 designated by them as the year of Women Empowerment and Development in promotion of Agenda 2063. 7 In February 2015, San Diego, Women leaders of the global community declared 2015 a year for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment.

8 In Rio, World leaders reaffirmed their commitment to ensure women's equal rights, access to opportunity and participation in leadership in the economy, security and political decision making.

9In a few months, members of the United Nations will adopt a Post 2015 development Agenda which will call once again for more concrete action in advocating Gender Equality & Empowerment of Women & Girls for a transformative world.

10 There is no doubt that progress has to be made in the 20 years since Beijing more girls are educated, rural women have found their voices, 11 more women hold professional position, more women are chief executives in the private sector, 12 more women are in parliament, and in exceptionally high percentage such as in Rwanda, 13more women are vying for high political office 14 and some of us have finally broken the glass ceiling.

15 Yet, as the San Diego Conference points out, 16 the current pace of change has been much too slow, much too slow so that at the current pace; 17 it will take 81 years to achieve gender equity in the work place 18 *where* we have the highest echelon remains largely male 19 and It will take 75 years to reach remuneration between men and women for work of equal value and more than 30 to reach gender balance in discussion making.

20This simply is a clear manifestation of an unjust world 21that seeks to leave no one behind. 22It is not enough to make nice speeches, hold international meetings, issue communique and declarations. 23Women leaders have said unequivocally,24 it is time for equality and have issued a call for action, to achieve planet 5050 by 2030. 25This call seeks a commitment to address 12 critical areas of concern -



essentially for the protection, education and training for women and girls ensuring access to information and the factors for production; especially for rural women; removing the constraints that lead to participation, in decision making at all levels in the society.

26 As we continue negotiation for a post 2015-development agenda, 27 our call for women empowerment and equality must go beyond rhetoric, must set the goals that are realistic and achievable and design the monitoring and evaluation systems that motivate countries to action. 28 This was the success of the MDGs, the spirit of progress and competition in the achievement of goals. 29 Let us do the same in the next global goal for women.

30 Liberia has a history of turbulent times 31 but in 2013 for the first time in two decades we celebrated ten consecutive years of peace and two successful general elections. 32 Then came 2014 33 and we were hit by Ebola, 34 an enemy that threatened all the gains of the past 10 years. Once again, 35 the Liberian people rose to the task. 36 we can report 37 hat there are no new cases anywhere in the country for over days.

38 When the next five years celebration of Beijing takes place in 2020, 39 I would have served and left a better country than found. 40 I want to thank all of you 41 who provided the motivation and support that enabled me to break the glass ceiling. 42 I hope that we will all work toward ensuring 43 that the African Union does not return to male domination.

44 Thank You.

Text 2

Speech by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to the Annual Summit of the Women in Parliament Global Forum on “Reshaping Society through Female Leadership” European Parliament

Wednesday, November 27, 2013

1 MADAM PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION;

MADAM PRIME MINISTER;

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENTS;

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS;

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:



I regret 2that I could not join you in your opening session, 3 but it's a pleasure to be here today to participate in the Women in Parliament Annual Summit. 4 I reflect back on the past 120 years, 5since the women of New Zealand first received suffrage. 6 The struggle that started many decades and centuries ago is far from fulfilling its promise, 7 but we have made great strides 8and there's no turning back. 9Today, Africa is proud to have a female Prime Minister, one female Vice Head of State, and two female Heads of State – one of whom will face elections in two years, 10and the other will leave office within four years. 11This represents a particular challenge, 12as we must make sure 13that there's someone that will succeed us 14when we move on. 15We have a steadily rising number of women in parliaments – up by more than 11 percent since 1995. 16Southern Africa has done especially well, with some of the largest proportions of women in local government, parliament, and cabinet in the world. 17The Seychelles Parliament has 44 percent women; South Africa, 42 percent; Mozambique 30 percent. 18 Furthermore, 41 percent of South Africa's Cabinet Ministers are women, as are 32 percent in Mozambique.

19This regeneration is expertly illustrated by the immense strides made in gender equality in Rwanda. 20After parliamentary elections in September, the proportion of women in the country's Lower House reached an unprecedented 64 percent – the highest in the world. 21Many attribute this transformation to the post-conflict reconstruction process, 22where women, girls, boys, and men worked together to rebuild the country. 23 However, I attribute this to the enlightened leadership of President Zuma and President Paul Kagame 24who leveled the playing field through constitutional and legislative reform

25In Liberia, women now occupy 31 percent of senior ministerial positions 26and the numbers are swelling. 27On International Women's Day this year, I resubmitted the Gender Equity Bill to our Legislature, 28which calls for 30 percent of all institutions of governance to be occupied by women. 29Despite the correction of long years of neglect, it is not easy for a woman President to convince legislative colleagues on the need to expand the power of women. 30 however, we will continue to press 31 until this legislation is passed.

32 Advances in gender equality are not confined to governance. 33 Across Africa, many more girls and boys are enjoying gender parity in education; 34 legal restrictions limiting women's economic participation have been halved since 1960; 35 and many countries are starting to pass laws and provisions to improve women's access to land and inheritance.



