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Binder- The Trip of the First Lady to Liberia, Accra, and Ghana, 01/14/2006-01/18/2006, Press Clips

The Trip of the First Lady to:

Monrovia, Liberia
Accra, Ghana
Abuja, Nigeria

January 14-18



Press Clips



Africa and Aboriginal Tuesdays: Text of The Inaugural Address by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia

What follows is the text of the inaugural address by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia as delivered on Monday, January 16, on the Capitol grounds in Monrovia.

Let us first praise Almighty God, the Arbiter of all affairs of humankind whose omnipotent Hand guides and steers our nation.

Before I begin this address, which signifies the high-noon of this historic occasion, I ask that we bow our heads for a moment of silent prayer in memory of the thousands of our compatriots who have died as a result the many conflicts.

Thank you!

I also ask your indulgence as I reflect on the memory of my two rural illiterate grandmothers and my mother and father who taught me to be what I am today, and the families who took them in and gave them the opportunity of a better life.

Let us also remember in prayers during his affliction, His Grace Archbishop Michael K. Francis, the conscience of our nation.

Vice President Boakai and I have just participated in the time-honored constitutional ritual of oath-taking as we embark upon our responsibilities to lead this Republic. This ritual is symbolically and politically significant and substantive. It reflects the enduring character of the democratic tradition of the peaceful and orderly transfer of political power and authority. It also confirms the culmination of a commitment to our nation's collective search for a purposeful and responsive national leadership.

We applaud the resilience of our people who, weighed down and dehumanized by poverty and rendered immobile by the shackles of fourteen years of civil war, went courageously to the polls, to vote - not once but twice, to elect Vice President Joseph Boakai and me to serve them. We express to you, our people, our deep sense of appreciation and gratitude for the opportunity to serve you and our common Republic. We pledge to live up to your expectations of creating a government that is attentive and responsive to your needs, concerns, and the development and progress of our country.

We know that your vote was a vote for change; a vote for peace, security and stability; a vote for individual and national prosperity; a vote for healing and leadership. We have heard you loudly, and we humbly accept your vote of confidence and your mandate.

This occasion, held under the cloudy skies, marks a celebration of change and a dedication to an agenda for a socio-economic and political reordering; indeed, a national renewal.

Today, we wholeheartedly embrace this change. We recognize that this change is not change for change sake, but a fundamental break with the past, thereby requiring that we take bold and decisive steps to address the problems that for decades have stunted our progress, undermined national unity, and kept old and new cleavages in ferment.

As we embrace this new commitment to change, it is befitting that, for the first time, the inauguration is being held on the Capitol Grounds, one of the three seats of Government. We pledge anew our commitment to transparency, open government, and participatory democracy for all of our citizens.

Fellow Liberians: As I speak to you today, I am most gratified by the caliber of the delegations of our own African Governments, Foreign Governments, partners and local partners as well, who have come to join us to celebrate this triumph of democracy in our country. I am particularly touched by those you see - our dear brothers, the delegation from the United States, headed by the wife of President Bush and my friend, our mediator, who has been with us so long and brought us to this day. We pay homage to all of you. We respect you. We welcome you. Bien vene a tous.

My dear Brothers and Sisters of West Africa: You have died for us; you have given refuge to thousands of our citizens; you have denied yourselves by utilizing your scarce resources to assist us; you have agonized for us, and you have prayed for us. We thank you, and may God bless you for your support to Liberia as well as for your continuing commitment to promote peace, security, stability, and bilateral cooperation within our sub-region - and beyond.

I wish to acknowledge the stewardship of the National Transitional Government under the leadership of its former Chairman, Mr. Gyude Bryant, for their contribution to peace and to the successful electoral process. I also recognize and thank the former National Transitional Legislative Assembly for their service to the nation. And I welcome the members of the 52nd Legislature who were sworn in a few moments ago. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I congratulate you as you assume your individual responsibilities of representing our people. I look forward to working with each of you as we strive to build a better nation.

I thank and applaud our gallant men and women of the Armed Forces of Liberia who have rendered sacrificial service to our nation and are now being willingly retired to facilitate the training and restructuring of the new Armed Forces of Liberia.

I also thank the leadership and gallant men and women of the United Nations Military Mission in Liberia who daily labor with us to keep the peace that we enjoy.

Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen: No one who has lived in or visited this country in the past fifteen years will deny the physical destruction and the moral decadence that the civil war has left in its wake here in Monrovia and in other cities, towns, and villages across the nation. We have all suffered. The individual sense of deprivation is immense. It is therefore understandable that our people will have high expectations and will demand aggressive solutions to the socio-economic and societal difficulties that we face.

Our record shows that we are a strong and resilient people; able to survive; able to rise from the ashes of civil strife and to start anew; able to forge a new beginning, forgiving if not forgetting the past. We are a good and friendly people, braced for hope even as we wipe away the tears of past suffering and despair. Our challenge, therefore, is to transform adversity into opportunity, to renew the promises upon which our nation was founded: freedom, equality, unity and individual progress.

In the history of our nation, in the history of every nation, each generation, each Administration is summoned to define its nation's purpose and character. Now, it is our time to state clearly and unequivocally who we are, as Liberians, as your leaders - and where we plan to take this country in the next six years.

Political Renewal

First, let me declare in our pursuit of political renewal, that the political campaign is over. It is time for us, regardless of our political affiliations and persuasions, to come together to heal and rebuild our nation. For my part, as President of the Republic of Liberia, my Government extends a hand of friendship and solidarity to the leadership and members of all political parties, many of them sitting right in front of me, which participated in our recent presidential and legislative elections. I call upon those who have been long in the struggle - and those who recently earned their stripes - to play important roles in the rebuilding of our nation.

Committed to advance the spirit of inclusion, I assure all Liberians and our international partners and friends that our Government will recognize and support a strong democratic and loyal opposition in Liberia. This is important because we believe that our democratic culture and our nation are best served when the opposition is strong and actively engaged in the process of nation building.

Moreover, we call upon our colleagues of all political persuasions now in the Diaspora to return home and join us in meeting this exciting challenge of national renewal.

We make a similar appeal to the thousands of our citizens who continue to live in refugee camps throughout the sub-region and beyond. We recognize and sympathize with your plight and will explore with our development partners ways and means to facilitate your early return home as a national imperative for our renewal and development.

To those who are still internally displaced, we pledge to work with our partners to get you back to your communities to enable you to start the process of rebuilding your lives.

We must have a new understanding. Your job, as citizens, is to work for your family and your country. Your country's only job is to work for you. That is the compact that I offer you today.

A New Era of Democracy

My Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Ours has certainly not been an easy journey to where we are today. Indeed, the road has been tortuous and checkered. The tendencies of intolerance of each other's opinion rooted in parochial and selfish considerations - and greed - have driven us into our descent into recent tragedies and paralysis as a nation and as a people. These negative national tendencies have, in the past, bred ethnic suspicion and hatred, led to injustice, social and political exclusion. They have also weakened our capacity to peacefully co-exist as a people with diverse socio-cultural, economic, and political backgrounds. Consequently, we have witnessed needless generalized conflicts that have profoundly affected the Liberian family, the foundation of our society.

I know of this struggle because I have been a part of it. Without bitterness, or anger, or vindictiveness, I recall the inhumanity of confinement, the terror of attempted rape, the ostracism of exile. But I also recall the goodness and the kindness of the many who defied orders and instruction and saved my life, and gave food to the hungry and to give water to the thirsty. I recall their humanity - and thank them.

And so, my Fellow Liberians let us acknowledge and honor the sacrifices and the contributions of all as we put the past behind us. Let us rejoice that our recent democratic exercise has been a redemptive act of faith and an expression of renewed confidence in ourselves. Let us be proud that we were able to ultimately rise above our intense political and other differences in a renewed determination as a people to foster dialogue instead of violence, promote unity rather than disharmony, and engender hope rather than disillusionment and despair.

My Administration therefore commits itself to the creation of a democracy in which the constitutional and civil liberties and rights of all of our people will be respected.

Economic Renewal

In a similar quest for economic renewal, we start on the premise that we are a wealthy people. Our nation is blessed with an endowment, rich in natural and human resources. Yet, our economy has collapsed due to several civil conflicts and economic mismanagement by successive governments. The task of reconstructing our devastated economy is awesome, for which there will be no quick fix.

Yet, we have the potential to promote a healthy economy in which Liberians and international investors can prosper. We can create an investment climate that gives confidence to Liberian and foreign investors. We can promote those activities that add value in the exploitation of our natural resources. We can recognize and give support to our small farmers and marketers who, through their own efforts over the years, have provided buoyancy and self-sufficiency in economic activity. We can revisit our land tenure system to promote more ownership and free holding for communities.

This will call for a transformation of our economic vision into economic goals that are consistent with our national endowment and regional and global dynamics. We will ensure that allocation of our own resources reflect those priorities formulated on the basis of sequential measures of structural change that need to provide this transformation. And we will call upon our development partners to likewise recognize that although they have made significant investment to bring peace to our country, this peace can only be consolidated and sustained if we bring development to our people.

With this in mind, we are working with our partners to identify key objectives and deliverables in the first one hundred and fifty days of our Administration, which coincides with the remaining budgetary period of the former government. We must meet our commitment to restore some measure of electricity to our capital city. We must put Liberians back to work again. We must put our economic and financial house in order. Most of all, we must revive our mindset of courage, hard work, honesty, and a can-do spirit.

Our strategy is to achieve quick and visible progress that reaches significant number of our people, to gain momentum, consolidate support, and establish the foundation for sustained economic development.

For the long term, more will be required from us and our partners. We will formulate a multi-year economic reconstruction plan tied to a Poverty Reduction Strategy Program that relieves our country from a staggering US\$3.5 billion debt and paves the way for acceleration in our national effort to make progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We will also tackle the HIV/Aids problem, thereby enduring that this threat to our human capital and growth and prosperity is addressed.

Governance

We know that our desire for an environment for private sector-driven sustainable growth and development cannot be achieved without the political will and a civil service that is efficient, effective and honest. The workforce in our ministries and agencies is seriously bloated. Our Administration will therefore embark on a process of rationalizing our agencies of government to make them lean, efficient, and responsive to public service delivery. This will require the creation of a meritocracy that places premium on qualification, professionalism, and performance.

Bonding

Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen: Across this country, from Cape Mount in the West to Cape Palmas in the East; from Mount Nimba in the North to Cape Monsterrado in the South, from Mount Wologizi in Northcentral to Mount Gedeh in the Southeast, our citizens at this very moment are listening by radio - some are watching by television. I want to talk to you!

As you know, in our various communities and towns, our children have a way of greeting their fathers when they come home after a long, tiring day of trying to find the means to feed the family that night and send the children to school in the morning. They say, "Papa na come."

For too many times, for too many families, Papa comes home with nothing, having failed to find a job or to get the help to feed the hungry children. Imagine the disappointment and the hurt in the mother and the children; the frustration and the loss of self-confidence in the father.

Through the message of this story, I want you to know that I understand what you ordinary citizens go through each day to make ends meet for yourselves and for your families.

Times were hard before. Times are even harder today. But I make this pledge to you: Under my Administration, we will work to change that situation. We will work to ensure that when our children say "papa na come", papa will come home joyfully with something, no matter how meager, to sustain his family. In other words, we will create the jobs for our mothers and fathers to be gainfully employed. We will create the social and economic opportunities that will restore our people's dignity and self-worth.

We will make the children smile again. The thousands of children who could not present their voting cards, but repeatedly told me whenever I met and shook their hands that they voted for me. Indeed, they voted with their hearts. To those children and other Liberian children across this nation, I say to you: I love you very, very much. I shall work to give you hope and a better future.

Now, I would like to speak in particular to our youth. You are out there. You can believe my word that our Administration will do its utmost to respond to your needs. We will build your capacity and empower you to enable you meaningfully participate in the reconstruction of your country. We will give you the education that you asked for, and the skills training that we know you desire. We shall actively pursue the Kakata Declaration resulting from the National Youth Conference held in 2005 and the implementation of a National Youth Policy and Program.

Corruption

Fellow Liberians, we know that if we are to achieve our economic and income distribution goals, we must take on forcibly and effectively the debilitating cancer of corruption. Throughout the campaign, I assured our people that, if elected, we would wage war against corruption regardless of where it exists, or by whom it is practiced.

Today, I renew this pledge. Corruption, under my Administration, will be the major public enemy. We will confront it. We will fight it. Any member of my Administration who sees this affirmation as mere posturing or yet another attempt by another Liberian leader to play to the gallery on this grave issue should think twice.

In this respect, I will lead by example. I will expect and demand that everyone serving in my Administration leads by example. The first testament of how my Administration will tackle public service corruption will be that everyone appointed to high positions of public trust, such as in the Cabinet and heads of public corporations, will be required to declare their assets. I will be the first to comply, and I will call upon the Honorable Speaker and President Pro-Temps to say that they comply.

My Administration will also accord high priority to the formulation and passage into law of a

National Code of Conduct, to which all public servants will be subjected.

My Fellow Liberians: If we are to achieve our development and anti-corruption goals, we must welcome and embrace the Governance and Economic Management Program, which the National Transitional Government of Liberia, working with our international partners, has formulated to deal with the serious economic and financial management deficiencies in our country.

We accept and enforce the terms of GEMAP, recognizing the important assistance which it is expected to provide during the early years of our Government. More importantly, we will ensure competence and integrity in the management of our own resources and insist on an integrated capacity building dimension initiative so as to render GEMAP non-applicable in a reasonable period of time.

Foreign Policy

My Fellow Liberians: Our nation's foreign policy has historically been rooted in our core values as a nation and people in the practices of good neighborliness, non-interference in the affairs of other nations and peoples, peaceful co-existence, regional cooperation and integration. These values will continue to guide the conduct of our foreign policy under my Administration. Our foreign policy will take due cognizance of the sacrifices and contributions that have been made by our brothers and sisters to restore peace, security, and stability to our country. We will therefore work to be a responsible member of sub-regional, regional, and international organizations, including the Mano River Union, Economic Community of West African States, African Union, and the United Nations. We will do all that we can to honor our obligations, past and current, and enforce all international treaties to which our country has subscribed.

To our sister Republics West, East, and North of our borders, we make this pledge: under my Administration, no inch of Liberian soil will be used to conspire to perpetrate aggression against your countries. In making this commitment, we will work for a new regional security that is based upon economic partnership aimed at enhancing the prospects for regional cooperation and integration.

My Fellow Citizens: Let me assure you that my Presidency shall remain committed to serve all Liberians without fear or favor. I am President for all of the people of the country. I therefore want to assure all of our people that neither I, nor any person serving my Administration will pursue any vendetta. There will be no vindictiveness. There will be no policies of political, social, and economic exclusion. We will be inclusive and tolerant, ever sensitive to the anxieties, fears, hopes, and aspirations of all of our people irrespective of ethnic, political, religious affiliation, and social status.

By their votes, the Liberian people have sent a clear message! They want peace; they want to move on with their lives. My charge as President is to work to assure the wishes of our people. We will therefore encourage our citizens to utilize our system of due process for settling differences. We will make sure that we work together as a people, knowing, however, that we will forcefully and decisively respond to any acts of lawlessness, threats to our hard earned peace, or destabilizing actions that could return us to conflict.

As we savor the new dawn of hope and expectation, I pledge to bring the Government closer to the people. The days of the imperial Presidency, of a domineering and threatening Chief Executive are over. This was my campaign promise, which I intend to keep.

And now, before I close, I would like to talk to the women - the women of Liberia, the women of Africa, and the women of the world. Until a few decades ago, Liberian women endured the injustice of being treated as second-class citizens. During the years of our civil war, they bore the brunt of inhumanity and terror. They were conscripted into war, gang raped at will, forced into domestic slavery. Yet, it is the women who labored and advocated for peace throughout our region.

It is therefore not surprising that during the period of our elections, Liberian women were galvanized - and demonstrated unmatched passion, enthusiasm, and support for my candidacy. They stood with me; they defended me; they worked with me; they prayed for me. The same can be said for the women throughout Africa. I want to here and now, gratefully acknowledge the powerful voice of women of all walks of life.

My Administration shall thus endeavor to give Liberian women prominence in all affairs of our country. My Administration shall empower Liberian women in all areas of our national life. We will support and increase the writ of laws that restore their dignity and deal drastically with crimes that dehumanize them. We will enforce without fear or favor the law against rape recently passed by the National Transitional Legislature. We shall encourage families to educate all children, particularly the girl child. We will also try to provide economic programs that enable Liberian women - particularly our market women - to assume their proper place in our economic process.

My Fellow Liberians: We are moving forward. The best days are coming. The future belongs to us because we have taken charge of it. We have the resources, and we have the resourcefulness. We now have the right Government. And we have good friends, good brothers and sisters who will work with us. Our people are already building our roads, cleaning up our environment, creating jobs, rebuilding schools, bringing back water and electricity.

We are a good people; we are a kind people. We are a forgiving people - and we are a God-fearing people.

So, let us begin anew, moving forward into a future that is filled with promise, filled with hope!

"In Union Strong, Success is Sure! We cannot - fail. We must not - fail. We will not - fail."

God bless you all - and save the Republic.

I thank you.

This transcript was published by All Africa.com

Tuesday, January 17, 2006

Mrs. Bush's Press Photos- West Africa
January 2006



REUTERS 

Tue Jan 17, 12:11 PM ET

A dancer from the African Showtime Dance Ensemble (C) performs on his back in front of U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#) (L), Ghana's President John Agyekum Kufuor (2nd L) and Barbara Bush (R) upon their arrival at the Christianborg Castle in Accra, Ghana January 17, 2006. The first lady, her daughter Barbara and Kufuor had lunch at the seaside castle which was built by Swedes in 1652 and had a history involving the slave trade before becoming the current seat of government in Ghana. REUTERS/Jason Reed



REUTERS 

Tue Jan 17, 12:10 PM ET

Dancers from the African Showtime Dance Ensemble perform for U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#) upon her arrival at the Christianborg Castle in Accra, Ghana January 17, 2006. The first lady, her daughter Barbara and Ghana's President John Agyekum Kufuor had lunch at the seaside castle which was built by Swedes in 1652 and had a history involving the slave trade before becoming the current seat of government in Ghana. REUTERS/Jason Reed



REUTERS

Tue Jan 17, 12:10 PM ET

Dancers from the African Showtime Dance Ensemble perform for U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#) upon her arrival at the Christianborg Castle in Accra, Ghana January 17, 2006. The first lady, her daughter Barbara and Ghana's President John Agyekum Kufuor had lunch at the seaside castle which was built by Swedes in 1652 and had a history involving the slave trade before becoming the current seat of government in Ghana. REUTERS/Jason Reed



REUTERS

Tue Jan 17, 12:08 PM ET

U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#) kisses a Nigerian flower girl Jamilla Ahmed, 11, as the U.S. deputy chief of mission in Nigeria, Thomas Fuery watches upon the first lady's arrival in Abuja, Nigeria January 17, 2006. Laura Bush arrived in Nigeria to begin the last leg of a three-nation trip to Africa. REUTERS/Jason Reed



REUTERS

Tue Jan 17, 11:57 AM ET

U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#) (2nd L) speaks to a traditionally-dressed African reporter as Ghana's President John Agyekum Kufuor watches during a tour of the Christianborg Castle in Accra, Ghana, January 17, 2006. Bush, Kufuor and other dignitaries had lunch at the seaside castle which was built by Swedes in 1652 and had a history involving the slave trade before becoming the current seat of government in Ghana. REUTERS/Jason Reed



REUTERS

Tue Jan 17, 11:54 AM ET

Ghana's President John Agyekum Kufuor gestures as he speaks to U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#) at Christianborg Castle in Accra, Ghana January 17, 2006. The pair and other dignitaries had lunch at the seaside castle which was built by Swedes in 1652 and had a history involving the slave trade before becoming the current seat of government in Ghana. REUTERS/Jason Reed



REUTERS

Tue Jan 17, 11:52 AM ET

U.S. first lady **Laura Bush** (2nd R) kisses a Ghanian flower girl as her daughter Barbara Bush (R) and Ghana's President John Agyekum Kufuor (L) watch upon their arrival at the Christianborg Castle in Accra, Ghana January 17, 2006. The trio and other dignitaries had lunch at the seaside castle which was built by Swedes in 1652 and had a history involving the slave trade before becoming the current seat of government in Ghana.

