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Liberia Government (Monrovia)

Liberia: Honorary Degree Conferred On President At Furman University in South Carolina

13 April 2009

Greenville, South Carolina — Furman University in South Carolina, the United States, has conferred on President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf an honorary Doctorate of Humanities.

In a citation supporting the conferral, the President of the University, David Shi, described the Liberian leader as a leading promoter of peace, justice and democratic processes who has worked tirelessly to bring about progressive changes in Liberia.

According to an Executive Mansion dispatch from Greenville, the Furman University President spoke of the Liberian leader's courageous efforts over many years, resulting in imprisonment and threats on her life. The risks, Dr. Shi noted, did not deter the Liberian President from continuing to work to free her country and remain a true champion of the rule of law.

"Her relentless efforts have helped Liberia's transition from a long period of abusive, chaotic and horrific dictatorships to a stable democratic government, working to improve the lives of all its citizens," Dr. Shi pointed out in the citation.

The Furman University President described the President's personal courage and unwavering commitment in the pursuit of justice and peace as an inspiration to people around the world.

Addressing students and faculty during a forum, the President spoke of the progress Liberia has made over the last three years. She cited, among other developments, the restoration of electricity and safe drinking water to some parts of Monrovia and its environs; the opening of schools throughout the country, leading to increased enrollment; and efforts to cancel the staggering USD\$4.7 billion debt Liberia owes multilateral financial institutions.

Most importantly, the Liberian leader said, the country's once battered image has been restored and the children of Liberia are now smiling again. "It brings me the greatest satisfaction that hope has been restored, and our children now have a right to education and clean drinking water, where everyone has an opportunity to reach his/her potential with equal opportunity for all," the Liberian leader told a capacity crowd on April 13 at the McAlister Auditorium in Greenville.

Despite moderate progress, the President said, domestic violence against women and rape continue to pose a problem in spite of the passage of strong legislation making rape a non-bailable offense. Unemployment, the President pointed out, also continues to undermine gains the country has made. The global financial crisis, the Liberian leader indicated, is also threatening economic gains the country has made since her ascendancy to power.

The President reiterated her call on American and other investors to visit Liberia and explore the country's potential. She cited the successful conclusion of the recent International Women's Colloquium held in Liberia as another indicator that the country is open for business.

Turning to students, the President advised those aspiring to leadership to set their goals and start to work toward those goals. "Determine what you want to be; work towards it and pursue your dream, standing up with courage and motivation and, above all, demonstrating a spirit of care for the people," the President said.

The forum was presented by the Riley Institute at Furman, a non-partisan organization affiliated with the Department of Political Science at Furman University.

Named for former Governor of South Carolina and United States Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, and inaugurated in 1999, the institute engages students and citizens across South Carolina in politics, public policy and leadership.

The forum brought together a cross section of residents of South Carolina, including students, faculty, politicians, among them Mr. Richard W. Riley, former U.S. Secretary of Education and former Governor of South Carolina, as well as Liberians residing in South Carolina and other neighboring states, including North Carolina and Georgia.

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