36 These advances are remarkable and demonstrate great faith in Africa's future. **37 With strong leadership on gender equality and equal representation in government**, our continent will continue to make steady advances in women's education and equal access to services, thereby laying the foundations for more stable and peaceful societies. **38 This hopeful and rosy picture** must not, however, cover the reality and the great challenges we face in trying to break down traditional beliefs of oppression and subjugation **39 that** are perceived to be natural social orders.

40 For every woman president, for every woman senator or corporate leader, millions of others are kept in servitude, relegated to a lower echelon of society. **41 Seventy percent of the 1.3 billion living in extreme poverty** are women **42 who** perform 66 percent of the world's work and produce half of its food. **43 Thousands of African women** continue to be denied access to power and resources, to be discriminated against, to suffer restricted mobility, to be married off as young brides. **44 These women** often lack access to the most basic services, including sexual and reproductive healthcare. **45 Advances in these areas** require continuing strong, decisive leadership from both men and women in positions of power.

46 In Liberia, we are working hard for gender equality on many levels – from personal security to political and economic empowerment. **47 We** are still dealing with the sad legacies of the past. **48 We** are still confronting lingering social values which tend to treat women as lesser beings. **49 My election to the presidency** eight years ago was a momentous occasion, because **50 it** signified **51 that** our **people** were able to rise above ancient beliefs in women's inferiority to accept **52 that a professional person with integrity from any gender** can lead a nation out of the ashes of destruction. **53 Nevertheless, this giant step for one woman** does not necessarily mean progress for the great majority; **54 it** is a first step in a march **55 that** must be sustained.

56 Violence against women is one of the most persistent and most neglected injustices. **57 Around the world** there are as many as 1.5 billion people currently affected by conflict and organized political violence. **58 Thousands**, even millions, of women in these countries will be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, with profound effects on their physical and psychological well-being. **59 The cessation of hostilities** does not mean peace of mind for all, especially women. **60 They** bear the scars of conflict more than anyone else. **61 These injuries** affect their ability to work, to pursue a livelihood and fulfill familial and community roles. **62 The economic costs to the victim's family, community and society** are enormous.



63 I thus applaud the leadership of British Foreign Secretary William Hague and the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Bangura, **64 who** is here, for pursuing the “Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict,” **65 which** was signed, in September, by 113 countries, including Liberia. **66 The Declaration** contains practical and political commitments to end the use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war.

67 We equally applaud the leadership of the African Union, represented by the Commission President here, Dr. Zuma, **68 which** has developed a roadmap on women in conflict, including activities such as the appointment of a Special Representative of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts, and the training of African Union staff on the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

69 In Liberia, through the pain and anguish experienced by each of these victims, **70 we** have found the strength and the courage to start to build a new, transformed society -**71 where women** enjoy equal rights and fair treatment, **72 and where their productive role in society and the economy** is acknowledged. **73 In my country**, women occupy high-ranking government positions; **74 rape**, though continuing, has been criminalized; **75 and women** have greater property and custodial rights.

76 Now a few thoughts on the way forward.

77 FIRST, we must better understand the challenge posed by gender inequality, particularly that relating to sexual violence. **78 We** need to understand the root causes of discrimination and to tackle them head-on. **79 Better data and monitoring** will be crucial. **80 The Post-2015 High-Level Panel** called for a “Data Revolution” through the new global development agenda. **81 This data revolution** is pivotal for true gender equality

82 SECOND, we must continue to push for high female representation in politics. **83 We** have come a long way, **84 but we** cannot afford to be complacent. **85 The presence of more women amongst lawmakers** will have a positive influence on political processes and rights. **86 They** must occupy decision-making positions and have the opportunity to show leadership in other sectors. Not only is this morally right, **87 it** also makes good economic sense. **88 Women's empowerment** spurs economic performance and boosts income.

89 THIRD, we must create space for civil society to hold governments accountable. **90 In Liberia**, a lively civil society is a vital spur for our progress. **91 And in Southern Africa**, for example, the 2008 Protocol on Gender and Development finally came into



force in 2012, in large part thanks to civil society pressure and a strong culture of accountability.

92 **FINALLY**, **we** must carefully examine our culture and social norms to understand why gender inequality is tolerated and perpetuated. 93 **National programs to redress inequalities and**, in particular, to eradicate gender-based violence, must draw on traditional structures and community leaders 94 *for* **they** are the gatekeepers of norms and cultural practices. 95 **Working in partnership with these leaders**, both male and female, we can start to reconstruct the ideologies that fuel this scourge as we seek true social transformation. 96 **The new measures for social progress** must be looked at from the perspective of gender equality, 97 **the way** in which society treats its people, 98 *how* **it** respects the individuality and rights of every human being, 99 *how* **every person** is given the same opportunity, the same justice and the same freedom. 100 **This** is a struggle 101 **that** must be waged by men and women all over the world.

102 **INDEED**, **we** have made some progress in women's equality, 103 *and* **there** can be no turning back.

104 **I** thank you.