REUTERS/Jason Reed

AP Associated Press

Tue Jan 17, 11:50 AM ET

U.S. first lady **Laura Bush**, third from right, and her daughter Barbara, far right, sit with, from right to left: 12-year-old **AIDS** patient Francis; Francis' caretaker; 16-year-old AIDS patient Anastina; and eight-year-old AIDS patient Connie; during a meeting with AIDS patients at the Korle-Bu Treatment Center in Accra,



Ghana, Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2006. Mrs. Bush met with AIDS patients after taking a tour of the facility. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)



AP Associated Press

Tue Jan 17, 11:35 AM ET

Looking out to the Gulf of Guinea, U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#) is given a tour of Christianborg Castle by Ghana's President John Agyekum Kufuor in Accra, Ghana, Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2006. The castle, which was built in 1652, was used to trade ivory, gold, and slaves. It currently houses the seat of government of Ghana. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)



REUTERS

Tue Jan 17, 10:15 AM ET

First lady [Laura Bush](#) smiles as a choir from the Accra Teacher Training Center sings during her visit to the training facility in Accra, Ghana, January 17, 2006. REUTERS/Jason Reed



AP Associated Press

Tue Jan 17, 8:42 AM ET

U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#), center seen with Ghana's President, John Agyekum Kufuor, right, at the Accra Teacher Training Center where she launched the Africa Education Initiative Textbooks Program in Accra, Ghana, Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2006. Others are unidentified. (AP Photo/Kwasi Kpodo)



AP Associated Press

Tue Jan 17, 7:12 AM ET

U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#), standing behind left, and Ghana's President John Agyekum Kufuor, standing right, look on during the signing ceremony of the Africa Education Initiative Textbooks Program at the Accra Teacher Training Center in Accra, Ghana, Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2006. Seated left to right are: U.S. Ambassador to Ghana Pamela Bridgewater; Ghana's Minister of Education Elizabeth Ohene; and Chicago State University President Elnora Daniel. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)



REUTERS 

Tue Jan 17, 6:26 AM ET

U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#) greets doctors, nurses and officials during her visit to the Korle-Bu [AIDS](#) treatment center in Accra, Ghana, January 17, 2006. Bush visited AIDS patients at the center during her three-nation trip to Africa. REUTERS/Jason Reed



AP Associated Press

Tue Jan 17, 5:57 AM ET

U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#) speaks at the Accra Teacher Training Center where she launched the Africa Education Initiative Textbooks Program in Accra, Ghana, Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2006. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)



REUTERS 

Mon Jan 16, 11:29 AM ET

Liberia's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (C) greets U.S. Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#) (L) as U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#) (R) watches before the start of Johnson-Sirleaf's inauguration ceremony in the capital Monrovia January 16, 2006. Johnson-Sirleaf took office as Africa's first elected woman president on Monday, backed by a strong show of U.S. support and vowing to fight graft and rebuild her country after years of war. REUTERS/Thierry Gouegnon



AP Associated Press

Mon Jan 16, 10:51 AM ET

U.S. Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#) and first lady [Laura Bush](#) leave the stage following the inauguration of Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Monrovia, Liberia, Monday Jan. 16, 2006. Sirleaf was sworn in Monday as war-battered Liberia's new president, making history as Africa's first elected female head of state and pledging a 'fundamental break' with the West African nation's violent past. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)



AP Associated Press

Mon Jan 16, 10:49 AM ET

U.S. Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#) and first lady [Laura Bush](#) leave the stage following the inauguration of Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Monrovia, Liberia, Monday Jan. 16, 2006. Sirleaf was sworn in Monday as war-battered Liberia's new president, making history as Africa's first elected female head of state and pledging a 'fundamental break' with the West African nation's violent past. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)



AP Associated Press

Mon Jan 16, 10:28 AM ET

Ambassador at large George Wallace Jr presents newly inaugurated Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf with the national insignia to the grand matron of the order of distinction of Liberia in Monrovia, Liberia, Monday Jan. 16, 2006. Sirleaf was sworn in Monday as war-battered Liberia's new president, carving her name into history as Africa's first elected female head of state. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)



REUTERS 

Mon Jan 16, 4:50 AM ET

U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#) waves alongside daughter Barbara as they step off their plane in Monrovia, Liberia, January 16, 2006. Bush, on a three-nation trip to Africa, is leading a contingent from the U.S. to Liberia on Monday to witness the inauguration of the first woman president in an African country, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. REUTERS/Jason Reed



AP Associated Press

Mon Jan 16, 5:02 AM ET

U.S. first lady [Laura Bush](#), left, and her daughter Barbara arrive at Roberts International Airport to attend the inauguration ceremony of Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Monrovia, Liberia, Monday, Jan. 16, 2006. Johnson-Sirleaf is Africa's first woman president. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)



REUTERS 

Sun Jan 15, 2:33 PM ET

U.S. First Lady **Laura Bush** (3rd R) walks with 10-year-old flower girl Aisha Garuba and members of Ghana's government upon her arrival in Accra, Ghana, January 15, 2006. Bush arrived on the first leg of a three-nation trip to Africa Sunday and will lead a contingent from the United States to Liberia on Monday to witness the inauguration of the first woman president in an African country, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. The government officials are (L-R) Deputy Minister of Information Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, Senior Minister John Henry Mensah, Tourism Minister Jake Obetsebi-Lamptey and Foreign Minister Nana Akufo-Addo. REUTERS/Jason Reed

Minister John Henry Mensah, Tourism Minister Jake Obetsebi-Lamptey and Foreign Minister Nana Akufo-Addo. REUTERS/Jason Reed



REUTERS 

Sun Jan 15, 1:05 PM ET

U.S. first lady **Laura Bush** (L) greets Ghana's Chief of Protocol James Nadjie as her daughter Barbara Bush (C) watches upon their arrival in Accra January 15, 2006. Laura Bush arrived on the first leg of a three-nation trip to Africa Sunday and will lead a contingent from the U.S. to Liberia on Monday to witness the inauguration of the first woman president in an African country, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. REUTERS/Jason Reed



REUTERS 

Sun Jan 15, 12:32 PM ET

U.S. First Lady [Laura Bush](#) (C) gathers with 10-year-old flower girl Aisha Garuba and Ghana's Senior Minister John Henry Mensah (R) upon her arrival in Accra, Ghana, January 15, 2006. Laura Bush arrived on the first leg of a three-nation trip to Africa Sunday and will lead a contingent from the United States to Liberia on Monday to witness the inauguration of the first woman president in an African country, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. REUTERS/Jason Reed



REUTERS 

Sun Jan 15, 12:30 PM ET

U.S. First Lady [Laura Bush](#) hugs 10-year-old Aisha Garuba who presented her with a bouquet upon her arrival in Accra, Ghana, January 15, 2006. Laura Bush arrived on the first leg of a three-nation trip to Africa Sunday and will lead a contingent from the United States to Liberia on Monday to witness the inauguration of the first woman president in an African country, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. REUTERS/Jason Reed



REUTERS

Sun Jan 15, 12:11 PM ET

U.S. First Lady [Laura Bush](#) (C) and daughter Barbara Bush watch dancers from the Musician Union of Ghana among government officials upon their arrival in Accra, Ghana, January 15, 2006. Laura Bush arrived on the first leg of a three-nation trip to Africa Sunday and will lead a contingent from the United States to Liberia on Monday to witness the inauguration of the first woman president in an African country, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. REUTERS/Jason Reed



REUTERS

Sun Jan 15, 12:07 PM ET

U.S. First Lady [Laura Bush](#) (3rd L) and daughter Barbara Bush (C) watch a dancer from the Musician Union of Ghana among government officials upon their arrival in Accra, Ghana, January 15, 2006. Laura Bush arrived on the first leg of a three-nation trip to Africa Sunday and will lead a contingent from the United States to Liberia on Monday to witness the inauguration of the first woman president in an African country, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. REUTERS/Jason Reed

Monrovia, Liberia

Daily News (New York)

January 14, 2006 Saturday

HEADLINE: RUN FOR IT, CONDI! Laura would luv Prez Rice

BYLINE: BY KENNETH R. BAZINET DAILY NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON - First Lady **Laura Bush** predicted yesterday the U.S. will soon have a female President and held out hope Secretary of State Rice will change her mind and run for the White House.

Asked about other potential female candidates in a CNN interview, Bush pointedly ignored the question in an apparent snub of Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), who is salivating at the chance to return to the White House - this time in the lead role.

On the eve of her trip to the inauguration of Liberia's first female President, Bush said the time is right for a female commander in chief here in the U.S. - as long as she's a Republican.

"I think it will happen for sure. I think it will happen probably in the next few terms of the presidency in the United States," she said.

"Of course, a Republican woman, like maybe Dr. Rice," she added with a giggle and a smile.

It's not the first time Bush has stumped for Rice, considered the brainy rock star of the Bush administration who is liked even by many Democrats, polls have shown.

But so far Rice plans to return to her ivory tower sanctuary at Stanford University and has dreams about someday becoming commissioner of the National Football League.

Rice's top State Department spokesman, Sean McCormack, indicated she still has no desire to run for President. "The secretary has spoken to this issue many times before," McCormack said.

Bush is well aware that Rice doesn't want to run at this point, but apparently she hasn't written off the possibility Rice will change her mind. "She says she definitely is not running," Bush said. "I'd love to see her run. She's terrific."

Rice will join Bush in the official delegation for President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's inauguration Monday.

Clinton's camp was mum about Bush's comments or the potential of the senator facing Rice. "No comment," said spokeswoman Ann Lewis. "Thanks for asking."

In nearly every recent 2008 presidential poll, Clinton tops Rice but loses to Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) or ex-Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

Associated Press Worldstream

January 14, 2006 Saturday 12:14 AM GMT

HEADLINE: No water, power, no jobs: Liberia's first elected woman president faces daunting task

BYLINE: By HANS NICHOLS, Associated Press Writer

Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf takes office as Africa's first elected female president on Monday, and takes up the challenge of rebuilding a war-scarred nation where a stunning 80 percent of the working population is jobless will be no easy task.

On-and-off civil wars from 1989 to 2003 left 200,000 people dead and displaced more than half of the tiny nation's 3 million people. Now in a devastated country with no electricity and no running water, not even the toilets are working in the in the Executive Mansion, where water is carried in in buckets.

"We have so many problems. Too many to count," said 33-year-old mother of three, Serena Marley, who ekes out a living as a market seller.

To rebuild Liberia and secure a desperately needed influx of foreign aid, Sirleaf must win over international donors by proving the country is in good hands well-governed, free of corruption and violence.

Doug Coffman, a U.N. spokesman in Liberia, said the country needs substantial and continued aid. Rebuilding and retraining the army and police force alone will take tens of millions of dollars (euros), he said.

With 15,000 peacekeepers and a solid two years of peace under Liberia's belt, the threat of renewed war is considered remote, for now.

Sirleaf says she will reach out to former rebel leaders and personally invite them to find ways to contribute to Liberia's growth. Most faction leaders supported Sirleaf's political rival, soccer star George Weah, who lost a heated November presidential runoff.

Her House and Senate modeled after their counterparts in the United States, with whom Liberia has a long a close history include former warlords as legislators.

Sirleaf must ensure the integration of 100,000 ex-combatants. That means keeping money flowing to U.N.-backed reintegration programs that have put them in school and given them job training.

Many ex-combatants are convinced Sirleaf stole the election from Weah, though international observers declared the vote free and fair.

Sirleaf, a 67-year-old Harvard-educated former finance minister, has promised to electrify the city within six months with private investment she claims to have already lined up.

"She's promised to bring safe drinking water and electricity and she has the international contacts to make that happen," 41-year-old former fighter James Cooper said.

Liberia, founded by freed American slaves in 1847, has been wracked by coups and war since 1980. Two of the last four heads of state have been executed, a third fled to Nigeria, and the fourth could face criminal charges for corruption.

Liberia's economy is minuscule. The national budget is just US\$80 million, with donors injecting about US\$300 million annually, mostly through aid projects.

The tumbledown capital is in bad shape, slipping into darkness nightly because the city has no mains power. Severed power lines dangle to the road, meeting open sewers that often spill onto the sidewalk. Buildings are bullet-splattered and blackened by fire and mold.

The situation is so bad that toilets in the Executive Mansion don't function because of shortages of water, most of which is carried in by buckets, said Edith Bawn of Living Water International, an aid group in charge of a US\$150,000 USAID grant to clean up government grounds.

Sirleaf's officials said they didn't know whether she'll move into the mansion Monday, though she will start using it as an office.

In an attempt prepare the city for inauguration guests prominent among them U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and U.S. First Lady **Laura Bush** the government has dispatched bands of youth to collect rubble and rubbish from potholed streets, hauling away rusted taxis, sweeping curbs and laying on fresh coats of paint.

Around the legislature, several hundred ex-combatants are clearing trees and erecting inaugural stands beneath an unforgiving sun all for two dollars (euros) a day and a free lunch.

For most, it was the first paid job in months.

Xinhua General News Service

January 14, 2006 Saturday 2:00 PM EST

HEADLINE: Laura Bush to attend Liberian presidential inauguration, visit Ghana

Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States, is to visit Ghana Sunday, and is to attend the Monday inauguration of Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf the first woman to be elected president in Africa, according to Ghana News Agency on Saturday.

Bush would be accompanied by six university presidents from the United States to Ghana to unveil the "Textbooks and Learning Materials Program" aimed to support African tertiary education with the required logistics.

Ghana was chosen for the launch of **Laura Bush's** program for Africa, which aims to link minority serving colleges in the United States with institutions in Africa to provide textbooks and school supplies for African students.

The program would be launched at the Accra Teacher Training College.

As part of her visit to Africa, Mrs. Bush would also travel to Liberia with the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to attend the inauguration of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf president-elect of Liberia and the first woman to be elected president on the African continent.

The Washington Post
January 14, 2006 Saturday
HEADLINE: NAMES & FACES

First lady **Laura Bush** did the sisterhood-is-powerful thing again yesterday. In an interview with CNN International, she said she would "love to see" Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice run for president.

Bush, who is traveling to Liberia with daughter Barbara to attend the inauguration of Liberia's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, speculated that America will "probably" have a female president within the next few terms. When prodded for whom she has in mind for the job, Bush responded, "Well, of course, a Republican woman. Like maybe Dr. Rice." Although Rice routinely demurs and deflects when asked about the Oval Office, Bush gave her vote: "She's terrific." The president's wife had urged him to appoint a woman to replace retiring Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, but, well, that didn't work out.

Laura Bush also said she provided a little sisterly support via a phone call to Samuel Alito's wife, Martha-Ann, after she cried during her husband's Supreme Court confirmation hearings a few days ago. Bush pointed out that she, too, feels like doing that "every once in a while."

Is Laura gunning for a stint as a daytime talk-show host or what?

That Karl Rove, so hot.

President Bush's senior adviser was roasted at the Headliners Club of Austin on Thursday and bore the brunt of jokes from attendees such as political strategist Mary Matalin, former University of Texas regent Lowell Lebermann and the president himself.

Jabs included Bush's videotaped suggestion that Rove finish reading the Cliff Notes of the Constitution in the next three years and Lebermann's observation that the Bush and Clinton administrations shared a common weakness: "Two pudgy people in the White House who couldn't keep their mouths shut."

Matalin, the only non-Texan speaker, recalled yesterday that she was a better storyteller than jokester, but she did repeat the president's off-color nickname for Karl, then offered, "Us girls renamed him 'Stud Muffin.' "

A spokesman for the event said Rove was in good spirits and even took notes during the evening. Took notes or names?

It's official: Gwyneth Paltrow is pregnant with her second fruitlet -- err -- baby.

After months of media speculation, the 33-year-old actress confirmed the big news during an interview after Thursday night's screening of her movie "Proof" in Los Angeles.

According to the entertainment show "The Insider," moderator Lou Diamond Phillips introduced Paltrow as a pregnant woman and asked, "How far along are you?" She answered noncommittally, "Far enough along to feel cumbersome." Paltrow has a 20-month-old daughter, Apple, with rocker hubby Chris Martin.

Future editions of James Frey's disputed memoir, "A Million Little Pieces," will contain an author's note about the book's contents, his publisher announced.

The bestseller has come under fire since Sunday, when the Smoking Gun Web site posted a story alleging that Frey embellished his criminal record as well as several parts of his story.

A Doubleday spokeswoman would not disclose further details or the motive behind the new addition.

* Former "Baywatch" hunk David Hasselhoff filed for divorce Thursday from Pamela Bach, his wife of 16 years. "The couple have agreed to an amicable settlement," Hasselhoff's publicist told the Associated Press yesterday. The couple wed in 1989 and have two teenage daughters.

-- Korin Miller

Indo-Asian News Service

January 14, 2006 Saturday 2:41 PM EST

HEADLINE: First woman US president likely soon: **Laura Bush**

BYLINE: Indo-Asian News Service

Washington, Jan 14 -- US first lady **Laura Bush** believes the country's first woman president is just a few elections away.

"I think it will happen probably in the next few terms of the presidency in the United States," President George W. Bush's wife said in an interview with CNN.

Bush said she would like to see US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice run for president, although she acknowledged that Rice "says she definitely is not running"

Her remarks Friday came the same day that Angela Merkel, Germany's first female chancellor, met President Bush for talks at the White House.

On Monday, Rice and the first lady are due to attend the inauguration of Africa's first woman president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, in Liberia. Mrs. Bush called Johnson-Sirleaf's election "really thrilling".

Published by HT Syndication with permission from Indo-Asian News Service.

Reuters

January 15, 2006

HEADLINE: US first lady irked by criticism of Bush AIDS plan

BYLINE: Patricia Wilson

U.S. first lady **Laura Bush** opened a four-day trip to West Africa on Sunday full of praise for the continent's first elected woman president but irritated by criticism of promoting abstinence to help combat AIDS.

"She serves as a very important role model for little girls on the continent as well around the world," Bush said of Liberia's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, whose inauguration she will attend on Monday. "A shining example for all of us."

Johnson-Sirleaf defeated soccer millionaire George Weah in a November 8 presidential runoff and has pledged to heal the wounds of a bloody 14-year civil war that ended in 2003 but left Liberia in ruins and killed 250,000 people.

Bush urged Liberia's president-elect to reach out to young people who did not support her.

"One problem in Liberia is there's so many unemployed young people and the young people were overwhelmingly for George Weah, the soccer player ... even though Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf won by 59 percent of the vote," she told reporters en route to Accra.

Bush said she brought "the commitment of the United States government to stand with Liberia and the people of Liberia as they rebuild their country."

A senior U.S. official said Washington had committed \$1 billion to Monrovia between 2004 and 2006, most of it for peacekeeping.

The rest of Bush's trip, to Ghana and Nigeria, will focus on education and the HIV/AIDS pandemic which the United Nations estimates infects more than 30 million people in Africa. The disease has killed at least 20 million worldwide.

President George W. Bush has proposed a \$15 billion emergency plan to help stem its spread in Africa and the Caribbean, but critics have complained the program leans too heavily on the promotion of abstinence and fails to place enough emphasis on condoms.

"I think it's a very fair divide," **Laura Bush** said. "The whole plan all along has been Uganda's plan which is the ABC -- abstinence, be faithful and the correct and consistent use of condoms."

Uganda has brought its AIDS infection rate down from 30 percent in the 1990s to about 6 percent now.

In a part of the world where one in three people had a sexually transmitted deadly disease and in countries "where girls feel obligated to comply with the wishes of men," women needed to know that abstinence was a choice, Bush said.

"But when girls are not empowered, when girls are vulnerable, their chances of being able to negotiate their sexual life with their partners and to encourage or make their partners use a condom are very low."

