

**“The Social Inclusion Dimension of a Transformative Agenda”**  
**The Sixth Babu Jagjivan Ram Memorial Lecture**  
**Delivered by H. E. Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**  
**President of the Republic of Liberia**  
**Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, India**  
**September 12, 2013**

Madame Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment;  
The Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Babu Jagjivan Ram  
Foundation;  
Honorable Speaker;  
Other Distinguished Officials of the High Table;  
Officials of the Indian and Liberian Governments;  
Students;  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

I bring you greetings in my own name and on behalf of the people of Liberia. We extend our sincerest appreciation to the Government of India for the invitation to visit your truly amazing country. We value our bilateral relationship with India and have signed various agreements during this visit, which aim at broadening and deepening the bonds between our countries and our people.

Our thanks to the Babu Jagjivan Ram Foundation for the kind invitation to deliver today’s lecture on “The Social Inclusion Dimension of a Transformative Agenda.” We are here today because of the life and the work of one individual. It is a mark of distinction that, long after a person is gone, his life and work continue to improve the lives of generations of people.

Babu Ram was an insightful and active participant in Indian society. He saw that India, like other societies, had institutionalized habits, customs and traditions that confined some of its members to the fringes of society. The marginalized and excluded were denied a voice; they and their needs were never acknowledged, and even though physically present, there was little trace of them in the public policy which affected their lives. Abandoned by their individual communities, they could not always find refuge in the state.

Marginalization and exclusion disproportionately affected only a segment of society. It meant that the destiny of a person had nothing to do with who they were or what they had done; rather, the lot in life was predetermined by where they were born or who their parents were. Babu Ram sought to change this. Another hero, Martin Luther King, said “people should be judged not by the color of their skin, but the content of their character.”

Babu Ram retained an abiding faith in the Indian people, their culture and traditions. He believed that India could be better, that Indians were capable of incredible kindness and nobility, and that the Indian society could be kinder to the marginalized. He campaigned for this cause, wrote books, and entreated anybody who would listen. He argued that Indian society could be different, and that the Indian society was capable of delivering the benefits of a free society not only to some but to all of the people.

The institution which hosts us today is a continuation of that work. It is a testament to faith in the strength and ability of Indian society to recognize its difficulties and collectively act to solve them. Babu Ram did not give in to the cynicism that said, “Our people have been doing this for generations.” He believed that India could be different and better – that the morality of an action or practice is not determined by how long it has been held or how many people have done it. Rather, the moral strength of a society was measured in how it treated its most vulnerable – the outcasts, the orphans, the elderly and the widowed – those who are incapable of fighting for themselves.

The world needs more of Babu Ram in our global and national societies, and in our local communities. Like him, the size of our problems should not deter or frighten us. India’s gift to the world is the belief that society should and can be better; that the collective public goods of our greater global society should be shared by all of its citizens, in India, in Africa, in Latin America, in Asia.

A look at the Human Development Index shows that while the rest of the world has made great strides in improving the human condition, progress has not been as fast in Africa. While maternal and child mortality have decreased, they have not been fast enough. While access to health and sanitation has expanded, the pace leaves much to be desired. The slow growth in the human condition of our people has come at a time of unprecedented growth in GDP figures across the continent. While GDP growth has pushed up average

incomes, it has not always resulted in a proportionate improvement in people's lives.

It is no secret that most of Africa remains further down the value chain and, consequently, at the low end of the payment scale. Even though such value chains would not exist without the minerals and other resources we possess, our compensation is the lowest because we do not add any value. People further up the value chain benefit disproportionately, and even though we have great natural wealth, we remain among the poorest people in the world, our citizens unable to reap the true benefits from our mineral resources which are finite.

Until we can invest in our infrastructure, our economies will not grow at the required rate for transformation. Until we can reduce the transaction costs for our entrepreneurs, our economies will not grow at the rate to fight poverty. As long as productive structures remain predominantly enclave economies, subject to the boom and bust of commodity prices, poverty will remain with us. When that happens, it threatens stability and the growth of democracy.

Liberia is a case in point. In the decade preceding the start of instability, Liberia's growth was remarkable. The country had grown, in the 1970s, at an average rate of more than 7 percent annually. By 1980, Liberia's GDP per capita had reached a peak of US\$1,765, bringing the country close to middle-income threshold. While this growth delivered in top-line statistics, it masked serious problems of poverty and inequality throughout the country. Liberia was thus classified as a country of growth without development.

When the global depression of the 1970s imposed sharp declines in primary commodity prices and increases in the price of oil, growth disappeared, sending the economy into turbulence. The resulting deprivation, superimposed on a long history of cleavage and marginalization, set the stage for a coup d'état and a long period of conflict.

Until 2003, the Liberian economy continued in free fall, resulting in a collapsed economy, destroyed infrastructure and institutions from which, despite the progress, we have yet to fully recover.

