

**Remarks by Former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia accepting the 2018 Charles T. Manatt Democracy Award:**

I am deeply touched and humbled to be the recipient of the 2018 Charles T. Manatt Democracy Award. I thank IFES President Bill Sweeney, the IFES Chairman, Ken Blackwell, its former Chairman, Peter Kelly, its Board of Directors and the Manatt family, including Kathy and Michele who are here tonight.

I am honored to accept this award on behalf of the women and men of Liberia, who through their vote in October and December of last year, chose a new leader in our country's progression toward democratic values. When I turned over governing authority to President George Weah on 22 January, it was the first time in 75 years that presidential power had been transferred peacefully and democratically in Liberia.

Liberia today remains a fragile state. Institutions are still young and are being tested, and resources remain scarce. Nations in a state of fragility, particularly post-conflict nations, need special attention and support.

We ask that you, our supporters and partners, remain focused on Liberia so the country can continue its emergence as a post-conflict success story. We ask that you actively engage the new government of President George Weah.

IFES started its work in Liberia shortly after the signing of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Since 2004, IFES has been working with Liberia's election officials and civil society organizations to strengthen the local management of elections. I am grateful for your assistance as I have witnessed firsthand the impact of your work and how it helped make Liberia's electoral process more transparent.

I had great pleasure to meet with Bill and Chairman Ken Blackwell when they visited Monrovia on Election Day last October. Indeed, the entire IFES team worked tirelessly during a challenging electoral process.

I would like to recognize the many partners of Liberia in this room. They include the president of the International Republican Institute, Dan Twining, the President of the National Democratic Institute, Derek Mitchel and the President of the National Endowment of Democracy, Carl Gershman. Together with IFES, your institutions have been instrumental in Liberia's democratic transition.

Thank You!

I also wish to recognize USAID Administrator Mark Green, who has supported Liberia since he was a member of Congress from Wisconsin. More recently, as a Board of Director of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Mark was at the MCC when Liberia was named a Threshold Country, qualified as a Compact Nation, and signed its first Compact. This was one of the proudest accomplishments of my administration.

Finally, I salute Senator Chris Coons, a fellow honoree, Liberia's champion, and my dear friend. Senator Coons, you have been a leading voice for Africa, as a member of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, working with your Republican colleagues and across Pennsylvania Avenue, regardless of the occupant of the White House. And I see that you are at it again, with the joint opinion article you wrote with the US Secretary of Commerce, Wilbur Ross, in support of the BUILD ACT, which will create a development finance institution capable of meeting the infrastructure needs of Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Liberia's successful political transition is reflective of Africa's quest for democracy. It is a continuum of the continent's struggle for liberation and freedom. This is particularly important in Africa, where we tend to focus on elections and celebrate them as "the milestone."

But, as it is often said, "elections do not a democracy make." We must look behind the process and examine the barriers that shut down competition before the campaigns ever start.

As I said in Kigali this past April at the annual meeting of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, we must identify the barriers to entry into political society and break them down, one by one.

Democracy must devolve from a single event, into the institutionalization of a process that provides access to all of its participants. We must look anew, not just at respecting constitutional term limits, but at adjusting constitutions to address campaign finance, to encourage the participation of women and the engagement of youth, and to strengthen the civil service.

On behalf of our youthful population, we must ensure that African leaders respect the right of their people to determine their future. I stand with the organizations in this room in devoting myself in my remaining years to strengthening democratic institutions across Africa.

I had the honor to lead the joint IRI-NDI observer mission to Zimbabwe in July to observe the country's first election where Robert Mugabe was not on the ballot. Despite the many reported lapses, Election Day was euphoric due to the extraordinary voter turnout. The atmosphere quickly changed when in response to peaceful protest the government failed its people, unleashing post-election brutality, reflective of the worst in the country's authoritarian past.

Zimbabwe's new president Emmerson Mnangagwa needs to prove himself, not to those of us who observed the election, but to his own people.

He must show tolerance and inclusion, respect for the rule of law, a commitment to honor the individual rights of all citizens and most importantly, for fundamental institutional reform across all sectors in society. These are the essential ingredients for a sustainable peace.

And as we look at the upcoming political contests, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and Cameroon, we must demand better than we are seeing.

It is not acceptable to weaponize rule of law to prevent opponents from competing in political contests. We, as an international community of stakeholders, must raise our voices not just on election day, but well before the playing field is distorted.

And for those who have served their country, for extraordinary length and period we say it is time for legacy, time for a successful and peaceful transfer of power to a new generation of political leaders. Love of country is also about letting go.

One cannot talk about democracy in Africa without noting the challenge of institutional and systemic corruption, one that vigorously fights back, often with an overpowering display of strength.

I salute my dear Nigerian small sister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala with her new book that reveals the deadly consequences of fighting corruption. Notwithstanding, that this battle must be won if Africa is to prosper, and that the only way to succeed, is to make the institutions stronger than the individuals.

But even with all of these hiccups, my dear friends, the African continent continues its unstoppable march toward participatory democracy, stability and sustained economic development.

Democracy is never given on a silver platter. It must be earned, defended, and nurtured every day, everywhere – in Africa, in Europe, in the United States. There is no alternative to having the freedom we want unless we are prepared to work and sacrifice for it.

That is the prevailing spirit in the world today, and for those of us who come from the old ways and are struggling to find new ways, we salute the enterprising young spirit which we hope will ensure that democracy, particularly in Africa, will remain secure for future generations.

The pressure builds for democracy. The young people today are educated, skillful, demanding, and eventually we will have to listen, and I think that will happen to all those that are still lagging.

Dear friends, in closing I want to assure you that we will remain committed to supporting the IFES mission, and that of her sister institutions, to promote good governance and democratic leadership across the African continent.

God bless all those gathered here today in support of the remarkable endeavor that is the promotion of democracy. God bless the IFES team that chose a life of service to others. I would like to thank all of those in this room, and those beyond, who have been with me on this long journey.

Thank you.