Opponents contend that money under the Bush program is often siphoned off to faith-based groups that preach abstinence, but supporters say in Africa promoting the use of condoms has failed to halt the disease.

"I'm always a little bit irritated when I hear the criticism of abstinence, because abstinence is absolutely 100 percent effective in eradicating a sexually transmitted disease," Bush said.

National Post (f/k/a The Financial Post) (Canada)

HEADLINE: **Laura Bush** declares Rice for U.S. president: 'She's terrific': Secretary of State could face Clinton in 2008 race

BYLINE: Philip Sherwell, The Sunday Telegraph

WASHINGTON - **Laura Bush** has revealed for the first time whom she would like to see replacing her husband in the White House: Condoleezza Rice, the Secretary of State.

"I'd love to see her run. She's terrific," Mrs. Bush said during an interview in which she predicted that for the first time a woman would soon be elected president of the United States.

The first lady, a powerful behind-the-scenes figure in U.S. politics, is the most influential voice to speak in favour of a presidential bid in 2008 by Ms. Rice. Her comments indicate that the Secretary of State would have backing at the highest level if she were persuaded to change her mind and run on the Republican ticket.

Asked about the prospects of a female president, Mrs. Bush told CNN: "I think it will happen, for sure. I think it will happen probably in the next few terms of the presidency in the United States."

She said her choice for that ground-breaking role would be "of course, a Republican woman" and then gave her endorsement to Ms. Rice.

Mrs. Bush is normally extremely guarded in her pronouncements, so her expression of support carries added weight. It is unlikely that she would have adopted such an overt position if her husband were opposed.

The unmarried Ms. Rice is a close confidante and long-standing friend of the Bush family, having previously advised George Bush Snr. on foreign policy when he was president. She played a key role in preparing the current President Bush for his first White House campaign and has worked closely with him ever since.

Since the President's brother Jeb, the Florida Governor, has ruled himself out of the 2008 race, she could emerge as the de facto "legacy candidate" for the powerful Bush political dynasty.

With Hillary Clinton, the former first lady and the frontrunner for the Democrat nomination, the United States could witness a showdown between two women for the nation's highest office in 2008.

Mrs. Bush was speaking on the eve of a trip to Liberia with Ms. Rice for the inauguration of the first female leader in Africa, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

There is a renewed buzz in Washington that the Secretary of State might be named as vice-president if the incumbent, Dick Cheney, were forced by his health to stand down. Mr. Cheney, who has a history of heart problems, was briefly admitted to hospital last weekend after

breathing problems but later said he was fine.

The recommendation of Mrs. Bush has delighted the self-styled Condistas of the Americans For Rice grouping.

The movement of grassroots Republicans has been running a campaign building support for a possible Rice presidential run at conservative gatherings across the United States.

"We're delighted by Mrs. Bush's comments," Jessie Jane Duff, the group's national chairman, told The Sunday Telegraph. "You don't get much closer to the President and we think her opinion carries enormous credibility."

The Condistas are running a "draft campaign" to persuade their heroine to run by demonstrating a ground swell of public support for her candidacy.

Despite her closeness to Mr. Bush, Ms. Rice would not be universally acclaimed as a candidate within Republican ranks. A former foreign affairs academic and expert on Russia, she has no record on domestic issues. Most notably, the neo-conservatives who in effect ran foreign policy during Mr. Bush's first term are dismayed by her more conciliatory approach and would campaign to prevent her winning the nomination.

For her part, Ms. Rice has insisted she has no plans to run for office. Indeed, the sports fan has often said her ideal job after stepping down would be to head the National Football League.

GRAPHIC: Black & White

Photo: Sean Gallup, Getty Images; Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice may emerge as the "legacy candidate" of the Bush political era.

The Associated Press

January 15, 2006 Sunday 7:24 PM GMT

HEADLINE: **Laura Bush** backs domestic spying program as criticism continues on Capitol Hill

BYLINE: By DEB RIECHMANN, Associated Press Writer

First lady **Laura Bush** said Sunday that the U.S. government is right to eavesdrop on Americans with suspected ties to terrorists, but a top Senate Republican joined a chorus of lawmakers who think domestic spying is on shaky legal ground.

"I think the American people expect the United States government and the president to do what they can to make sure there's not an attack by foreign terrorists," Mrs. Bush said just before landing here to begin a four-day stay in West Africa.

President Bush is concerned that media disclosure of the program will cripple work to foil terrorists, she said. "I think he was worried that it would undermine our efforts by alerting terrorists to what our efforts are," Mrs. Bush said.

Bush's secret order gave the National Security Agency permission to listen in on international phone calls and peek at e-mails between Americans and suspected terrorists.

Administration officials claim a congressional resolution passed after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 a resolution that authorized him to use force in the fight against terrorism gave the president the authority to order the program.

"I thought they were wrong," Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., said on ABC's "This Week."

Specter is one of several Republicans and Democrats who are questioning the administration's authority to engage in domestic spying without court warrants. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales has agreed to testify at hearings next month before the Judiciary Committee, which Specter chairs.

Committee members, including GOP Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas, have expressed doubt about Bush's legal argument for the program.

"We're not going to give him a blank check, and just because we're of the same party doesn't mean we're not going to look at this very closely," Specter said. "And I moved immediately when the matter was disclosed to say that I would use my authority as chairman of the Judiciary Committee to have hearings, and we're going to pursue it."

Speaking on CBS' "Face the Nation," Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., said she too does not think Bush had the legal authority to order the program. She lamented the administration's decision to bypass checks and balances provided by the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

Under the act, the attorney general can authorize a warrantless wiretap for up to 72 hours. But he must give the presiding judge of an 11-member FISA court a heads up and justify the

surveillance later. If the attorney general fails to do so, the court has discretion to notify the target of the surveillance.

"If you're going to wiretap Americans, if you may wiretap whomever an American might call, if you're going to put that information in a database and I said if, because we don't exactly know what happened follow the law, and do it legally," Feinstein said.

On her second trip to Africa, Mrs. Bush plans to join Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Monrovia, Liberia, on Monday to attend the inauguration of President-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first woman president on the continent.

"The centerpiece of this trip is women's empowerment, with Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as an example, a shining example for all of us, for women around the world," she said.

Mrs. Bush also is highlighting U.S.-backed education and HIV-AIDS programs in Ghana and Nigeria.

In a 12-minute exchange with reporters on the plane, Mrs. Bush rebuffed criticism that too much of U.S. assistance for battling AIDS in Africa is focused on abstinence programs. She said abstinence, the use of condoms and being faithful to one's sexual partner are all important in curbing the spread of disease.

"I'm always a little bit irritated when I hear the criticism of abstinence, because abstinence is absolutely 100 percent effective in eradicating a sexually transmitted disease," she said.

In countries where girls feel obligated to comply with the wishes of men, girls need to know that abstinence is a choice.

"When girls are not empowered, when girls are vulnerable ... their chances of being able to negotiate their sexual life with their partners and to encourage or make their partners use a condom are very low," she said. "So it's really important for all three to be part of a successful eradication of AIDS, and that is ... abstinence, be faithful to your partner, and then use condoms, correctly and consistently."

BBC Monitoring International Reports

January 15, 2006 Sunday

HEADLINE: GHANA US FIRST LADY ARRIVES IN ACCRA EN ROUTE TO LIBERIA

Excerpt from report by Ghanaian GBC radio on 15 January

The US first lady, **Laura Bush**, has arrived in Ghana en route to Liberia for the inauguration of President-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

As part of her African trip, she will also visit Nigeria. She is accompanied by one of her twin daughters, Barbara, who has an interest in the care of people living with HIV/AIDS. Also on her entourage are the US under-secretary of state for African affairs, Ambassador Jendayi Frazer, and 13 senior officials. [Passage omitted].

Source: Radio Ghana, Accra, in English 1800 gmt 15 Jan 06

BBC Monitoring

The Associated Press

January 15, 2006 Sunday 5:03 PM GMT

HEADLINE: **Laura Bush** begins four-day swing through West Africa

BYLINE: By DEB RIECHMANN, Associated Press Writer

First lady **Laura Bush** said Sunday that the U.S. government is right to eavesdrop on Americans with suspected ties to terrorists, and that President Bush worries that revelations about the domestic spying program will cripple efforts to foil terrorists.

"I think the American people expect the United States government and the president to do what they can to make sure there's not an attack by foreign terrorists," Mrs. Bush said just before landing here to begin a four-day stay in West Africa.

"I think he was worried that it would undermine our efforts by alerting terrorists to what our efforts are," she said.

Mrs. Bush planned to travel on Monday to Liberia to attend the inauguration of President-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first woman president on the continent. She also is highlighting U.S.-backed education and HIV-AIDS programs in Ghana and Nigeria.

In a 12-minute exchange with reporters on the plane, Mrs. Bush rebuffed criticism that too much of U.S. assistance for battling AIDS in Africa is focused on abstinence programs. She said abstinence, the use of condoms and being faithful to one's sexual partner are all important in curbing the spread of disease.

"I really have always been a little bit irritated by criticism of abstinence because abstinence is absolutely, 100 percent effective in fighting a sexually transmittable disease," she said. "When girls are not empowered, girls are vulnerable, and their chances of being able to negotiate their sexual life with their partners and to make their partner chose a condom are very low."

She said that in Africa, where one in three people have AIDS, a sexually transmitted disease, it's important to talk about abstinence.

"In many countries where girls feel obligated to comply with the wishes of men, girls need to know that abstinence is a choice. It's really very, very important to have all three," she said.

Mrs. Bush also quelled speculation that Vice President Dick Cheney, who has suffered heart attacks in the past but not as vice president, would step down before the end of Bush's term. Cheney recently used a cane because of a foot ailment.

"I think Vice President Cheney's in great health and he's doing great," Mrs. Bush said. "Yes, I'm sure the president would not like for him to step down, obviously. The vice president has been an excellent vice president. He's solid as a rock."

LOAD-DATE: January 16, 2006

The Bradenton Herald (Florida)/Associated Press/Miami Herald

January 15, 2006 Sunday

HEADLINE: Florida kids on the way to Liberia

BYLINE: ASSOCIATED PRESS

(AP) -- Liberian president-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has been called the "Iron Lady," someone who fearlessly challenged the most powerful Liberian warlord.

Two Florida children have another name for her: Grandma.

Jamell Sirleaf, 9, and Amina Sirleaf, 7, will be part of a group of dignitaries in Liberia on Monday for the swearing-in of their grandmother, Africa's first female head of government.

The two will be at the ceremony in Monrovia, Liberia's capital, joining dignitaries such as first lady **Laura Bush** and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The children will be accompanied by their mother, Helen Joseph, who fled from Liberia at the age of about 13. The children's father is James Sirleaf, Johnson-Sirleaf's son. Joseph and Sirleaf are divorced, but their grandmother remains close.

And grandma, well, she wanted Jamell and Amina at the historic event.

"Ellen called me and insisted that I take the children," Helen Joseph told the Orlando Sentinel.

Despite her memories of war-torn Liberia, a country of curfews and shootings, Joseph agreed. She said until now she has been afraid to take the children to visit the country where she was born.

Liberia was founded by freed American slaves in 1847. The country has been torn by bloody coups and war since 1980. Around 200,000 people have died in the fighting, and millions have been displaced.

The president-elect will take over a war-scarred nation where a stunning 80 percent of the working-age population is jobless.

The Harvard-educated economist is a former Liberian finance minister. She has also served with the World Bank and the United Nations. She won the presidency in a November runoff election.

Pensacola News Journal (Florida)

January 15, 2006 Sunday

HEADLINE: Peace replaces strife in nation of Liberia

BYLINE: Kate Peabody

Kate Peabody is the health reporter for the News Journal. She is a native of Liberia.

Liberians in Pensacola and across the United States will have lots to celebrate on Monday. After nearly two decades of civil strife, it seems Liberia, my homeland, once fraught with unending problems, is on the verge of attaining lasting peace.

It will also mark a day of historic proportions when Africa's oldest republic, founded by freed American slaves in the 1800s, will inaugurate its first woman president -- the first ever on the continent.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and first lady **Laura Bush** are among the foreign dignitaries who will attend the ceremonies for president-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Monrovia, the capital.

Much to be grateful for

On Nov. 23, the Harvard-educated Johnson-Sirleaf and her Unity Party won nearly 60 percent of the vote in a runoff election against millionaire soccer player George Weah's 40 percent.

As our embattled nation struggles to gain its footing, we have lots to be grateful for, given our horrific past, which began with the violent military overthrow of President William R. Tolbert in 1980, and later spiraled into 14 years of a senseless civil war.

In one fell swoop, a violent coup had shattered our lives and changed Liberia forever.

For me, it began on that dreadful morning of April 12, 1980, when I was awoken to pandemonium in the hallways of my college dorm at Cuttington University, nearly 120 miles away from Monrovia. It was evident from the rape of a female student the night before that gun-toting soldiers swarming our campus had not come to protect us.

Suddenly, my serene and tranquil world seemed light years away.

Clearly, the sobering news of the coup, led by 28-year-old Master Sgt. Samuel K. Doe, was a rude awakening for many Liberians. We never imagined such violence was ever possible on our shores. But little did we know that this, too, would be the emergence of a long and horrific nightmare.

Our worst fears were yet to come. Doe wasted little time executing former government officials. And anyone who dared oppose him, thereafter, felt his wrath. He ruled with impunity.

Leaving Liberia

Just one month after the upheaval, in May 1980, at 21, with mixed emotions, I left Liberia to attend college at Southern University in Baton Rouge, La.

I felt guilty leaving my family to face an uncertain future -- worried particularly about my father's fate. My father, Alfred Kollie, a deputy minister for the Ministry of Local Government, was among the few officials from the Tolbert government to reluctantly retain his post. But we breathed a sigh of relief when he deftly planned his resignation and did so two years later.

Doe's ruthlessness was no match for his opposition or anyone who crossed him. And so after nine years of his brutal rule, when rumor spread that Charles Taylor, a former official in his government, was returning home to redeem the country from its misery, many Liberians rejoiced. Taylor had left the country some years earlier, after falling out of grace with Doe and moving to the United States.

But their joy was short-lived.

On Christmas Eve in 1989, while visiting my parents for the first time in years, we learned that Taylor and a group of men had clandestinely entered the country. Sensing trouble, my father urgently pressed me to return to America. It would be another six months before I would again communicate with my family. Indeed, Taylor's arrival had set in motion not only the subsequent assassination of Doe, but also the violent and senseless 14-year war.

Even Doe's death in September 1990 did nothing to stem the violence. Taylor continued to battle soldiers loyal to Doe and other rebel groups as well, before he finally emerged on top, winning a lopsided election in 1997.

Prospect for change

The United Nations estimates that close to 250,000 Liberians were killed in the war and countless others displaced, some living as refugees in neighboring countries -- my father included.

In 2003, after bending to pressures from President George W. Bush and other African leaders, Taylor was forced to leave Liberia and now lives in exile in Nigeria.

Despite our violent past and a long road to recovery, I continue to be a hopeless optimist.

Not only am I overjoyed at the prospects of change for the better in the country, I am especially proud of my 73-year-old dad, who together with a couple of his friends had sown the seeds of the Unity Party, now headed by Johnson-Sirleaf.

Back in August 1984 when the party founder, the late Edward Kessely, and a group of men with similar ideas gathered for the first of several meetings in my dad's living room, little did they know that they too would be a tiny part of the momentous events set to take place Monday.

My dad also served as the first chairman of the party. And as he prepares to return home after nearly a decade as a refugee in Ghana, I'm encouraged that aside from the tremendous loss of lives, one of the greatest tragedies of the war is coming to an end. Countless families like ours, separated by this conflict, can now look forward to some long overdue reunions at home.

It's a day that I anxiously await.

SUNDAY TASMANIAN

January 15, 2006 Sunday

HEADLINE: Boss's wife backs Condi bid

AMERICA will soon have a woman president, First Lady **Laura Bush** said yesterday, and she hopes it will be Condoleezza Rice (and presumably not Hillary Clinton).

"I think it will happen probably in the next few terms of the presidency in the United States," said Mrs Bush. Rice has already said she doesn't want to replace President Bush in the Oval Office, but Mrs Bush said: "I'd love to see her run. She's terrific."

In a rare interview, Mrs Bush talked about her upcoming trip to Africa with daughter Barbara Bush and Rice. The women are attending the inauguration of Liberian President Ellen Johnson, the first woman head of state in Africa.

Press Briefing by the First Lady After Liberia Inauguration

Aboard Plane

4:20 P.M. (Local)

MRS. BUSH: Well, we had a very exciting day. The inauguration of the President of Liberia was everything I hoped it would be. I loved her inaugural address. I thought what she said about corruption, for instance, was very important to her country; what she said about being the President of all the people was important. And I thought it was really sweet when she told the children of Liberia that she loved them. I liked that a lot, I thought it was really a very wonderful day, and I'm proud to have been the one to get to go with Dr. Rice to represent the United States at President Johnson-Sirleaf's inauguration.

Q Speaking of Dr. Rice, what did you think of the cheer that went up? I mean, you have all these heads of states, heads of delegations, dignitaries, and Condoleezza Rice's name comes up, and a big cheer. What did you think of that?

MRS. BUSH: Well, I think the people of Liberia are very, very proud of Dr. Rice. As all of you know, Liberia was started by freed slaves, African Americans founded Liberia. And if you looked at the program -- I don't know if you saw the program of the inauguration, but with the list of all of their former presidents, their first several presidents were born in the United States, starting about 1840*, I think, was when Liberia was founded.



So I think they feel a special fondness for the United States, and I think they feel a very special pride for Dr. Rice.

Q Did you have any opportunity to talk with President Johnson-Sirleaf?

MRS. BUSH: Very little. We got to meet twice. When we first came in, we went over and paid our respects to her, and then at the very end, she stopped by and spoke again. I got to tell her that I was impressed with her inaugural address, that I liked it a lot. I also told her when we first paid our respects to her before the inauguration that I brought the very best wishes of the American people to her, and of the President, of course, to her.

I want to encourage the American people to keep an interest in Liberia after this inauguration. I hope that her goals that she outlined in her inaugural address are goals that can be met. And I know they can be if the international community, and particularly the United States, stands with the people of Liberia.

Q Do you have any reaction to what we saw on the way in?

MRS. BUSH: Well, we saw a lot of really very interesting things on the way in. I rode in with the Ambassador, so I saw the rubber plantation. I don't know if you smelled the smell when we first got off, but it's the smell of latex, processing latex. And that's a natural resource that Liberia has, that hopefully they'll be able to rebuild their economy and rebuild the rubber plantation and the latex processing plants, now that the civil war is over, now that they have a fair and free election and a new President.

They have a lot of natural resources. I don't know if you also noticed the banana palms and the coconut palms that are natural there. They get about 200 inches of rain a year.



So they have the chance to be an agricultural -- really, for the whole continent of Africa, a real agricultural headquarters. And so I hope they'll be able to do that.

Q -- symbolic of your whole trip here, empowering women. I talked to a first lady who's a friend before I came, and he thought maybe this -- he sort of used the words "international feminism" is a theme for your --

MRS. BUSH: Well, I thought it was very interesting in her address that she spoke to the women of Africa - the women of Liberia, the women of Africa and the women of the world is what she said in her address. And I liked that. I think women around the world are watching and they're proud of her. But you're right, women's empowerment, girls' education is a centerpiece of this trip, because all of us know that educated girls lead much more successful lives. They can be better mothers for their children, they can make wiser and more informed decisions for their children's health, as well as for their children's education.

Plus they can contribute to the economy. And in Liberia, the farmers traditionally were women. And now, because of the 14 years of civil war, a lot of women are no longer on their land that they farmed before, but hopefully they'll be able to go back to their own properties and start that again.

Q Speaking of civil war, and also now that you've seen some of the country and some of the devastation that that civil war caused, do you think it's time for Charles Taylor to be brought to war crimes trial?

