

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE PRESENTATION OF THE INDIRA GANDHI PRIZE FOR PEACE, DISARMAMENT AND DEVELOPMENT FOR 2012 TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA, H.E. MS. ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi: 12-09-2013

It is a privilege and honour for me to present the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for the year 2012 to Her Excellency, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf “for serving as an example and an inspiration to many a woman in Africa and beyond and for ensuring the return of peace, democracy and development in Liberia”.

The prize, instituted in the name of our former Prime Minister Late Shrimati Indira Gandhi, celebrates the values that Mrs. Gandhi stood and fought for in the service of our nation and people. Mrs. Gandhi played a major role in defining the destiny of India. She was unflinching in her concern for the poor and the disadvantaged and she championed their cause with rare intensity. She was also a crusader for global peace, a just economic order and disarmament. It is therefore befitting that the Indira Gandhi Peace Prize honours those who have made significant contribution to peace, disarmament and development, causes that were so dear to Indiraji. She was truly one of the twentieth century’s most remarkable personalities.

After decades of fighting for freedom, justice and equality in Liberia, Madam President you have revived national hope by strengthening institutions of good governance and leading the revitalization of the national economy. Your activism brought

you imprisonment and exile, but neither deterred you from speaking out in the interest of peace, justice and equality. As the first woman elected to lead an African nation, President Sirleaf is an inspiration to women everywhere, indeed to all of us who seek and work for building peaceful and prosperous communities that enable the development of an informed empowered and productive citizenry. Her outstanding leadership and remarkable vision has earned her international recognition, including the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize.

President Sirleaf has been a powerful voice for conflict resolution, harmony, peace and democracy in Africa. Beyond Liberia's own borders, these very ideals form the cornerstone of her efforts towards enhanced regional integration as an important vehicle for economic growth and social stability.

Peace and development are the two concepts closely intertwined and necessary to break the vicious cycle of poverty, hunger, inequality, violence and war. Emerging from a dark night that saw so much violence and bloodshed in a country, which is Africa's oldest republic, Liberia is now moving towards its tenth year of sustained peace. India has been privileged to have played a key role in peace keeping efforts in Liberia. India was the first country to send an all female police unit to a peace-keeping mission with its deployment in Liberia. I recall, Madam President, that during a visit to this all Female Indian Unit in 2011, you announced that due to the inspiration drawn from them, your Government has targeted twenty percent woman recruitment in your security forces.

There is a long history of civilisational contacts, friendship and cooperation between India and Africa. Human resource development and capacity building assistance are at the core of Indian cooperation with Africa because they enable and empower people to take charge of their own future. The India-Africa Forum Summit provides a new template for our partnership. This partnership is guided by the vision and priorities of our African partners and is anchored in the fundamental principles of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit. India will continue to assist Africa in charting its own course through institution building, infrastructure development and technical and vocational skill development. Madam President, you have often said that Liberia's youth must have the opportunity to be educated and employed. Our development cooperation partnership with Liberia parallels your own priorities. Today, especially when the global economic environment is in turmoil, the importance of South-South cooperation takes on a particular salience.

As aspiring economies, India and Africa share a lot in common. This provides a natural synergy for building partnerships. We visualise a partnership that is anchored in the fundamental principles of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit.

India and Liberia have a longstanding relationship of friendship and cooperation. We stand with President Sirleaf in her efforts to pursue stability, economic growth and democratic governance for the Liberian people. In presenting President

Sirleaf with this Prize, we also recognise the people of Liberia and their courage and strength.

Thank you.