The rebuilding of post-conflict Liberia began in 2006. In the past seven years, our task was to lay a foundation, a springboard for progress. It required stability, growth, debt relief, improvements in economic and social infrastructure. This foundation is the means to an end. The end is to improve the quality of life for all Liberians; to create the jobs, services and conditions that will not just meet our people's needs, but enhance the condition of their welfare. Over the next few years, we must grow our economy to accommodate all Liberians from the biggest landowner to the smallest petty trader. In our first six years, we lifted Liberia. In the next four, we must do all we can to lift Liberians.

How, then, do we transform our old economy from a plantation or concessionaire economy perceived to run for the benefit of a few, to a modern, inclusive economy? There is no magic wand that we can wave to turn our subsistence agricultural economy and unemployment into a vibrant manufacturing economy. We cannot turn our uneducated and unemployed youths into doctors, lawyers and professors overnight. However, there is hope; there is hope for a better future if we all work toward it, toward the goal in which every Liberian has access to decent education, is gainfully employed, and every young person can own their own business. With peace and patriotism, such a future is within our grasp.

We must start by building our infrastructure. It is impossible to create new Liberian industries without the energy to operate machinery, the roads to transport supplies and products, and the ports to export goods cheaply to foreign markets. The only way to create a robust economy is to supply access to these economic essentials – electricity, roads, port infrastructure – that fuel these businesses. Without this national backbone of high-quality, affordable infrastructure, our efforts will be in vain. This must be, for all of us, Liberians, a high priority.

Working with partners, Liberia tried an experiment. We implemented a pilot cash transfer program, launching the program in one of the most economically deprived areas where some of our most vulnerable and food insecure population live. These households were typically headed by the elderly, people living with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Some were headed by youth or single mothers with many dependants.

By providing a relatively small amount of money – about US\$20 a month – on a regular and predictable basis, we saw marked improvement in the lives of the beneficiaries. An independent third party evaluation of the program showed compelling evidence that the cash transfer program improved food security, education, access to health, and economic condition of beneficiary households. It showed that school attendance increased, and 66 percent of children had improved marks. When faced with illness, they were more likely than in previous years to seek health care for all members of their family. More importantly, the program showed great potential in stemming the inheritance of intergenerational poverty.

In Liberia and in Africa, increasing benefits from natural resources means we must continue to institutionalize such mechanisms that produce equitable growth within our countries. The Babu Jagjivan Ram Foundation, which wins converts to the cause of creating a casteless society, is an example of institutionalizing the fight against inequality. In countries such as my own, an attractive option is to tie resource revenues to social protection programs. While we continue to invest in infrastructure and encourage entrepreneurial activity, we must not forget about the investment in institutional infrastructure that delivers social welfare benefits to our people.

As the period of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) comes to an end in a little over two years, the world seeks a successor regime, a transformation agenda aimed at the elimination of poverty and sustained social justice and equity. I was privileged to serve as a Co-Chair of a 24-person High-Level Panel, constituted by the United Nations Secretary-General, to propose a post-2015 successor global agenda. Our Report, titled “A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development,” proposes five big, transformative shifts as the priorities for a forward-looking, compelling and integrated sustainable development agenda.

It calls for a quantum leap forward in economic opportunities and a profound economic transformation to end extreme poverty to improve livelihoods. It calls for a commitment to rapid, equitable growth – not growth at any cost nor short-term spurts in growth – but sustained, long-term, inclusive growth that can overcome the challenges of unemployment, especially youth unemployment, that can ensure that resource scarcity and adaptation to climate change are fully addressed. It calls for an inclusive growth that is

supported by the global economy that ensures financial stability, promotes stable, long-term private financial investment, and encourages open, fair and development-friendly trade. Departing from the paternalism of the past, it calls for a global partnership based on mutual respect and responsibilities, one which involves all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society.

The path from the margins of society, where access to a quality life is a luxury, is one that must be taken collectively. Babu Ram recognized this, and sought the assistance of the state in improving the conditions under which this group can negotiate and have a voice. India's experience in this provides the basis for an increasing global voice in the promotion of equity and social justice. India may have its own share of inequalities, but it has the power, the experience and the global position to become an example and a success to change the world's global agenda.

Babu Ram spent his life working to bring the marginalized from the fringes of society, to restore their dignity and worth as human beings. His work continues today through the Foundation. We commend all of you who have made this possible.

Liberia, despite the enormous challenges, must continue to be a strong example of commitment to freedom and social justice, must continue to promote growth that is inclusive, must continue to advocate for an equitable piece of the global economic pie. Together, in partnership, Liberia and India can bring closer Babu Ram's dream of a world without caste, a world of equity, a world of equal opportunity.

Thank you.