MRS. BUSH: Well, I know that the President of Liberia will work to do what's best for Liberia, and also to bring Charles Taylor to justice. This is a time of reconciliation right now in Liberia with her inauguration following the contested -- very contested election. And so I assume, and I think, that she will work to bring him to justice.

Q Mrs. Bush, did you give any special message from the President?

MRS. BUSH: Yes, I just gave her the very best wishes from the President when I spoke to her and told her that we would stand with the people of Liberia and that I'm really honored to have the chance to be the one that got to come along with Dr. Rice to her inauguration.

Q Did you invite her to Washington again?

MRS. BUSH: No, but I'm sure she will be soon.

Q Not to diminish what you've done, what you're doing in the states, but this is your fifth foreign trip -- you've had four in this term, the second term. Do you sense that your legacy may (inaudible) foreign countries?

MRS. BUSH: Actually, I think that what happened to me really happened also to the other people in the United States, and that is after September 11th, when we all looked at Afghanistan and saw the oppression of women there, it awakened a lot of people to the plight of women around the world. As we look more and more at AIDS and what we can do in the United States to help alleviate AIDS suffering around the world, we realize more and more that girls' education is a key part of it.

So I don't -- although education has always been what I'm interested in for my whole life, I didn't expect, really, when George was elected, that I would be interested in education worldwide like I am. But it's just turned out, under the circumstances of what we've lived through in our country for the last few years that it's a really important piece that the United States can help worldwide with.

END 4:28 P.M. (Local)

*1847



Voice of America

January 16, 2006

HEADLINE: **Laura Bush** Arrives in Africa

BYLINE: Scott Stearns

U.S. first lady **Laura Bush** is in Africa at the start of a four day tour that includes the inauguration of the continent's first female head of state, Liberian President-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

Traditional Ghanaian drummers welcomed Mrs. Bush to Accra. She will meet with Ghanaian President John Kufour during this visit, and announce a partnership between six American universities and six African nations to develop individual kindergarten-through-eighth-grade curriculums.

She will also visit Nigeria to meet with President Olusegun Obasanjo, and speak about HIV/AIDS prevention at a hospital in the capital, Abuja. But the centerpiece of this trip is Monday's inauguration of Liberian Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as Africa's first female head of state. Speaking to reporters en route to Africa, Mrs. Bush said the Liberian president-elect is a shining example of women's empowerment.

The first lady is leading a delegation that includes her daughter, Barbara, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer says the strength of the delegation shows President Bush's commitment to Liberia and women's rights.

"President Bush is sending this high-level delegation to underscore the importance of Liberia's transition from war to peace, and towards a democratic consolidation for the Liberian people, the continent of Africa and the world at large," said Frazer. "The election of Africa's first female president is an inspiration for young girls and women across the continent."

The Bush administration last year contributed more than \$840 million to Liberia, the bulk of which went to pay for United Nations peacekeepers. It also included \$60 million to train Liberian police and \$90 million to help returning refugees.

Mrs. Bush said one of the biggest problems facing Liberia is massive unemployment. There is also the question of former rebel leader and head-of-state Charles Taylor, who is currently living in exile in Nigeria. Taylor started the war that ultimately toppled former military ruler Samuel Doe. Taylor is now wanted by a war crimes tribunal for his alleged support for human rights abuses in the civil war in neighboring Sierra Leone.

Assistant Secretary of State Frazer says the Bush administration still wants Taylor held accountable for his actions.

"Clearly, the United States continues to seek Charles Taylor having to answer, to be accountable for the atrocities he carried out in Sierra Leone, where he is indicted by the Sierra Leone special court, and throughout the Mano River states," said Frazer. "He was one of the major sources of instability in the region."

During a visit to Washington after her election, Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf asked Secretary of State Rice about Taylor. Frazer says the secretary told the president-elect that Washington will continue to pursue the matter, and was encouraged by Nigerian President Obasanjo's statement to the U.N. General Assembly that the former Liberian leader should be turned over to the special court.

[Stearns report - Download 368k](#) 

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Agence France Presse -- English

January 16, 2006

HEADLINE: Sirleaf becomes Liberia's sworn-in president

Liberia's new President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf took the oath of office Monday, becoming Africa's first elected woman head of state.

"I, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, do solemnly swear to protect, defend and uphold the constitution of the Republic of Liberia and will conscientiously, faithfully and impartially discharge my duties to the best of my ability, so help me God," she said, her hand on the Bible.

She was sworn in by the country's supreme court chief justice Henry Reed Cooper at a Monrovia ceremony attended by thousands of people from around the west African country devastated by 14 years of successive civil wars.

Before Sirleaf took the oath in the grounds of the parliament building, the 64 members of parliament elected last October were sworn in with the 30 senators in the upper house.

Senior figures from across Africa and further afield attended the inauguration, among them United States First Lady **Laura Bush** and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Agence France Presse -- English

January 16, 2006 Monday 10:26 AM GMT

HEADLINE: Thousands attend inauguration of new Liberian president

Thousands of people began filing into the grounds of Liberia's parliament building Monday for the inauguration of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as Africa's first female elected head of state, hopeful of a new era of peace and democracy after years of war and tyranny.

Among the first, hours before the ceremony, were a group of African traditional dancers grounds blowing horns and beating drums in line with local tradition of alerting the population of a pending great event.

Makeshift marquees made from bamboo sticks were festooned with balloons and ribbons in the national colours of blue, red and white, while the trunks of mango and avocado trees in the grounds were painted white.

Senior figures from across Africa and further afield were also due to attend the inauguration, among them United States First Lady **Laura Bush** and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, John Kufuor of Ghana, Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone's Ahmad Tejan Kabbah were also expected, as was Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing, who is on a tour of west Africa.

Johnson Sirleaf, 67, a veteran politician and international civil servant, won a second round runoff election against football hero George Weah on November 8. Her swearing-in ceremony is scheduled for 1100 GMT.

She faces the mammoth task of rebuilding one of the world's most failed states, one ruined by civil wars that raged from the 1989 rebellion launched by Charles Taylor until 2003, when Taylor, by then the elected president, stepped down and went into exile as part of a UN-brokered peace process.

A quarter of a million people were killed in the conflicts.

On the eve of her inauguration, Sirleaf vowed to restore hope to her country's people, half of whom have known nothing but war.

"We will make our children smile again, we will give them back their youth and their future. We will make, like, and be proud of Liberia," she said.

There are more than 15,000 United Nations peacekeeping troops stationed in the country and the UN mission stepped up security along main roads and at the airport serving Monrovia ahead of Monday's ceremony.

A US warship has been stationed off the west African country's coast and key roads in the capital

were closed to public vehicles.

"We're really, really excited to be at such a historic inauguration," **Laura Bush** told reporters Sunday while travelling to Monrovia.

Sirleaf "ran on a platform of reconciliation and reconstruction and it's going to take the help of a lot of countries, including the United States, which has a special relationship with Liberia, for her and the people of Liberia to be able to do the reconstruction they need," she said.

Bush said she was bringing "the commitment from the United States government to stand with her, to stand with the people of Liberia as they rebuild their country."

"The centerpiece, really, of this trip is women's empowerment, with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as a shining example for all of us, for women around the world, not just women on her continent," she added.

Rice told reporters the inauguration was "exciting for the continent" and a sign of the progress Liberia has made since the lawless days of Charles Taylor.

"I think it would have been hard to imagine that we would have had free and fair elections this fall and now be inaugurating this woman as president," Rice said.

"It's going to be a hopeful day. ... The Liberian people certainly deserve a hopeful day," she said. "The Liberian people are trying to look forward and I think we owe it to them to look forward and not backward."

Associated Press Worldstream

January 16, 2006 Monday 2:22 PM GMT

HEADLINE: First lady travels to Africa, attends historic inauguration

BYLINE: By DEB RIECHMANN, Associated Press Writer

First lady **Laura Bush** smiled broadly and applauded the historic swearing in on Monday of Liberia's new leader, the first woman ever elected president in Africa, who exclaimed that the future belongs to women "because we have taken charge of it."

On her second trip to Africa, Mrs. Bush joined U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Liberia's capital at the inauguration of new President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a Harvard-educated economist who pledged to restore peace after a 14-year civil war in this nation founded by freed American slaves.

"I think it's really important worldwide," Mrs. Bush said about Sirleaf's inauguration. "I think it's particularly important on the continent of Africa, because traditionally women have been excluded in many African cultures not all of them, but in many."

Mrs. Bush was the formal head of the U.S. delegation, but it was Rice who was greeted with hoots of approval by the crowd during introductions.

Sirleaf's victory in a run-off election in November raised hope that Liberia would move past a war that devastated the West African country. The 67-year-old grandmother has vowed to end the period of corrupt-male-dominated rule in Liberia, still reeling from a brutal 1989 to 2003 civil war that left some 200,000 dead.

Former Liberian President Charles Taylor was indicted by the U.S. for war crimes and forced from power in 2003 during rebel war, paving the way for U.N. peacekeeper to help restore order.

"Charles Taylor is out of Liberia," Rice told reporters on a flight to Monrovia. "He is through raping and pillaging this country, and the Liberian people are trying to look forward."

Mrs. Bush and her 24-year-old daughter, Barbara, who recently worked on AIDS in a pediatric hospital in South Africa, spent Sunday night in Accra, Ghana, at the home of the U.S. ambassador.

Associated Press Worldstream

January 16, 2006

HEADLINE: Liberia's Sirleaf sworn in as first elected female president in Africa

BYLINE: By HANS NICHOLS, Associated Press Writer

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was sworn in Monday as war-battered Liberia's new president, making history as Africa's first elected female head of state and pledging a "fundamental break" with the West African nation's violent past.

"We know that your vote was a vote for change, a vote for peace, security ... and we have heard you loudly," Sirleaf told Liberians in an inaugural speech.

"We recognize this change is not a change for change's sake, but a fundamental break with the past, therefore requiring that we take bold and decisive steps to address the problems that have for decades stunted our progress," she said.

Sirleaf takes charge of a ruined nation struggling for peace after a quarter-century of coups and war. Speaking for the first time as president, she also promised to stamp out corruption to secure the trust of skeptical foreign donors whose aid is desperately needed to rebuild.

In a statement, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan congratulated Sirleaf, saying she had a "historic mandate to lead the nation toward a future of lasting peace and stability."

Standing in front of a Liberian flag with her left hand on a Bible, Sirleaf pledged to "faithfully, conscientiously and impartially discharge the duties and functions of the office of president of the Republic of Liberia to the best of my abilities, so help me God."

The ceremony was attended by thousands of Liberians and scores of foreign dignitaries, including Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and South Africa's Thabo Mbeki.

Two U.S. Navy warships were visible offshore for the first time since the war ended in 2003, a rare show of support also meant to protect two high-profile American guests, first lady **Laura Bush** and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Security was tight, with armed U.N. peacekeepers surveying the scene with binoculars from atop surrounding buildings. The U.N. redeployed 500 peacekeepers previously stationed outside the capital to strategic points in Monrovia and the international airport.

Sirleaf will serve a six-year term as head of Africa's oldest republic, founded by freed American slaves in 1847. The country has known little but war, however, since a rebel group led by Charles Taylor plunged the country into chaos, invading from neighboring Ivory Coast in 1989.

Taylor became president in 1997 but stepped down and was exiled to Nigeria as part of the 2003 peace deal brokered as rebels pressed on the capital. He is now wanted on war crimes charges by a U.N.-backed war crimes court in Sierra Leone for his role in backing a brutal rebel group

during that country's 1991-2002 civil war.

On a flight to Monrovia early Monday, Rice told reporters Taylor "is through raping and pillaging this country, and the Liberian people are trying to look forward."

Nigeria has refused to hand Taylor over to the court and Sirleaf has said only that she would consult with regional leaders regarding Taylor's future. Rice said she's confident Sirleaf will work to hand Taylor over to the Sierra Leone court.

Rich in diamonds, iron ore and timber, Liberia was relatively prosperous and peaceful until a 1980 coup saw illiterate Master Sgt. Samuel Doe seize power and order Cabinet ministers tied to poles in their underwear and executed.

Harvard-educated Sirleaf was finance minister at the time, but was spared, she told The Associated Press in a recent interview, "by the grace of God."

Twice imprisoned in the 1980s by Doe's junta, Sirleaf fled into exile.

When Taylor launched a rebel invasion in 1989, Sirleaf briefly supported him a move that still draws criticism today. The war saw children as young as 10 take up arms. Fighting uprooted half the country's 3 million people and killed 200,000.

A truce paved the way for presidential elections in 1997 that Sirleaf lost to Taylor. The brazen bid earned her the nickname "Iron Lady."

After another rebel war forced Taylor from power in 2003, Sirleaf ran for president again, this time winning a heated November run-off buoyed by a resume that included senior jobs at Citibank, the U.N. and the World Bank. Her soccer star rival, George Weah, was backed by ex-rebel leaders and many ex-combatants.

Sirleaf inherits a nation in tatters. The capital has no running water or electricity, and unemployment is an astounding 80 percent.

Reflecting how slowly economic wheels are turning, the annual budget is a mere US\$80 million. Annual donor aid is three-and-a-half times that.

Sirleaf says her top priorities include stamping out corruption, getting electricity in the capital and assuring a future for 100,000 ex-combatants who laid down arms last year, many of whom are prowling the streets, unemployed.

Associated Press Online

January 16, 2006

HEADLINE: Rice Again Rules Out 2008 White House Run

Not even a vote of confidence from **Laura Bush** can change Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's mind about running for president in 2008.

Before leaving for Africa, the first lady predicted the United States soon would have a female president a Republican, and maybe even Rice.

"I think it will happen for sure," Mrs. Bush said Friday about a woman in the Oval Office.

In the year since becoming secretary of state, Rice has repeatedly dismissed the notion of running for the Republican nomination to succeed her current boss, President Bush.

Asked about the first lady's comments Sunday, Rice laughed and good naturedly answered the recurring question about her prospects for president in 2008. No dice, she said for the umpteenth time.

"Obviously, it's flattering when people say things like that. The first lady is not only a terrific person, she's my friend. And I was honored that she said that, of course. She's a wonderful person," Rice said.

"But I've spoken to this. I know what I'm good at, I know what I want to do and that's not it."

How about vice president?

"The two are the same," she said with a grin and a shake of her head.

During her flight Sunday, Mrs. Bush was asked whether she'd heard from Rice after her remark.

"I'm probably going to have to take over her correspondence department, when she gets all the letters," Mrs. Bush joked.

Brakebill, Elizabeth B.**From:** Culvahouse, Sarah A.**Sent:** Monday, January 16, 2006 11:45 AM**To:** Brittain Intern, Laura L.; DL-WHO-FirstLady; Heinemann Intern, Katherine G.; Joo Intern, Mee Y.; Knight Intern, Kelsey M.; Lewis Intern, Caroline E.; Parilo Intern, Michelle M.**Subject:** AP- Laura Bush Attends Liberian Inauguration- 1/16/2006**Laura Bush Attends Liberian Inauguration**

By DEB RIECHMANN, Associated Press Writer 34 minutes ago.

First lady Laura Bush smiled broadly and applauded the historic swearing in on Monday of Liberia's new leader, the first woman ever elected president in Africa, who exclaimed that the future belongs to women "because we have taken charge of it."

On her second trip to Africa, Mrs. Bush joined Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Liberia's capital at the inauguration of President-elect Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a Harvard-educated economist who pledged to restore peace after a 14-year civil war in this nation founded by freed American slaves.

"I think it's really important worldwide," Mrs. Bush said about Sirleaf's inauguration, which falls on the day Americans honor civil rights icon, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. "I think it's particularly important on the continent of Africa, because traditionally women have been excluded in many African cultures — not all of them, but in many."

Mrs. Bush was the formal head of the U.S. delegation, but it was Rice who was greeted with hoots of approval by the crowd during introductions.

The outdoor ceremony, held on a muggy overcast day, was informal by U.S. standards. The platform was simply decorated with red, white and blue bunting and balloons. Members of the local media shouted at diplomats on stage to move out their camera shots.

The new president said Liberians who voted for her were casting a ballot for national healing, leadership and freedom.

"We know that your vote was a vote of change, a vote of peace, security and stability. We have heard you loudly," Sirleaf said in her speech, which both Mrs. Bush and Rice attended.

Sirleaf's victory in a run-off election in November raised hope that Liberia would move past a war that devastated the West African country. The 67-year-old grandmother has vowed to end the period of corrupt-male-dominated rule in Liberia, still reeling from a brutal 1989 to 2003 civil war that left some 200,000 dead.

"The United States has already invested a lot of money over the last two years through the election period," Mrs. Bush said Sunday just before landing in Ghana. "We have a commitment for the year 2006, as well, to help them in their reconstruction as they start to try to have electricity again and potable water and all the things that are so crucial for basic survival in Liberia."

Mrs. Bush and her 24-year-old daughter, Barbara, who recently worked on AIDS in a pediatric hospital in South Africa, spent Sunday night in Accra, Ghana, at the home of the U.S. ambassador. They were up before dawn Monday to fly to Monrovia, named after President Monroe.

On her more than hour-long drive to the capital, Mrs. Bush's motorcade passed checkpoints manned by U.N. peacekeeping soldiers and she got a close-up look at the pervasive poverty in Liberia. A few residents waved, but most looked on curiously at the motorcade from thatched huts, some with roofs covered with plastic held down by rocks.

Mrs. Bush landed at Roberts International Airport which U.S. Marines controlled in August 2003 to facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid into the country and stop the flow of arms to former Liberia President Charles Taylor. Taylor fled into exile that month, paving the way for a transitional government that is handing over power to Sirleaf.

"Charles Taylor is out of Liberia," Rice told reporters on a flight to Monrovia. "He is through raping and pillaging this country, and the Liberian people are trying to look forward."

Taylor is in exile in Nigeria but is wanted on war-crimes charges in Sierra Leone, where he supported a brutal rebel group during that country's 1991-2002 civil war. Nigeria says it won't hand Taylor over to a U.N.-backed tribunal unless a democratically elected Liberian leader makes such a request. Rice said she's confident that Sirleaf will work to bring Taylor to justice, and that he ultimately will end up before the special court in Sierra

Leone.

"This will happen," Rice said. "It's what the international community wants. The international community wants justice. I think the Liberian leadership wants justice."

Sirleaf defeated George Weah, a soccer star who first claimed that the election was fraudulent, but then conceded defeat after international election observers deemed the presidential elections largely clean.

Mrs. Bush's motorcade passed lingering reminders of the election — a billboard that said "Vote George Weah," faded blue campaign posters for Sirleaf and a banner hung over a street that said "Let's join hands in development. No more guns. No more violence."

Liberia faces great challenges: poverty at 85 percent and illiteracy at 80 percent, as well as high unemployment, serious health problems, poor public services and weak public institutions.

"She ran on a platform of reconciliation and reconstruction, and it's going to take the help of a lot of countries, including the United States, which has a special relationship with Liberia, for her and the people of Liberia to be able to do the reconstruction they need," Mrs. Bush said.

Congress appropriated more than \$840 million last year to help reconstruct Liberia. Of that, more than \$520 million has gone to support a U.N. peacekeeping mission.

The United States currently is working on quick-impact programs to help rebuild courthouses, high schools and hospitals and provide skills training to youth and ex-combatants. The U.S. government also is helping finance efforts to rebuild Liberia's army.

Brakebill, Elizabeth B.

From: Culvahouse, Sarah A.
Sent: Monday, January 16, 2006 10:40 AM
To: McBride, Anita B.; Brakebill, Elizabeth B.; McClellan, Scott; Duffy, Trent D.; Davis, Michele A.; Perino, Dana M.; Bartlett, Dan; Cooper, Colby J.; Wallace, Nicolle
Subject: Reuters - US first lady irked by criticism of Bush AIDS plan

I am forwarding this to you per Susan.

Reuters

US first lady irked by criticism of Bush AIDS plan January 15, 2006 By Patricia Wilson

U.S. first lady Laura Bush opened a four-day trip to West Africa on Sunday full of praise for the continent's first elected woman president but irritated by criticism of promoting abstinence to help combat AIDS.

"She serves as a very important role model for little girls on the continent as well around the world," Bush said of Liberia's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, whose inauguration she will attend on Monday. "A shining example for all of us."

Johnson-Sirleaf defeated soccer millionaire George Weah in a November 8 presidential runoff and has pledged to heal the wounds of a bloody 14-year civil war that ended in 2003 but left Liberia in ruins and killed 250,000 people.

Bush urged Liberia's president-elect to reach out to young people who did not support her.

"One problem in Liberia is there's so many unemployed young people and the young people were overwhelmingly for George Weah, the soccer player ... even though Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf won by 59 percent of the vote," she told reporters en route to Accra.

Bush said she brought "the commitment of the United States government to stand with Liberia and the people of Liberia as they rebuild their country."

A senior U.S. official said Washington had committed \$1 billion to Monrovia between 2004 and 2006, most of it for peacekeeping.

The rest of Bush's trip, to Ghana and Nigeria, will focus on education and the HIV/AIDS pandemic which the United Nations estimates infects more than 30 million people in Africa. The disease has killed at least 20 million worldwide.

President George W. Bush has proposed a \$15 billion emergency plan to help stem its spread in Africa and the Caribbean, but critics have complained the program leans too heavily on the promotion of abstinence and fails to place enough emphasis on condoms.

"I think it's a very fair divide," Laura Bush said. "The whole plan all along has been Uganda's plan which is the ABC -- abstinence, be faithful and the correct and consistent use of condoms."

Uganda has brought its AIDS infection rate down from 30 percent in the 1990s to about 6 percent now.

In a part of the world where one in three people had a sexually transmitted deadly disease and in countries "where girls feel obligated to comply with the wishes of men," women needed to know that abstinence was a choice, Bush said.

"But when girls are not empowered, when girls are vulnerable, their chances of being able to negotiate their sexual life with their partners and to encourage or make their partners use a condom are very low."

Opponents contend that money under the Bush program is often siphoned off to faith-based groups that

preach abstinence, but supporters say in Africa promoting the use of condoms has failed to halt the disease.

"I'm always a little bit irritated when I hear the criticism of abstinence, because abstinence is absolutely 100 percent effective in eradicating a sexually transmitted disease," Bush said.

CNN

SHOW: AMERICAN MORNING 7:00 AM EST

January 16, 2006 Monday

HEADLINE: Inauguration Under Way for Liberia's New President; Pakistan Protests Airstrike That Killed 18 Civilians

HIGHLIGHT: Liberia's newly-elected president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, is the first woman to lead an African nation, and the hope is she will help the country forget the violence of the past.

MILES O'BRIEN, CNN ANCHOR: Well, let's talk about the protesters. Protesters voicing their anger over an American incursion in Pakistan. We'll have a closer look at the frontlines of the war on terror for you.

The first ladies of the U.S. government are in Africa to see another first, the first woman elected to lead an African nation. We're live from Liberia.

And a community comes out to remember their own. We have details of the Sago Mine memorial, an emotional time there in coal mining country. It's been a couple of weeks since those miners were lost.

CAROL COSTELLO, CNN ANCHOR: Yes. No closer to an answer either. Good morning to you. I'm Carol Costello in for Soledad this. And hopefully it is warmer where you are than it is here.

M. O'BRIEN: Odds are it is.

Big news coming out of Africa this morning, a landmark inauguration going on right now. Just moments ago, Liberia's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf arrived for the ceremony. She is the first woman ever expected to lead an African nation. And the hope is she'll help the country forget the violence of the past.

Liberia sits on the western coast of Africa, right next to Sierra Leone.

CNN's Jeff Koinange is joining us by videophone from Liberia's capital of Monrovia.

Jeff, hello to you. This is a pivotal moment for Africa, isn't it?

JEFF KOINANGE, CNN LAGOS BUREAU CHIEF: No doubt about it, Miles. And I'll tell you why it's so pivotal. Two years ago at this time, we wouldn't be standing where we are right now, because this country was at war back then.

This is an historic day, not just for the fact that Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is the first Liberian woman elected president, or Africa for that matter. The fact that this country is at peace after all they've gone through is extraordinary. People here are excited.

A short while ago, U.S. First Lady **Laura Bush** arrived, accompanied by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. That there shows an endorsement, support, from the most powerful nation on earth, the fact that they came to support one of their own, hoping that this will be a turning point in this country's often turbulent history.

M. O'BRIEN: Jeff, tell us, if you can give us a sense -- as we look at the ceremony and pomp that's under way right now, give us a sense of the real work that lies ahead, the challenges that face her.

KOINANGE: No doubt about it, Miles. There are huge challenges ahead.

First of all, the economy is in shambles. That's going to have to be taken care of immediately. Also basic social services on the ground, everything from water to electricity, that is nonexistent here in the capital of Monrovia.

President-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, soon to be President Johnson-Sirleaf, will have her work cut out for her. And she's going to need her very commendable credentials, impressive credentials, having worked at the World Bank, City Bank and the United Nations Development Program. She's going to need all of that and more help to get this country back on its feet after so many years of civil war that killed up to more than 200,000 people -- Miles.

M. O'BRIEN: Jeff Koinange from Monrovia, Liberia. Thank you very much. That's a story you'll only see here on CNN.

And speaking of women elected to lead countries, let's go to another continent and another woman who is now in charge.

Kelly, good morning.

KELLY WALLACE, CNN ANCHOR: Good morning, Miles.

You're exactly right, the people of Chile electing their first female president. Socialist candidate Michelle Bachelet edged out conservative Sebastian Pinera by 7 percent of the vote in a runoff race. Bachelet is a one-time political prisoner who currently serves as defense minister for outgoing President Ricardo Lagos. Bachelet takes office March 11.

Deutsche Presse-Agentur

January 16, 2006, Monday

HEADLINE: NEWS FEATURE: Swearing in begins tough job for new Liberian leader

Thousands of women from all over the continent travelled to celebrate the inauguration Monday of Liberia's 23rd president, but more importantly, to witness the installation of Africa's first ever elected female president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

Sirleaf's inauguration ends a two year transitional period which saw an interim government led by Gyude Bryant take over in October 2003 after former president Charles Taylor was forced into exile in neighbouring Nigeria in August of the same year.

The 67-year-old economist and former top U.N. official defeated former football star George Weah in a surprisingly orderly and peaceful election campaign last November to win the presidency in a country that is only starting to emerge from 15 years of a brutal civil war which left the mineral-rich nation's economy in tatters.

But the ranks of the more than 85 per cent of Liberians who are unemployed have now also been swollen by thousands of former combatants, many of them illiterate children who have committed atrocities against their own villagers.

While Liberians are impatient for quick and visible changes to their daily lives, reintegrating the indisciplined former fighters back into their traumatised society remains a hard but necessary task for the new government.

Expected to announce her cabinet later this week, President Johnson-Sirleaf is almost certain to include former warlords to help her negotiate the dismantling of the remaining militias. It will take all her formidable political experience to stop the plunder of the country's mineral resources, a process which is believed to be led by former rebels turned politicians.

Donors will also want assurance that the new president will curb rampant government corruption in order to disburse crucial aid to help Liberia rebuild basic services where electricity, running water and hospitals remain a luxury.

Yet despite the immense task ahead, the atmosphere in Monrovia Monday was festive and the main street newly spruced up by former combatants paid ten U.S. dollars a day for their efforts to welcome a host of international dignitaries.

No less than five African presidents and United Nations Deputy Secretary General Louise Frechette were present at the inauguration ceremony. American First Lady **Laura Bush** and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice were also among the many high-level visitors in Monrovia.

Security was tight with United States Secret Servicemen protecting the U.S. delegation and President Johnson-Sirleaf being driven around and guarded by U.S. Marines.

Two American warships were deployed off the Liberian coast in an impressive show of strength by the historical ally of Africa's first independent nation.

Analysts say apart from the many expectations of President Johnson-Sirleaf's new and as yet untested government, Liberians also expect concrete and enduring assistance from the United States to keep the fragile peace in Liberia on which many states in the West African sub-region rely for their own stability.

A clear change of guard was underway Monday as the pounding of drums replaced the traditional 21-gun salute during the open-air inauguration ceremony. Liberians dearly hope they never have to hear the sounds of gunfire in their country again. dpa ebk pmc

Deutsche Presse-Agentur

January 16, 2006, Monday

HEADLINE: 1ST LEAD: Africa's first female leader sworn in amid tight security

The 67-year-old Harvard-trained economist and grandmother Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was sworn in as Liberia's 23rd president in the capital Monrovia amid tight security Monday.

At least five African presidents and U.S. First Lady **Laura Bush**, as well as U.N. Deputy Secretary General Louise Frechette and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice were among the high-level guests attending the ceremony.

Africa's first ever female president is being guarded and transported by U.S. marines in the war-battered nation that is only now emerging from some 15 years of brutal civil war.

It was not immediately clear how long the U.S. troops would stay in the West African country to ensure the new president's personal safety.

Liberia's main airport was closed for commercial aircraft and was being guarded by U.N. troops.

The new president faces an immense task of rebuilding a collapsed economy, reconciling former warring parties and reintegrating into society thousands of former combatants who are skilled in warfare but have never known how to read or write. dpa ebk wjh

The Washington Times

January 16, 2006

HEADLINE: Laura fires back at critics

BYLINE: Bill Sammon

ACCRA, Ghana -- First lady **Laura Bush** yesterday said she was "irritated" by outside criticism of her husband's anti-AIDS programs in Africa as being focused too heavily on abstinence and not enough on condoms.

Mrs. Bush, on a trip to West Africa to witness the inauguration of the continent's first elected female president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia, also defended a National Security Agency program to eavesdrop on foreign al Qaeda suspects who communicate with Americans. She said the political furor in the U.S. would aid the terrorists.

But she was most annoyed by a question about AIDS and the U.S. policy to emphasize abstinence, which the reporter asking her said "some people have equated ... with Christian moralism."

"I'm always a little bit irritated when I hear the criticism of abstinence, because abstinence is absolutely 100 percent effective in eradicating a sexually transmitted disease," Mrs. Bush said, before tying her answer in with one of the major themes of her trip, women's rights in Africa.

"In a country or a part of the world where one in three people have a sexually transmitted deadly disease, you have to talk about abstinence, you really have to," she said. "In many countries where girls feel obligated to comply with the wishes of men, girls need to know that abstinence is a choice."

She also said AIDS can be curbed by the correct use of condoms and by being faithful to one's partner.

Mrs. Bush also said her husband was upset last month when the New York Times revealed the existence of the National Security Agency eavesdropping program.

"He was worried that it would undermine our efforts by alerting terrorists to what our efforts are," she said. "We're constantly on the alert for an attack like what happened on September 11th."

"And I think the American people expect the United States government and the president to do what they can to make sure there's not an attack by foreign terrorists," she added.

Mrs. Bush is leading the U.S. delegation, which also includes her daughter Barbara and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, to today's swearing-in of Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf, a U.S.-educated economist and former World Bank official.

"We're really, really excited to be at such a historic inauguration," Mrs. Bush told reporters en route to Africa. "Because traditionally, women have been excluded in many African cultures -- not all of them, but in many."

The first lady said Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf "serves as a very important role model for little girls on the continent, as well as around the world."

The Bush administration hopes the inauguration will mark a turning point for Liberia, which was wracked by violence that killed about 250,000 people from 1989 to 2003. Since then, a transitional government has ruled the continent's oldest republic, which was established in 1847 by freed American slaves.

Mrs. Bush said the new president can begin the healing process in earnest and pledged U.S. help to rebuild the war-ravaged nation.

"She ran on a platform of reconciliation and reconstruction, and it's going to take the help of a lot of countries, including the United States, which has a special relationship with Liberia, for her and the people of Liberia to be able to do the reconstruction they need," she said.

Assistant Secretary of State Jendayi Frazer, who is traveling with Mrs. Bush, said the U.S. is in the process of giving Liberia "\$1 billion from 2004 to 2006."

Mrs. Bush also will make stops in Ghana and Nigeria to discuss such topics as HIV/AIDS. Barbara, her daughter, recently worked with AIDS-stricken children in a South African hospital.

On the U.S. political front, Mrs. Bush also brushed off suggestions that Vice President Dick Cheney's health problems would prevent him from serving out his term. Mr. Cheney recently was hospitalized for shortness of breath, caused by a medication he was taking for a foot ailment.

"Vice President Cheney's in great health, and he's doing great," she said. "I'm sure the president would not like for him to step down, obviously."

"The vice president has been an excellent vice president," she added. "He's solid as a rock."

The Miami Herald

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: President vows to rebuild;

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became Africa's first elected female head of state after being sworn in as president of Liberia.

BYLINE: Hans Nichols, Associated Press

Africa's first elected female head of state Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was sworn in Monday as war-battered Liberia's new president, promising a "fundamental break" with the West African nation's violent past and pledging to rebuild.

With U.S. Navy warships offshore for the first time since the civil war's end two years ago, and first lady **Laura Bush** and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on hand in a show of support, the moment was met with thunderous applause from thousands of guests.

"We know that your vote was a vote for change, a vote for peace, security . . . and we have heard you loudly," the 67-year-old Sirleaf said in her inaugural speech. "We recognize this change is not a change for change's sake, but a fundamental break with the past."

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan sent congratulations, saying Sirleaf had a "historic mandate to lead the nation toward a future of lasting peace and stability."

Founded by freed American slaves in 1847, Liberia was prosperous and peaceful for more than a century, bolstered by abundant timber and diamond wealth. But back-to-back civil wars from 1989 to 2003 brought the country to its knees, killing 200,000 people and displacing half the nation's population of 3 million.

It is now one of the world's poorest countries, ranked 206th in terms of per capita income out of 208 countries on the 2004 World Bank list.

Today, not even the capital has running water or electricity: The rich rely on generators; the poor, on candles. Unemployment is 80 percent. "We have all suffered. The individual sense of deprivation is immense," Sirleaf said.

She acknowledged the task of rebuilding would be coupled with high expectations, but called for patience.

"The task of reconstructing our devastating economy is awesome," she said. "There will be no quick fix, yet we have the potential to promote a healthy economy in which Liberians and international investors can prosper."

Ensuring Liberia remains peaceful, though, will be Sirleaf's most pressing -- and perhaps most difficult -- task.

George Weah, the soccer star who lost the November runoff, was backed by most of the country's top warlords and faction leaders. He grudgingly accepted defeat and attended the inauguration.

Several lawmakers in the new legislature, including the House speaker, are under a U.N. travel ban and assets freeze for constituting "a threat to peace." One newly appointed senator ordered his troops to hack off the ears of a captured president in 1990. Others are allies of one-time warlord and president Charles Taylor, who was forced from power in 2003 as rebels shelled the capital.

Another crucial task: assuring the future of 100,000 ex-combatants who laid down arms last year. Many of them are unemployed.

For now, Sirleaf's government is backed by 15,000 U.N. troops. A similar U.N. force pulled out of neighboring Sierra Leone in the final days of 2005, completing a successful five-year mission that restored the peace.

Taylor is wanted by a U.N.-backed war crimes court in Sierra Leone for his role in fueling that country's civil war, but Nigeria has refused to hand him over.

In an interview with NBC's *Today* show broadcast Monday, Sirleaf suggested she would like to see Taylor put on trial.

"Mr. Taylor has always said he wanted his day in court to defend himself. We should grant him that privilege," she said.

Rice said she was confident Taylor would be handed over to the Sierra Leone court eventually. He "is through raping and pillaging this country, and the Liberian people are trying to look forward," Rice told reporters.

In her address, Sirleaf promised to stamp out corruption -- a key step to win over skeptical foreign donors.

She also called on Liberians abroad and refugees in West Africa to return and rebuild. The United Nations says nearly 400,000 Liberians are displaced, both inside the country and the region.

Born in Liberia in 1938, Sirleaf worked her way through college in the United States by mopping floors and waiting tables. She graduated with a master's degree in public administration from Harvard in 1971 and took top jobs in Liberia, including finance minister, and senior positions at Citibank, the World Bank and the United Nations.

Twice imprisoned in Liberia in the 1980s for political reasons, she returned during a break in fighting in 1997 to run for president. She lost to Taylor, but tried again last fall, emerging victorious.

The Kansas City Star

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: More women emerge to lead their nations

During her inauguration Monday in Monrovia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the new leader of Liberia, was helped with a sash by Liberian Senior Ambassador-at-large George W. Wallace Jr. Among those at the swearing in was U.S. first lady **Laura Bush**.

Around the globe, more women are stepping up to lead their countries. On Monday, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf took the oath as Liberia's president - the first elected woman to be a head of state in Africa.

In Chile, pediatrician Michelle Bachelet awaits a March inauguration after voters picked her Sunday to be their first female president. And Finnish President Tarja Halonen, the first woman to hold that office, is closer to another term after winning the first round of presidential elections over the weekend. Story on A-6

Other countries where women lead:

Bangladesh: Prime Minister Khaleda Zia

Germany: Chancellor Angela Merkel

Ireland: President Mary McAleese

Latvia: President Vaira Vike-Freiberga

New Zealand: Prime Minister Helen Clark

Philippines: President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

Number of female heads of state elected or appointed since 2000: **12**

Approximate number of women presidents or prime ministers serving in the 50 years prior to 2000: **45**

Total years Indira Gandhi served as prime minister of India before her 1984 assassination : **15**

The last year Ireland had a male president: **1990**

Number of women ever to be U.S. head of state: **0**

Irish Times

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: Economist sworn in as Liberian president

BYLINE: Rob Crilly in Monrovia

LIBERIA: A 67-year-old grandmother has been sworn in as president of Liberia, making her Africa's first elected woman head of state.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf promised her war-weary people that she would draw a line under 14 years of coups and conflict to begin rebuilding a country proudly known as Africa's oldest republic.

The former World Bank economist said maintaining peace, law and order would be her priorities.

US first lady **Laura Bush** and secretary of state Condoleezza Rice were among the guests who gathered in the Liberian capital, Monrovia, yesterday in a show of Washington's support for the incoming president.

Waves of cheers and ululations greeted the swearing in of Mrs Johnson Sirleaf during a ceremony that mixed traditional drumming with Western-style political procedure.

In her inaugural address, she said: "We know that your vote was a vote for change, a vote for peace, a vote for security . . . and we have heard you."

Restoring electricity to the battle-scarred capital and putting Liberians back to work, she continued, would be the priorities for her first 150 days.

Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria were among the African heads of state who sat on white plastic garden furniture arranged outside Monrovia's capitol building.

The seat of government is a reflection of Liberia's origins as a colony for freed American slaves.

Thousands of Liberians packed into the grounds, which were decked out with red, white and blue bunting for the occasion. The garden party atmosphere and the ceremony's location are a fitting reminder of how far the country has already come.

Little more than two years ago the cherry trees and neat lawns were the scene of fierce gun battles as rival militias vied for control of the capital. More than 200,000 people were killed in a series of civil wars between 1989 and 2003. Almost half the population of three million people were forced to flee their homes.

The cycle of violence was finally broken in 2003 when president Charles Taylor - who came to power at the head of a brutal rebel army - accepted refuge in Nigeria as another wave of insurgents pressed in on the capital.

Mrs Johnson Sirleaf beat George Weah, the former international footballer, in a presidential run-

off last November to take power in a continent traditionally dominated by male politicians.

Today Liberia is at peace, thanks in part to 15,000 United Nations troops - including a rapid reaction force of about 430 Irish soldiers.

Now the challenge for Mrs Johnson Sirleaf is to maintain that peace. To do that she must contend with senators who include reminders of the country's bloody past. Among them is Prince Johnson, a former rebel commander turned born-again preacher, who oversaw the execution of the 20th president, Samuel Doe, in 1990.

The stakes could not be higher.

In a report published to coincide with yesterday's inauguration, the International Crisis Group, a pressure group working to avoid conflict, said the success of Liberia's transition to democracy was crucial to the region as a whole.

"If Liberia slides back towards instability, it will again threaten its neighbours," it concluded. "Everything is aligned for potential success but the situation, as shown by the post-election riots, remains fragile."

One of Mrs Johnson Sirleaf's first tasks will be to find work for the country's 100,000 former fighters who have laid down their arms. That will mean putting up the funding for education programmes or to pay for public works.

"This is the sector that has to be a priority," said one analyst. "These are the people who have rioted in the past and who, if they don't see fast enough progress, could give up on the whole process and take up arms again."

It will be a struggle for the country's tiny economy, where only one person in five is employed.

There is plenty of work to be done. The years of civil war have left Monrovia with an air of decay. The city has no running water or electricity.

Average life expectancy is 47 and 80 per cent of the population is unemployed.

Toga Nimely, a civil servant who attended the inauguration, summed up the feelings of many when he said he was optimistic after hearing Mrs Johnson Sirleaf's speech.

"We have been through such a long, dark period that we are all ready for change," he said. "She is the right person to do that for us."

The Independent (London)

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: Liberia's 'iron lady' pledges reform

BYLINE: By Rob Crilly in Monrovia

Africa's first elected female head of state has promised a rapid peace dividend to the war-weary people of Liberia in an inauguration ceremony marked by a display of backing from Washington.

Cheering Liberians danced through the streets to the beats of traditional drumming as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a 67-year-old grandmother, promised to restore electricity to the capital, Monrovia, and tackle the high unemployment rate in an attempt to unite the country behind her.

She won a presidential run-off against George Weah, the former international footballer, in November. Now the former World Bank economist faces the challenge of unifying a country shattered by 14 years of civil war.

Laura Bush, the American first lady, and Con-doleezza Rice, the Secretary of State, were in the audience at the inauguration.

Ms Johnson Sirleaf said maintaining peace, law and order would be the priorities for her presidency as the country drew a line under its bloody history. "This is not change for change's sake but a fundamental break from the past," she said.

Lighting up the capital and putting Liberians back to work, she continued, would be her priorities. "Our strategy is to achieve quick and visible progress that reaches significant numbers of people to gain momentum, consolidate support and establish a foundation for sound economic development," said the woman who has become known as Africa's iron lady.

Yesterday's jubilant atmosphere was a reminder of how far the country has come in the past two years, when gun battles raged between rival militias vying for control of the capital.

Mrs Bush said on board her US Air Force flight that the new president faced a huge task. "She ran on a platform of reconciliation and reconstruction and it's going to take the help of a lot of countries, including the United States - which has a special relationship with Liberia - for her and her people to be able to do the reconstruction they need."

GRAPHIC: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is presented with the national insignia in Monrovia, Liberia JEROME DELAY/AP

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: First elected female president in Africa talks of a new course

BYLINE: The Associated Press

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and first lady Laura Bush attend the ceremony. "I think women around the world are watching, and they're proud of her," Bush told reporters after the inauguration.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is sworn in as president Monday in Monrovia, Liberia. "We know that your vote was a vote for change, a vote for peace, security ... and we have heard you loudly," Johnson-Sirleaf said.

MONROVIA, Liberia -- Africa's first elected female head of state, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, was sworn in Monday as war-battered Liberia's new president. She promised a "fundamental break" with her country's violent past and pledged to rebuild.

With U.S. Navy warships offshore for the first time since the civil war ended two years ago, and first lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on hand in a show of support, the moment was met with thunderous applause from thousands of guests.

"We know that your vote was a vote for change, a vote for peace, security ... and we have heard you loudly," Johnson-Sirleaf, 76, said in her inaugural speech. "We recognize this change is not a change for change's sake, but a fundamental break with the past."

Founded by freed American slaves in 1847, Liberia was prosperous and peaceful for more than a century, bolstered by abundant timber and diamond wealth.

But back-to-back civil wars from 1989 to 2003 killed 200,000 people and displaced half the nation's population of 3 million.

It is now one of the world's poorest countries. Not even the capital has running water or electricity; the rich rely on generators, the poor on candles. Unemployment is 80 percent. "We have all suffered. The individual sense of deprivation is immense," Johnson-Sirleaf said.

"The task of reconstructing our devastating economy is awesome," she said. "There will be no quick fix, yet we have the potential to promote a healthy economy in which Liberians and international investors can prosper."

Bush, making her second trip to Africa, said that the swearing-in symbolizes a push to empower women worldwide and marks a new dawn for Liberia.

"I think women around the world are watching, and they're proud of her," Bush told reporters after the inauguration ceremony as she flew to Ghana to continue her four-day stay on the

continent.

"Women's empowerment, girls' education is the centerpiece of this trip, because all of us know that educated girls lead much more successful lives," said Bush, who made the trip with her daughter Barbara, 24, who recently worked in a pediatric hospital in South Africa.

Bush was the formal head of the U.S. delegation, but it was Rice who was greeted with loud hoots of approval by the crowd during introductions.

The outdoor ceremony, held on a muggy, overcast day, was informal by U.S. standards. The platform was decorated simply with red-white-and-blue bunting and balloons. The program started late. Heads of state arrived mid-ceremony. Members of the local media shouted at officials on stage to move out of their camera shots.

Ensuring that Liberia remains peaceful will be Johnson-Sirleaf's most pressing -- and perhaps most difficult -- task.

George Weah, the soccer star who lost the November runoff, was backed by most of the country's top warlords and faction leaders.

He grudgingly accepted defeat and attended the inauguration.

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: Laura defends the GOP

BYLINE: Bill Sammon,

MONROVIA, Liberia -- First lady Laura Bush yesterday rejected Democratic claims that Republicans are mired in a "culture of corruption" and said she'd be "glad" to campaign for Republican candidates in the fall.

"It isn't true," Mrs. Bush said of the "culture of corruption" charges in an exclusive interview with The Washington Times while here for the inauguration of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as president of Liberia.

Mrs. Bush offered her star power to Republican candidates after saying she did not know how the Democrats' accusations will affect the congressional elections in November.

"I'll be glad to campaign for Republicans who ask me to campaign for them or do fundraisers for them," the first lady said at the U.S. ambassador's residence here.

Mrs. Bush made clear that "there's certainly not a role for any sort of bribery or anything that would be considered corrupt," but said many lobbyists play vital roles in public policy.

"The whole lobbying aspect of politics is very interesting in the United States," Mrs. Bush said. "There's an important aspect to lobbying, as well.

"I mean, what people don't think of is the American Heart Association or breast cancer research - each of those groups lobby for federal funds, for very, very important and worthwhile causes in our country," she added. "And so I hope that people realize that there is a role for advocates for different issues."

Rep. Bob Ney, Ohio Republican, temporarily stepped down Sunday as chairman of the House Administration Committee because of his association with disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Democrats are expected to make corruption charges a central theme in their attempt to win congressional seats in the midterm elections.

Mrs. Bush also said she was "disappointed" in Democrats for trying to delay a vote on President Bush's nomination of Judge Samuel A. Alito Jr. for the Supreme Court because it would further postpone retirement for Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

"I'm disappointed about that," Mrs. Bush said. "I know Sandra Day O'Connor would like to retire.

"She stayed longer because the president asked her to when he nominated John Roberts for chief justice," the first lady added. "And I think it just would serve the country better if [Judge Alito] can go ahead and be voted on, up and down, and then assume the job."

Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee have delayed a vote on Judge Alito until next week while liberal interest groups work to erode public support for the nominee. Republicans called for a panel vote this week.

Democrats questioned Judge Alito so aggressively last week that his wife, Martha, broke into tears and left the committee room Wednesday for more than an hour. Mrs. Bush, who called Mrs. Alito and urged her to "hang in there," made it clear yesterday that she disapproved of the rough hearings.

"They're difficult for family members when they see the people they love attacked," she said. "I really think when anyone is up for confirmation, whether it's for justice of the Supreme Court or any other job that requires Senate confirmation, that it's incumbent upon senators to be respectful."

The first lady is traveling in Africa with her daughter Barbara, who has a keen interest in the troubled continent. Mrs. Bush pointed out that last year, Barbara "went to South Africa, where she worked at a pediatric hospital, and then she did UNICEF work in Botswana.

"She's very interested in Africa and she loves it, and really her interest has stimulated mine," the first lady added. "Barbara has been a big influence on me, influenced my interest in Africa."

Barbara's twin sister, Jenna, is not accompanying her mother on this trip.

"Jenna's teaching school in a charter school, and she loves education," said Mrs. Bush, a former teacher. "She's having a great time. She's interested particularly in the charter school movement and really wanted to work in a charter school."

The first lady also backed the president's decision in November to make a more aggressive defense of his Iraq policy. She lauded Iraqis for electing a permanent government last month.

"It's really important for him to talk to the American people about the war in Iraq and about what the United States' goals are," she said, "because I'm not so sure that the press does get the word out on how important the vote was there."

Since rejoining the Iraq debate in earnest, the president has seen his job approval ratings climb, although he and his wife often say they are unaffected by polls.

"I only really pay attention when they're really good," Mrs. Bush joked.

Mrs. Bush also revealed that her iPod listening includes songs by Tina Turner and Dolly Parton. She said her musical tastes are somewhat different from those of her husband.

"He likes country music a little bit more than I do, although I actually really am very fond of country music, as well," she said. "One of the songs on my iPod that I love is Dolly Parton singing 'Stairway to Heaven.' So that's sort of a combination, country and pop."

BBC Monitoring Africa - Political

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: Kenyan paper urges "amicable formula" over ex-Liberian leader Taylor

Text of editorial entitled "Punish Taylor, but don't imperil gains" published by Kenyan newspaper The People on 17 January

Yesterday's swearing in of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as war-battered Liberia new president no doubt carved her name into history as Africa's first elected female head of state. Even more, she emerged as the western Africa nation's possible redeemer after years of strife during which millions were either killed or displaced.

While the process leading up to last year's polls was bound to be contentious, it was always one that was, by all means, supposed to provide mandate for a leader who would lead Liberia towards a future of lasting peace and stability. It is also gratifying that foreign powers, from the United States to Kenya, have ever sought to provide logistic and moral support to such a process.

Indeed, the role that peacekeeping forces from Kenya have played both in Sierra Leone and Liberia cannot be gainsaid. The presence in yesterday's ceremony of US First Lady Laura Bush, Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and South African counterpart Thabo Mbeki is testimony to this.

However, it would be fundamental that any efforts aimed at cementing the new chapter in Liberia involve greater participation from African leaders, as only then will Liberia's interests be fully taken into account. For instance, it is the wish of every African that the thorny issue of bringing former Liberian leader Charles Taylor to justice be implemented as soon as applicable.

Taylor became president in 1997 but stepped down and was exiled to Nigeria as part of 2003 peace deal brokered as rebels pressed on the capital. He is now wanted on war crime charges by a UN-backed war crimes court in Sierra Leone for his role in backing a brutal rebel group during that country's 1991-2002 civil war. But Nigeria has refused to hand him over to the court and Sirleaf has said she would consult with regional leaders regarding Taylor's future.

On the other hand, Rice has said she is confident Sirleaf will work to hand Taylor over to the Sierra Leone court and that she was expected to push for the case while in Monrovia yesterday. Given these intricacies, it would be necessary that while the Liberian past deeds should be conclusively tackled, it should never provide an opportunity to compromise the gains so far made in the peace process.

Instead, an amicable formula need to be established - one that can guarantee that justice is found for the victims of Taylor's tyranny as well as ensuring that Liberia's posterity is not held by its past.

Source: The People, Nairobi, in English 17 Jan 06

THE AUSTRALIAN

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: Historic day as woman takes charge in Liberia

BYLINE: Fiona Connolly and Sarah Grant

MONROVIA: Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was due to be sworn in last night as Liberia's new head of state, carving her name into history as the first elected female president of an African country.

Senior figures from across Africa and further afield were to attend the inauguration, among them US first lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

"We're really, really excited to be at such a historic inauguration," Mrs Bush told reporters while travelling to the Liberian capital, Monrovia.

Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf "ran on a platform of reconciliation and reconstruction and it's going to take the help of a lot of countries, including the US, which has a special relationship with Liberia, for her and the people of Liberia to be able to do the reconstruction they need", Mrs Bush said.

She went on to describe the president-elect as a "shining example for all of us, for women around the world, not just for women on her continent, but women everywhere".

Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf pledged to unite her country and secure the trust of sceptical foreign donors whose aid is desperately needed to rebuild her ruined nation, which is struggling for peace after a quarter of a century of coups and war. She also hoped her ascension would be an inspiration to women worldwide.

"I am excited by the potential of what I represent -- the aspirations and expectations of women in Liberia, African women and women all over the world," the 67-year-old grandmother said. "I am also humbled -- humbled by the enormity of the challenge we face."

The UN, which has more than 15,000 peacekeeping troops in Liberia, stepped up security before the inauguration, redeploying about 500 peacekeepers previously stationed outside the capital to strategic points in Monrovia and the international airport.

Liberian police, though unarmed, also increased their presence on the streets.

Two US navy warships appeared offshore for the first time since the war ended in 2003, a rare show of support also meant to protect Mrs Bush and Dr Rice.

Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf will be sworn in for a six-year term, taking charge of Africa's oldest republic, which was founded by freed American slaves in 1847.

Rich in diamonds, iron ore and timber, Liberia was relatively prosperous and peaceful until a 1980 coup had illiterate Samuel Doe seize power and order cabinet ministers tied to poles in their

underwear and executed.

Harvard-educated Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf was finance minister at the time, but was spared, she claims, "by the grace of God".

Twice imprisoned in the 1980s by Doe's junta, Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf fled into exile.

When Charles Taylor launched a rebel invasion from neighbouring Ivory Coast in 1989, Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf briefly supported him -- a move that still draws criticism today.

The war had children as young as 10 take up arms. Fighting uprooted half the country's three million people and killed 200,000.

A truce paved the way for presidential elections in 1997 that Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf lost to Mr Taylor. The brazen bid earned her the nickname "Iron Lady".

After another rebel war forced Mr Taylor from power in 2003, Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf ran for president again, this time winning a heated November runoff buoyed by a resume that included senior jobs at Citibank, the UN and the World Bank.

Her soccer star rival, George Weah, was backed by ex-rebel leaders and many ex-combatants.

She inherits a nation in tatters. The capital has no running water or electricity, and unemployment is 80 per cent.

BLOODY HISTORY OF WARS AND COUPS

- * 1847: Liberia founded by freed slaves from the US and Caribbean
- * 1980: Years of relative stability end with a military coup led by Samuel Doe. Former president William R. Tolbert Jr publicly executed
- * 1985: Doe wins presidential election
- * 1989: First civil war begins as Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia begins an uprising
- * 1990: Doe executed by NPFL
- * 1995: Peace agreement signed
- * 1997: Taylor wins presidential elections by a landslide as the NPFL wins a majority in the legislative assembly
- * April 1999: A new rebel group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, begins attacks in the north, starting a second civil war
- * August 2003: Taylor steps down, exiling himself to Nigeria. International peacekeepers arrive
- * November 2005: Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf wins presidential election, defeating soccer star George Weah
- * January 16, 2006: Johnson-Sirleaf's inauguration in the capital, Monrovia

Associated Press

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: Laura Bush Attends Liberian Inauguration

BYLINE: Deb Riechmann

First lady Laura Bush smiled broadly and applauded the historic swearing in on Monday of Liberia's new leader, the first woman ever elected president in Africa, who exclaimed that the future belongs to women "because we have taken charge of it."

On her second trip to Africa, Mrs. Bush joined Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Liberia's capital at the inauguration of President-elect Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a Harvard-educated economist who pledged to restore peace after a 14-year civil war in this nation founded by freed American slaves.

"I think it's really important worldwide," Mrs. Bush said about Sirleaf's inauguration, which falls on the day Americans honor civil rights icon, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. "I think it's particularly important on the continent of Africa, because traditionally women have been excluded in many African cultures — not all of them, but in many."

Mrs. Bush was the formal head of the U.S. delegation, but it was Rice who was greeted with hoots of approval by the crowd during introductions.

The outdoor ceremony, held on a muggy overcast day, was informal by U.S. standards. The platform was simply decorated with red, white and blue bunting and balloons. Members of the local media shouted at diplomats on stage to move out their camera shots.

The new president said Liberians who voted for her were casting a ballot for national healing, leadership and freedom.

"We know that your vote was a vote of change, a vote of peace, security and stability. We have heard you loudly," Sirleaf said in her speech, which both Mrs. Bush and Rice attended.

Sirleaf's victory in a run-off election in November raised hope that Liberia would move past a war that devastated the West African country. The 67-year-old grandmother has vowed to end the period of corrupt-male-dominated rule in Liberia, still reeling from a brutal 1989 to 2003 civil war that left some 200,000 dead.

"The United States has already invested a lot of money over the last two years through the election period," Mrs. Bush said Sunday just before landing in Ghana. "We have a commitment for the year 2006, as well, to help them in their reconstruction as they start to try to have electricity again and potable water and all the things that are so crucial for basic survival in Liberia."

Mrs. Bush and her 24-year-old daughter, Barbara, who recently worked on AIDS in a pediatric hospital in South Africa, spent Sunday night in Accra, Ghana, at the home of the U.S. ambassador. They were up before dawn Monday to fly to Monrovia, named after President Monroe.

On her more than hour-long drive to the capital, Mrs. Bush's motorcade passed checkpoints manned by U.N. peacekeeping soldiers and she got a close-up look at the pervasive poverty in

Liberia. A few residents waved, but most looked on curiously at the motorcade from thatched huts, some with roofs covered with plastic held down by rocks.

Mrs. Bush landed at Roberts International Airport which U.S. Marines controlled in August 2003 to facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid into the country and stop the flow of arms to former Liberia President Charles Taylor. Taylor fled into exile that month, paving the way for a transitional government that is handing over power to Sirleaf.

"Charles Taylor is out of Liberia," Rice told reporters on a flight to Monrovia. "He is through raping and pillaging this country, and the Liberian people are trying to look forward."

Taylor is in exile in Nigeria but is wanted on war-crimes charges in Sierra Leone, where he supported a brutal rebel group during that country's 1991-2002 civil war. Nigeria says it won't hand Taylor over to a U.N.-backed tribunal unless a democratically elected Liberian leader makes such a request. Rice said she's confident that Sirleaf will work to bring Taylor to justice, and that he ultimately will end up before the special court in Sierra Leone.

"This will happen," Rice said. "It's what the international community wants. The international community wants justice. I think the Liberian leadership wants justice."

Sirleaf defeated George Weah, a soccer star who first claimed that the election was fraudulent, but then conceded defeat after international election observers deemed the presidential elections largely clean.

Mrs. Bush's motorcade passed lingering reminders of the election — a billboard that said "Vote George Weah," faded blue campaign posters for Sirleaf and a banner hung over a street that said "Let's join hands in development. No more guns. No more violence."

Liberia faces great challenges: poverty at 85 percent and illiteracy at 80 percent, as well as high unemployment, serious health problems, poor public services and weak public institutions.

"She ran on a platform of reconciliation and reconstruction, and it's going to take the help of a lot of countries, including the United States, which has a special relationship with Liberia, for her and the people of Liberia to be able to do the reconstruction they need," Mrs. Bush said.

Congress appropriated more than \$840 million last year to help reconstruct Liberia. Of that, more than \$520 million has gone to support a U.N. peacekeeping mission.

The United States currently is working on quick-impact programs to help rebuild courthouses, high schools and hospitals and provide skills training to youth and ex-combatants. The U.S. government also is helping finance efforts to rebuild Liberia's army.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: Liberia's new president promises 'fundamental break' with the past

BYLINE: Hans Nichols, Associated Press

Africa's first elected female head of state, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was sworn in yesterday as war-battered Liberia's president, promising a "fundamental break" with the West African nation's violent past and pledging to rebuild.

With U.S. Navy warships offshore for the first time since the civil war's end two years ago and **Laura Bush** and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on hand, the moment drew thunderous applause from thousands of guests.

"We know that your vote was a vote for change, a vote for peace, security... and we have heard you loudly," Sirleaf, 67, said in her inaugural speech. "We recognize this change is not a change for change's sake but a fundamental break with the past."

Founded by freed American slaves in 1847, Liberia was prosperous and peaceful for more than a century. But back-to-back civil wars from 1989 to 2003 brought the country to its knees, killing 200,000 and displacing half the population of three million.

Liberia is now one of the world's poorest countries, 206th in per-capita income of 208 countries on the 2004 World Bank list. Unemployment is 80 percent.

Sirleaf said rebuilding would be coupled with high expectations, but she called for patience.

"There will be no quick fix," she said, "yet we have the potential to promote a healthy economy in which Liberians and international investors can prosper."

Ensuring that Liberia remains peaceful, though, will be Sirleaf's most pressing - and perhaps most difficult - task.

George Weah, the soccer star who lost the November runoff, was backed by most of the country's top warlords. He grudgingly accepted defeat and attended the inauguration.

Several lawmakers in the new legislature are under a U.N. travel ban for constituting "a threat to peace." Others are allies of Charles Taylor, the onetime warlord who was forced from the presidency in 2003.

For now, Sirleaf's government is backed by 15,000 U.N. troops.

Sirleaf was born in Liberia in 1938, and she worked her way through college in the United States. She earned a master's degree from Harvard University in 1971 and took top jobs in Liberia, including finance minister, and at Citibank, the World Bank, and the United Nations.

Twice imprisoned in Liberia in the 1980s for political reasons, she returned during a break in fighting in 1997 to run for president. She lost to Taylor but tried again last fall, emerging victorious.

The New York Times

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: Liberia's Harvard-Trained 'Queen' Is Sworn In as Leader

BYLINE: Lydia Polgree

Greeted by shouts of "Queen of Africa!" and standing before the bullet-scarred capitol of this war-torn nation, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a Harvard-trained banker and stalwart survivor of Liberia's brutal politics, took the presidential oath of office on Monday, becoming Africa's first woman to be elected a head of state.

As her words were interrupted again and again with joyful shouts of "Yes!" and "Amen!" Ms. Johnson Sirleaf, 67, told the crowd that she would bring "a fundamental break with the past, thereby requiring we take bold and decisive steps to address the problems that for decades have stunted our progress, undermined national unity and kept old and new cleavages in ferment."

It was a jubilant moment suffused with history, observed with smiles by members of the old boy's club Ms. Johnson Sirleaf now joins, the formerly all-male fraternity of African leaders. Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's president and chairman of the African Union, looked on beaming as Ms. Johnson Sirleaf was sworn in.

A United States delegation led by **Laura Bush** and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sat beneath simple woven canopies. Their presence was an indication of the long and often troubled relationship between the United States and Liberia, which was founded by freed slaves from the United States in 1847.

In the front row sat George Weah, the soccer star who lost to Ms. Johnson Sirleaf and initially refused to concede the election, raising the grim possibility that long-suffering Liberia's opportunity for lasting peace might slip away. But Mr. Weah conceded last month, paving the way for the historic ceremony.

Despite the euphoria, Ms. Johnson Sirleaf faces a mountain of troubles in a nation afflicted by civil war for 14 years. Liberia's public works are in shambles; there is no piped water, no electricity grid. Its roads, schools and health centers, where they still exist, barely function.

An interim government that has ruled since Charles Taylor fled in 2003 was supposed to kick-start development, but corruption forced many donors to halt their programs.

The European Union had been supporting an effort to bring electricity to all of the capital, but withdrew because of corruption concerns. With the new president taking office, the Europeans will begin the program again, committing \$70 million. The United States is committed to rebuilding the armed forces. The United Nations mission in Liberia, which includes 15,000 peacekeepers, costs about \$700 million a year.

There also remains the difficult question of what to do about Mr. Taylor, the warlord-turned-

president who, with the backing of Libya and other regional powers, rampaged through his own country and much of West Africa, unleashing a cycle of war that still reverberates today. He fled to exile in Nigeria in 2003 as a condition of ending the war, but is under indictment by a court for war crimes in Sierra Leone. Nigeria has said it will hand him over only if Liberia asks.

Ms. Johnson Sirleaf said Liberia was bound by the United Nations resolution calling for Mr. Taylor to appear in Sierra Leone, and must weigh calls for justice against the need for peace. "Our peace is fragile; we still have lots of Taylor operatives in the country," she said in an interview. "We don't want to see us return to a state of war."

Liberians, even Mr. Weah's partisans, who had taken to the streets to protest what they said was a rigged election, exulted in the moment, relieved that war seemed to have ceased and proud that their nation had produced the continent's first woman to be elected head of state.

"I voted for George Weah, but I accept Ellen because she is our Ma and is going take care of us," said Benedict Newon, 19, a former child soldier. He first hoisted a weapon for the warlord Charles Taylor when he was 10, though he later switched allegiance to another rebel group.

"I never carry gun again," Mr. Newon said, gesturing at his 8-month-old son and his pregnant wife, Fatou. "I have a future now. I got to protect it. I got to be patient with Ma Ellen."

That notion of president as mater familias may seem new, but in Liberia politics has always been paternalistic -- fighters for Mr. Taylor called him their "Papay."

In an interview before the inauguration, Ms. Johnson Sirleaf said that unlike some Western women in politics, she embraced the stereotypical feminine roles as part of her appeal, though she is also known as Liberia's iron lady from her years in opposition politics, which included two stints in prison.

"The iron lady, of course that comes from the toughness of many years of being a professional in a male-dominated world," she said. "But also the many young people we have here, and the suffering I have seen, and the despair and lack of hope, brought out the motherliness in me, and that is where the Ma Ellen comes from."

It is a combination -- tough and tender -- that has won women new respect in the increasingly democratic political scene in Africa. Once dominated by male autocrats, many African countries now have women in high positions, and a handful are poised to join Ms. Johnson Sirleaf at the pinnacle of power.

Women from across the continent flocked to Monrovia to celebrate her victory. Abena P. A. Busia, an English professor from Ghana, said she would have swum to the inauguration.

Euphoria was palpable in the streets, where squads of workers frantically readied this battered city for its long-awaited close-up. Lacking heavy equipment, crews painted lines in the roads using huge stencils and hand brushes.

Pandora Matati, 20, a former fighter, was among the crews who worked furiously to prepare for the big event.

"I love Ellen because she is going to do so much for us," she said as she took a brief break from her job laying concrete at the capitol. "With Ellen, anything is possible."

National Post (f/k/a The Financial Post) (Canada)

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: President's first task is to rebuild Liberia

BYLINE: Alphonso Toweh and Katharine Houreld, Reuters

MONROVIA, Liberia - Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf took office as Africa's first elected woman president yesterday, backed by a strong show of U.S. support and vowing to fight graft and rebuild her country after years of war.

As well as several fellow African leaders, U.S. first lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice attended the inauguration in a sign of Washington's backing for Africa's oldest republic, founded in 1847 by freed slaves from the United States.

Wearing a cream and gold dress, Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf, 67, was sworn in at a colourful open-air ceremony to loud cheers from hundreds of foreign dignitaries and Liberians, including women showing off dresses emblazoned with their new president's portrait.

"Let us begin anew, moving forward into a future that is filled with hope and promise," Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf said in her first address as leader of a nation that lacks basic services like water and electricity after a devastating 14-year civil war.

"Oh yes, God has answered our prayer," said Teresa Smith, a businesswoman attending the ceremony with her six children.

The new Liberian President vowed to fight rampant corruption, which experts say has fuelled decades of instability, and to uphold a foreign donor-backed Governance and Economic Management Program (GEMAP) that will oversee state spending.

"We will accept and enforce the terms of GEMAP. We will ensure competence and integrity in the management of our resources," said the Harvard-trained economist. She pledged to "wage war against corruption regardless of where it exists or by whom it is practised."

A U.S. official travelling with Mrs. Bush said Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf's inauguration, on the day Americans remember slain civil rights campaigner Martin Luther King, was "an example of women's empowerment across Africa."

But the official acknowledged she "will have to show results rather quickly."

Weary of their country's recent history of conflict, chaos and destruction, Liberians have high expectations both for the new president they call "Mama Ellen" and for the superpower across the Atlantic they look upon as a kind of Godfather.

"The United States has a long and special relationship with Liberia which we will continue," added the U.S. official.

Washington spent more than US\$840-million last year on Liberia as it emerged from a brutal civil war, which ended in 2003 after killing 250,000 people and leaving the country's infrastructure in ruins. U.S. officials say helping the country is a priority of the Bush administration.

U.S. secret service agents mingled with UN peacekeepers in the ramshackle capital and two U.S. warships, USS Mount Whitney and USS Carr, were in position offshore.

Across the city, rubbish had been cleared, bullet-scarred walls painted over and trees planted in a face-lift operation.

Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf beat soccer millionaire George Weah in last year's presidential election with a promise to beat graft and build a better future, but analysts say her vows may founder unless donors make good on pledges of aid.

The Myrtle Beach Sun-News
January 17, 2006
HEADLINE: Tuesday Globe

ACROSS THE COUNTRY

CALIFORNIA

President Ford in hospital with pneumonia

Rancho Mirage | Former President Ford was undergoing treatment for pneumonia Monday at the same facility where he was briefly hospitalized a month ago, his chief of staff said. He was said to be doing well.

Ford, 92, was admitted Saturday to Eisenhower Medical Center near his home in Rancho Mirage in Southern California, Penny Circle said.

"Based on his age it is prudent for his initial course of treatment - IV antibiotics - to be done at the hospital," Circle told The Associated Press.

Ford was expected to be released from the hospital Wednesday or Thursday, she said.

NEW YORK

Gas tanker flips, catches fire in city

New York | A tanker truck carrying thousands of gallons of gasoline overturned and caught fire on a major city highway Monday, blocking traffic and interrupting service on a subway line. A tower of dense smoke could be seen for miles.

The driver was able to escape, and no one else was hurt when the Mobil truck overturned around midday on the six-lane Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, said Jim Tuller, a police chief for the borough of Queens.

"The driver appeared to lose control and the truck flipped over," he said. No other vehicle was involved, and the accident's cause was not immediately known, Tuller said.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Gore denounces White House wiretapping

Washington | Former Vice President Al Gore used the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday Monday to rebuke President Bush for authorizing warrantless eavesdropping within the U.S., charging the president with "breaking the law repeatedly and insistently."

Gore said numerous actions by Bush amounted to a presidential power grab, and in concert with

a go-along Republican-controlled Congress, had led the nation to a dangerous point.

"A president who breaks the law is a threat to the very structure of our government," Gore said.

FLORIDA

Judge orders mental exam for teen suspect

Fort Lauderdale | A judge Monday ordered a psychological examination for one of two teens arrested in the fatal beating of a homeless man and a second beating that was videotaped by a surveillance camera.

Family members and their attorneys negotiated the Sunday surrender of Brian Hooks, 18, and Thomas S. Daugherty, 17, who had fled the state. They face murder charges in the death of Norris Gaynor, 45, and aggravated battery charges in the videotaped beating of Jacques Pierre, 58, police Capt. Michael Gregory said Sunday.

AROUND THE WORLD

PAKISTAN

Leaders demand apology for deadly airstrike

Peshawar | Pakistan's ruling party on Monday demanded an apology for an alleged CIA airstrike that killed at least 17 people, but the country's prime minister said his trip to the U.S. this week would go ahead as planned.

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and his ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Q on Monday condemned the alleged U.S. airstrike on a village near the Afghan border, which intelligence officials have said targeted al-Qaida's No. 2 leader, Ayman al-Zawahri.

Aziz said he was still scheduled to leave Tuesday for the United States, where he said he would talk about security issues but also meet business leaders to encourage foreign investment.

VATICAN CITY

Pope mourns rise in anti-semitism

Pope Benedict XVI, meeting with Rome's chief rabbi Monday, expressed pain and worry over outbreaks of anti-Semitism in the world and called on Jews and Christians to wage a united battle against hate.

Waves of violence and vandalism targeting Jews have hit Europe in the past few years. Last week, worshippers in a Moscow synagogue were attacked by a man with a knife.

Benedict did not mention specific occurrences of anti-Semitism in his speech to greet Rabbi

Riccardo Di Segni in an audience at the Vatican.

The rabbi led a delegation from Rome's Jewish community, one of the oldest in the world.

JAPAN

American plane crashes into sea, pilot ejects

Tokyo | An American F-15 "Eagle" fighter jet crashed into the sea near Okinawa Island early this morning. The pilot ejected and was rescued with only minor injuries, American military officials said.

The plane went down around off the coast of Ikeijima, part of the Okinawa island chain, during a routine training mission, according to a statement issued by U.S. Air Force officials on Kadena Air Base. The crash occurred about 55 miles northeast of the base.

The statement said the cause of the crash was under investigation. The pilot's name was not released.

LIBERIA

Sirleaf sworn in as first African female leader

Monrovia | Africa's first elected female head of state, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was sworn in Monday as Liberia's president, promising a "fundamental break" with the West African nation's violent past and pledging to rebuild.

With U.S. Navy warships offshore for the first time since the civil war's end two years ago, and first lady **Laura Bush** and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on hand in a show of support, the moment was met with thunderous applause from thousands of guests.

From wire reports

Ottawa Citizen

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: Liberian president vows to rebuild: Will take 'decisive' steps to move on from war

BYLINE: The Daily Telegraph

MONROVIA, Liberia - The first woman to win a presidential election in Africa took power in Liberia yesterday, pledging to rebuild her war-shattered country.

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was inaugurated in Monrovia. None of the city's bullet-scarred buildings were fit to hold the ceremony, so dignitaries gathered in the open air.

Among those mingling beside the battered legislative building were South African President Thabo Mbeki, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and U.S. President George W. Bush's wife, **Laura Bush**.

Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf, who defeated George Weah, the former soccer player, in last year's election, said her government would "take decisive steps to address the problems that have, for decades, stunted our progress."

Fourteen years of civil war in Liberia claimed perhaps 250,000 lives, eight per cent of the population. The killing ended in 2003 and 15,000 United Nations peacekeepers now enforce an uneasy calm.

Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf, 67, is the first president in Liberia's recent history to have clear international support.

The Wichita Eagle (Kansas)

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: Iraq rules nearly all of ballots are valid

BAGHDAD, Iraq -- Iraq's electoral commission ruled Monday that more than 99 percent of the ballots from the Dec. 15 parliamentary elections are valid, opening the way for a new government to start coming together.

Also Monday, insurgents hiding in a roadside farmhouse ambushed a police patrol northeast of Baghdad, killing five officers and a child and wounding 19 people, police officials said. A bombing aimed at a convoy of American police advisers in the capital caused one death.

Two American soldiers were also killed when their AH-64 Apache helicopter crashed north of Baghdad, apparently after being shot down by insurgents.

Europeans increase pressure on Iran

LONDON -- Britain, France and Germany stepped up pressure against Iran and its nuclear ambitions Monday, announcing that they will press for an emergency meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency in two weeks as a prelude to bringing Iran before the United Nations Security Council.

But the meeting, hastily organized over the weekend, produced no unanimous statements, in an apparent sign of lingering reluctance by Russia and China to apply additional pressure quickly on Iran, a country with which both have important commercial ties.

Liberia swears in Africa's first female head of state

MONROVIA, Liberia -- Africa's first elected female head of state, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was sworn in Monday as war-battered Liberia's new president, promising a "fundamental break" with the West African nation's violent past and pledging to rebuild.

With U.S. Navy warships offshore for the first time since the civil war's end two years ago, and first lady **Laura Bush** and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on hand in a show of support, the moment was met with thunderous applause from thousands of guests.

The Times (London)

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: First lady of Africa is sworn in

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was sworn in as Africa's first female president yesterday, pledging to heal the wounds from 14 years of brutal civil war in Liberia.

The Harvard-educated economist, left, herself jailed for protesting against excessive government spending, touched on her own experience of the violence in her inaugural speech.

"I recall the inhumanity of confinement, the terror of attempted rape and the ostracism of exile," she told a crowd of several thousand. Scores of international dignitaries also attended the event, among them the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, and the First Lady, **Laura Bush**.

"It is time to come together to heal and rebuild our nation.

"We will make the children smile again...we cannot, we will not, we must not fail."

Liberia lost a quarter of a million people before 15,000 peacekeepers ended the conflict in 2003.

Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf, a former World Bank consultant, beat the former Chelsea football player George Weah in a run-off for the presidency.

San Jose Mercury News

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: Liberia swears in female president;
SIRLEAF VOWS TO UNITE WAR-RAVAGED NATION

BYLINE: Hans Nichols, Associated Press

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf pledged a "fundamental break" with Liberia's violent past as she was sworn in Monday as president, carving her name into history as Africa's first elected female head of state.

Wearing a traditional African headdress, Sirleaf took the oath of office in a ceremony attended by thousands of Liberians and scores of foreign dignitaries, including first lady **Laura Bush** and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

"We know that your vote was a vote for change, a vote for peace, security . . . and we have heard you loudly," Sirleaf said in her inaugural speech.

"We recognize this change is not a change for change's sake, but a fundamental break with the past, therefore requiring that we take a bold and decisive steps to address the problems that have for decades stunted our progress," she said.

Standing in front of a one-starred Liberian flag with her left hand on a Bible, Sirleaf pledged to "faithfully, conscientiously and impartially discharge the duties and functions of the office of president of the Republic of Liberia to the best of my abilities, so help me God."

"Women around the world are watching, and they're proud of her," Bush told reporters after the inauguration ceremony as she flew to Ghana to continue her four-day stay on the continent.

Bush was the formal head of the U.S. delegation, but it was Rice who was greeted with loud hoots of approval by the crowd during introductions.

"The people of Liberia are very, very proud of Dr. Rice," Bush said, noting that the nation was founded by African-Americans and that several of Liberia's first presidents were born in the United States.

Sirleaf takes charge of a nation struggling for peace after a quarter-century of coups and war, and she has promised to unite it.

Speaking for the first time as president, she also pledged to stamp out corruption to secure the trust of skeptical foreign donors whose aid is desperately needed to rebuild.

In a statement, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan congratulated Sirleaf, saying she had a "historic mandate to lead the nation toward a future of lasting peace and stability."

Security was tight at Monday's ceremony, with armed U.N. peacekeepers surveying the scene

with binoculars from atop surrounding buildings.

The United Nations has redeployed 500 peacekeepers previously stationed outside the capital to strategic points in Monrovia and the international airport. Liberian police, though unarmed, have also increased their presence on the streets.

Two U.S. Navy warships also were visible offshore for the first time since the war ended in 2003, a rare show of support also meant to protect Bush and Rice.

Sirleaf will serve a six-year term as head of Africa's oldest republic, founded by freed U.S. slaves in 1847. The country has known little but war, however, since a rebel group led by Charles Taylor plunged the country into chaos, invading from neighboring Ivory Coast in 1989.

Taylor became president in 1997 but stepped down and was exiled to Nigeria as part of the 2003 peace deal brokered as rebels pressed on the capital. He is now wanted on war-crimes charges by a U.N.-backed war-crimes court in Sierra Leone for his role in backing a brutal rebel group during that country's 1991-2002 civil war.

The Mirror

January 17, 2006

HEADLINE: ELLEN'S THE FIRST LADY

BYLINE: Allison Martin

LIBERIAN president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf looks solemn as she inspects lines of police after being sworn in yesterday as Africa's first elected female head of state.

Johnson Sirleaf, 67, vowed a "fundamental break" with the African nation's war-torn past in her inaugural speech.

American's First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice were among guests at the ceremony in Monrovia.

HERALD SUN

January 18, 2006

HEADLINE: Women rule, no feminists

BYLINE: Babette Francis

THE election of women as leaders in Chile, Liberia and Germany may cause feminists to imagine an era where they will be standing toe to toe with their male enemies on the world stage.

The fantasy has even been fuelled by the promotion of Geena Davis to US President in the television series Commander in Chief.

Davis is seen as a Hollywood prelude to Hillary Clinton's run for the White House.

But the feminist euphoria in thinking women can solve all the world's problems could be shortlived. We have had many female prime ministers and presidents in the past.

There was Britain's "Iron Lady" Margaret Thatcher, Israel's Golda Meir, India's Indira Gandhi, Sri Lanka's Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan.

None was noted for advancing the feminist cause.

Indeed, Thatcher was loathed by the sisterhood, most of whom could barely acknowledge she was female.

"Grocer's daughter" was the epithet hurled at her, with the emphasis on grocer.

Why are feminists such professional snobs?

One Nation's Pauline Hanson was repeatedly described as running a fish-and-chip shop as if that was her main credential.

Of the new titleholders, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany is conservative and intent on repairing Germany's relationship with that bete noir of feminists, President George W. Bush.

She worked at one time as a barmaid in the former East Germany to put herself through university, rejecting both communism and feminism as dogma.

Liberia's President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf aims to eliminate the corruption plaguing her poverty-stricken country.

Her inauguration was attended by US First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

This is not exactly a feminist scenario.

The only president who fits the feminist mould appears to be Michelle Bachelet of Chile.

Single mum, socialist-marxist, and former political prisoner during the Pinochet regime, she may indeed advance the feminist cause.

But will that make the women of Chile any happier? Are women anywhere in the world happier because of feminism?

Kate O'Beirne, a US National Review columnist, has a new book, *Women Who Make the World Worse*. This is a serious examination of 30-plus years of feminist policies.

O'Beirne recounts the hypocrisy of powerful feminist leaders during the Clinton years -- Bill, that is.

She compared them to battered spouses willing to endure any humiliation so long as they didn't lose their man.

"As long as Bill Clinton supported abortion rights, affirmative action, and federal child care, it didn't matter that he was a sexual predator," she writes.

Feminism, far from promoting the happiness and well-being of women and society, has instead left great swathes of melancholy in its wake.

O'Beirne mentions one large study of well-being data on 100,000 Americans and Britons from the early 1970s to the late 1990s.

It found that while US men had grown happier, women were 20 per cent less happy.

The so-called "women's movement" was and is a misnomer. Feminists honestly believe they speak for all women: "I think this way, I am a woman, I represent all women."

This is nonsense.

In 1984, feminist Bella Abzug confidently predicted the victory of the Walter Mondale-Geraldine Ferraro ticket as "women . . . join across all racial, social, and regional lines in stark opposition to President Reagan and his policies."

Women voted for the Ronald Reagan ticket over Mondale-Ferraro by 56 per cent per cent to 44 per cent.

Feminists now claim that they were never against marriage and family. Currently they are all for same-sex marriage and lesbian families.

BUT in 1971, Ms magazine founder Robin Morgan called marriage "a slavery-like practice -- we cannot destroy inequities between men and women until we destroy marriage".

Germaine Greer recommended all women leave their husbands in search of more satisfying

"rambling organic structures". Seaweed perhaps?

Logic is not a feminist strong point and Kate O'Beirne's book is a useful reality check for those anticipating a feminist commander in chief.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Pennsylvania)

January 18, 2006 Wednesday

HEADLINE: CHIEFS WHO HAPPEN TO BE WOMEN LIBERIA, CHILE, GERMANY, FINLAND -- ARE FEMALE LEADERS A GLOBAL TREND?

Liberia's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was inaugurated in Monrovia on Monday as Africa's first elected woman president. First lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice were there representing the United States. The Liberian crowds sang, "This is our time, oh, mama, this is our time."

On Sunday Michelle Bachelet, an agnostic, a former pediatrician and a single mother, was elected the first female president of Chile with 53.5 percent of the votes. She has pledged to fill half her Cabinet with women ministers.

Last week, Angela Merkel, Germany's first woman chancellor, was in Washington exchanging differing views with President Bush on torture at Guantanamo and the Iraq war. This week Ms. Merkel goes to Moscow to meet with Russia's iron-fist-in-velvet-glove president Vladimir V. Putin. She will undoubtedly tell Mr. Putin just exactly what she and the Germans think about his fiddling around with Western Europe's natural gas supply to squeeze the Ukrainians.

What does all this mean? Is there a common thread? Were the recent developments in Liberia and Chile part of some rite-of-spring chick-fest? Or are they a normal result of the increasing participation of women in the political process across the world? We note once again the calm voice of Palestine parliamentary candidate Hanan Ashrawi as elections approach there. Or is it simply a function of the unique evolution of politics in each of these separate constituencies?

To the degree that one believes that people vote on the basis of gender, a woman candidate has the possibility of gaining the votes of slightly more than half the population on that basis. On the other hand, it is also possible that a woman candidate might not get the votes of half the population on the basis of her gender.

Into the pot must go also the recent presidential election in Finland. There, the incumbent candidate, Finland's first woman president, Tarja Halonen, 62, did not sweep the 50 percent-plus of the votes to win victory and a second term in the first round of voting Sunday. But she did finish first among the candidates, and some voters gave as a reason for voting for her Ms. Halonen's maternal image.

Looking further at the Finland situation, the president's critics say she is sometimes stubborn and quick to anger. Men aren't, right?

The other classic comment on women, sometimes put forward in the United States as a reason not to put a female pinkie on the nuclear trigger, is that they are unpredictable. How is a woman more unpredictable than a man in his mid-60s who leaves his wife of 40 years because he has just discovered that they are incompatible?

In looking at this subject in the current context, each country's circumstances are different.

Liberia had had almost non-stop war since Master Sgt. Samuel K. Doe overthrew President William R. Tolbert Jr. in a coup in 1980. Liberia is even now plagued by young men with guns. In the legislative contests that accompanied the first round of Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf's victory late last year, such gems from the past as warlord Prince Johnson -- who tortured then President Doe to death in 1990 starting by cutting off his ears with a video camera running -- won a seat in the parliament.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's principal opponent was soccer star George Weah, 39. It is easy to see how Liberian voters might choose Ms. Johnson, 67, a former World Bank economics expert, over another young man with few if any qualifications for the presidency, for her maturity and maternal image, to start with.

Michelle Bachelet in Chile was elected, in part, as the candidate of the center-left coalition parties who have governed the country since it voted out the government of Gen. Augusto Pinochet in 1990. On the other hand, she stands for quite a lot on her own bat and is really quite special. She is an agnostic in a country that is 89 percent Catholic. She is single, with one daughter born out of wedlock. She was tortured and exiled by the Pinochet government. Her father died in prison at their hands. She served as minister of health and minister of defense in preceding governments. She studied medicine in East Germany and had lived in the United States as a child. She is scheduled to be inaugurated as president of Chile on March 11.

So is there any message in the Liberian and Chilean experiences for Americans moving up on presidential elections in 2008, with the two principal parties' candidate-selection campaigns beginning to loom up this year? The obvious name that leaps to mind is that of Sen. Hillary Clinton. Her husband, former President Bill Clinton, bats down speculation that he might be a candidate to succeed Kofi Annan as secretary-general of the United Nations, pointing out that the post has traditionally not been occupied by a citizen of a country that is a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council. The second obvious point, raised by discussion of the first, is his wife's political situation.

It is certainly no secret that Sen. Clinton wants to run for president on the Democratic ticket. The fact that she, like Liberia's President Johnson-Sirleaf and Chile's president-elect Bachelet is a woman will be one element in her prospects for the Democratic nomination, and, if acquired, prospects to be elected president. Her success in that regard will be something altogether different and will be based on the American people's assessment of her qualifications to govern the country, not unlike Liberia's and Chile's judgments of Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf and Ms. Bachelet.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf offers every possibility of being just what Liberia needs at this point in its difficult recent history. Michelle Bachelet looks just right for Chile at this point in time, a modern person as president of a modern country. Both are unique products of their countries' recent experience. That they are women may help, but is not much more than that, in my view.

THE AUSTRALIAN

January 18, 2006

HEADLINE: Thanks, Laura, but no thanks

MONROVIA: Not even a vote of confidence from **Laura Bush** can change US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's mind about running for president in 2008.

Before leaving for an African trip with Dr Rice, the First Lady predicted the US soon would have a female president -- a Republican, and maybe even Dr Rice.

"I think it will happen for sure," she said about a woman in the Oval Office.

In the year since becoming Secretary of State, Dr Rice has repeatedly dismissed the notion of running for the Republican nomination to succeed her current boss, President George W. Bush.

Asked about the First Lady's comments ahead of their attendance at the inauguration of Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Dr Rice laughed and good naturedly answered the recurring question about her prospects for president in 2008. No, she said, for the umpteenth time.

"Obviously it's flattering when people say things like that. The First Lady is not only a terrific person, she's my friend. And I was honoured that she said that, of course. She's a wonderful person," Dr Rice said. "But I've spoken to this. I know what I'm good at, I know what I want to do and that's not it."

How about vice-president?

"The two are the same," she said with a grin and a shake of her head.

Although political pundits have been licking their chops at a possible match-up of her and Democratic senator Hillary Clinton in the 2008 presidential election, Dr Rice has said she has other vocations in mind.

The former provost of Stanford University has said she would like to return to academia or, as an ardent American football fan, possibly become commissioner of the National Football League.

For her part, **Mrs Bush** was left wondering whether she had triggered a political stampede for Dr Rice by her comments.

"I'm probably going to have to take over her correspondence department when she gets all the letters," **Mrs Bush** said.

Agence France Presse -- English

January 18, 2006

HEADLINE: After Liberia and Chile, could US elect a woman president?

Americans are getting used to the idea of being led by a female president, with political observers dreaming of a showdown between Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Senator Hillary Clinton in the 2008 election.

If polls, a television show about a female president and a prediction by First Lady Laura Bush are any indication, Americans appear willing to follow Liberia and Chile in electing their first woman president.

Before attending the presidential inauguration of Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first elected female president, Laura Bush predicted last week that a woman would lead the United States someday soon.

"I think it will happen for sure," she said, adding that it will occur "probably in the next few terms of the presidency in the United States."

Reality may imitate art in 2008. "Commander in Chief," which stars Geena Davis as the first female president, became a hit television series after appearing last year. Davis won a Golden Globe for her role on Monday.

A recent Gallup poll for USA Today and CNN showed that 70 percent of Americans said they would probably vote for a woman in 2008.

But before Clinton and Rice can battle for the ultimate power seat in the Oval Office, they would have to become the first women to win the nomination of the top two American political parties.

Republicans and Democrats have yet to pick a woman as a White House nominee, although Geraldine Ferraro was the Democratic vice presidential candidate during Walter Mondale's failed presidential bid in 1984. And Elizabeth Dole tried but failed to win the Republican nomination for president in 2000.

Laura Bush has already made her view on the subject known. She told CNN last week that Rice would be a great Republican candidate to succeed her husband, President George W. Bush, who wraps up the first year of his second term on Friday.

"I'd love to see her run. She's terrific," she said of Rice.

Rice, however, has said she does not want to run for president.

Clinton, who has led potential Democratic candidates in opinion polls, has yet to declare her intentions.

Although neither has said she will run for president, political observers are already pining for a battle between the two powerful women.

Dick Morris, a former adviser to Clinton's husband, president Bill Clinton, co-wrote a book titled "Condi vs. Hillary: The Next Great Presidential Race."

The book imagines a political duel between "two highly accomplished women, partisans of opposite parties, media superstars and quintessentially 21st-century female leaders."

To Morris, only Rice has the potential to reach across the political spectrum to stop Clinton from winning the 2008 election.

While Rice's boss saw his popularity rating plunge last year, the chief US diplomat remained a popular government figure.

After Johnson Sirleaf's inauguration and Chilean president-elect Michelle Bachelet's election victory this week, it is becoming easier to imagine the United States being led by a woman, analysts said.

"It's perfectly possible," said Stephen Hess, a George Washington University professor.

"We're talking on a week in which a woman president was inaugurated in Africa and a woman was elected in Latin America, so this is not any longer so unique," Hess said.

"Here, polls show that gender doesn't really make that much difference anymore," he added.

Women have made gains in the US political landscape, although the United States remains in the 63rd spot worldwide in terms of female legislative representation.

There are 69 women in the 435-member US House of Representatives and 14 female senators in the 100-member Senate.

Clinton has an edge over Rice because she has won an election, while the secretary of state has never run for office, Hess said.

"The odds are greater that it would be Hillary rather than Condi," he said. "You would have to go very far to find a president of the United States who hadn't been elected to some previous office."

Associated Press

January 18, 2006

HEADLINE: Africa's first woman leader vows change

BYLINE: Hans Nichols, MONROVIA

ELLEN Johnson Sirleaf was sworn in yesterday as war-battered Liberia's new president.

She carved her name into history as Africa's first elected female head of state.

Ms Sirleaf repeated the oath of office read to her by Liberian Supreme Court Chief Justice Henry Reed Cooper in an inauguration ceremony attended by thousands of civilians and scores of diplomats, dignitaries and other African leaders.

She promised a "fundamental break" with the west African nation's violent past and pledged to rebuild.

With U.S. Navy warships offshore for the first time since the civil war's end two years ago, and U.S. First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on hand in a rare show of support, the moment was met with thunderous applause.

"It is time for us, regardless of our political affiliations or persuasions, to come together to heal and rebuild our nation," Ms Sirleaf, 67, said.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan offered congratulations, saying Ms Sirleaf had a "historic mandate to lead the nation toward a future of lasting peace and stability."

Founded by freed American slaves in 1847, Liberia was prosperous and peaceful for more than a century, bolstered by abundant timber and diamond wealth.

Back-to-back civil wars from 1989 to 2003 brought the country to its knees, killing 200,000 people and displacing half the tiny nation's population of 3 million.

Today, not even the capital has running water or electricity. The rich rely on generators, the poor on candles. Unemployment is at 80 per cent. "We have all suffered. The individual sense of deprivation is immense," Ms Sirleaf said. She called for patience.

"The task of reconstructing our devastated economy is awesome, for which there will be no quick fix, yet we have the potential to promote a healthy economy in which Liberians and international investors can prosper," she said.

Soccer star George Weah, who lost the November run-off, was backed by most of the country's top warlords and faction leaders. He grudgingly accepted defeat and attended the inauguration.

Deseret Morning News (Salt Lake City)

January 18, 2006

HEADLINE: A milestone in Liberia

BYLINE: Deseret Morning News editorial

Liberia always has had a special relationship with the United States. Settled by former U.S. slaves in the 19th century and established under a constitution similar to the one in this country, it was a peaceful haven in Western Africa until only a few decades ago.

Now it is struggling to overcome years of civil strife that has left it devastated and impoverished. And it has elected Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as president. She is the first female head of state ever on the African continent, and she represents the best chance for peace in Liberia and the region in many years.

It was encouraging to see both Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and first lady **Laura Bush** attend Sirleaf's inauguration this week. But that shouldn't be the end of U.S. involvement in Liberia. The successful rejuvenation of Liberian democracy is important to the region, and Sirleaf faces many challenges.

After 14 years of civil war, Liberia is so impoverished that even the nation's capital city, Monrovia, does not have electricity. The nation's unemployment rate, according to the Associated Press, is 80 percent. Meanwhile, people loyal to the former dictator, Charles Taylor, still are around. Some of them serve in the nation's legislature.

Sirleaf's election opponent was a former soccer star who was backed by warlords and other strong-men who prefer the violent methods that have terrorized the nation for years.

Fortunately, she won the election by a landslide. But the 100,000 or so former soldiers who agreed last year to lay down arms may not be content to wander the streets jobless for long.

For now, 15,000 U.N. soldiers remain in Liberia to keep the peace. No one can be sure what would happen to the nation if those troops left, but it ought to be clear that only through peace and the rule of law can the nation regain its footing and begin to prosper once again. The United States should do all it can to facilitate that prosperity, including forgiving loans granted, and subsequently misspent, under previous regimes.

Liberia's unique relationship with the United States is underscored by Sirleaf's own past. She was educated at Harvard, where she earned a master's degree in public administration in 1971. But to do so, she had to take odd jobs performing janitorial duties and waiting tables -- work that placed her on a par with many impoverished black women both in 1971 and today.

Her rise to power through an election is a huge step forward for Africa as a whole. If she succeeds in pulling Liberia out of its darkest years, she could spread a welcome age of peace and prosperity to other nations, as well.

Winston-Salem Journal (Winston Salem, NC)

January 18, 2006

HEADLINE: WELL WORTH THE TRIP

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and **Laura Bush**, the first lady, sent a strong and needed message of U.S. support for Liberia as they attended the inauguration of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the Liberian president Monday.

After all, the country was founded by freed slaves from America, and many Liberians who fled its bloodshed of recent years now live in the Triad and elsewhere in this country.

Liberians, and their supporters worldwide, are hoping that Sirleaf's leadership will bring lasting peace. And Rice and Bush, like other women the world over, must have felt a bit of well-justified pride in the fact that Sirleaf is the first elected female head of state in Africa.

GRAPHIC: AP PHOTO
(Rice and **Laura Bush**)

TOWNSVILLE BULLETIN

January 18, 2006

HEADLINE: Op-ed - (Real) girl power Women leaders take big slice of control

IT'S a touch too flippant to describe it as the dawning of a new era of girl power -- but that's exactly what it is.

With the swearing-in of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as Liberian president and the weekend victory of Michelle Bachelet in Chile, a new generation of women are claiming a hold on power as world leaders.

Elected women have played important roles on the world stage for more than a quarter-century -- including such iron-fisted figures as Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi and Britain's formidable Margaret Thatcher.

In Europe and Asia, the Americas and New Zealand, women of the left and right have held office at the head of states and governments -- but many cut lone figures on a political scene overwhelmingly dominated by men.

The simultaneous arrival of Bachelet, 54, as Chile's first woman leader and Sirleaf, 67, as Africa's first elected woman head of state, suggests that a new trend may be at work.

In Europe, the last few months saw Angela Merkel emerge as Germany's first woman chancellor, while Finland's Tarja Halonen looked set for re-election as president following a strong first-round performance at the weekend.

Women presidents already hold office in Ireland and Latvia, while a woman, Segolene Royal, has emerged as the clear frontrunner to be the opposition Socialist Party's candidate in France's 2007 presidential elections.

In Asia, several strong women leaders have emerged in the past five years -- President Gloria Arroyo of the Philippines, Begum Khaleda Zia, elected prime minister of Muslim-majority Bangladesh for a second time in 2001, and Prime Minister Helen Clark, who has governed New Zealand since 1999.

Megawati Sukarnoputri was president of Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation, from 2001 to 2004, decades after her father Sukarno founded the republic.

Even Africa, where women were long excluded from political life, currently has two female prime ministers: Maria do Carmo Silveira of Sao Tome et Principe and Luisa Diogo of Mozambique.

In the United States, the prospect of a woman succeeding US President George W Bush is no longer taboo, with both the Democrat Hillary Clinton and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice seen as strong possible contenders.

First Lady **Laura Bush** -- who led a high-level delegation to Liberia for Sirleaf's inauguration on Monday -- has said that she expects to see a woman president of the United States within the next decade.

"I think it will happen for sure," **Laura Bush** told CNN television, immediately mentioning Rice when asked to suggest names.

Rice -- whose election as a black woman would be a double first for the country -- has been repeatedly named in Republican circles as a possible candidate, although she insists she has no White House ambitions.

Laura Bush, who was to continue to Ghana and Nigeria on a tour focused on the work of African women, hailed Sirleaf, a Harvard-educated former World Bank official, as a beacon of hope for her sex.

"The centrepiece, really, of this trip is women's empowerment, with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as a shining example for all of us, for women around the world, not just women on her continent," Bush told reporters on her way to Liberia.

Worldwide, the number of women in politics is steadily rising, although they remain severely underrepresented, according to Karine Jabre, a Swiss researcher who has studied the place of women in parliaments since 1945.

"In 1995, women made up 11.8 per cent of all lower houses of parliament, rising to 13.4 per cent in 2000 and 16.2 per cent in 2005," she said.

Despite notable exceptions, such as the tough-minded Thatcher, Jabre's study also suggested that women in positions of power tended to put a greater priority on social issues than their male counterparts.

Sirleaf has argued that women have a central role to play in restoring hope to one of the world's most failed states, ruined by 14 years of civil war. "The women of Liberia and the women of Africa, we must succeed and we will," she told the women who came to her inauguration.