



## Support Women Candidates, Johnson Sirleaf Urges Ecowas

The NEWS (Monrovia)

NEWS

25 June 2008

Posted to the web 25 June 2008

Monrovia

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has urged leaders in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to support women candidates in upcoming elections in a number of countries of the Community.

She said if exercised successfully, the measure will help to promote women empowerment in the region.

According to an Executive Mansion release, the President spoke Monday in Abuja, Nigeria, at the 34th Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS.

President Sirleaf's statement comes at the time when a number of West African nations are scheduled to hold elections later this year in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone.

The heads of states also took note of the pending elections scheduled to be held later this year in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone and urged all stakeholders in these ECOWAS member states to ensure the conduct of credible, transparent, free and fair elections.

The President said ECOWAS has been very successful, describing the sub-regional group as an important vehicle towards the realization of a union government of Africa.

The Liberian leader noted the gains made by the West African community thus far, including its role in ending the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia as well as the progress made in Cote d'Ivoire towards the restoration of peace.

According to the release, at the end of the summit, the heads of state of ECOWAS among other issues, noted with concern the prevailing high cost for food and expressed satisfaction at efforts made individually by member states to address this challenge.

The leaders further commended the ECOWAS Commission for facilitating an emergency regional consultative meeting on the issue. They said the food crisis provides a window of opportunity for ECOWAS member states to redouble efforts to effectively implement the ECOWAS Common Agricultural Policy and Regional Strategy for short, medium and long-term food security.

They also reviewed the performance of the West African economy, noting the improved macroeconomic management as well as improving governance practices in member states.

The ECOWAS heads of state have, meanwhile, expressed concern over the slow pace in attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), particularly in light of the persistent rise in the price of crude oil, petroleum products and food.

The sharp increases, the leaders observed, have had adverse budgetary implications on the economies of most member states. The ECOWAS heads of state further stressed the importance of regional infrastructure for the scaling up of the economic development and integration process.

Ivorian Presidents Laurent Gbagbo and Joao Bernardo Vieira of Guinea Bissau have been designated to coordinate the efforts of the ECOWAS Commission in the development of regional infrastructure, transport and energy framework.

On the economic front, the ECOWAS heads of states urged member states to effectively implement the protocol on free movement of persons and goods, the right of residence and establishment, ensure the harmonization of the ECOWAS passport and guarantee equal treatment of refugees and other ECOWAS citizens.

President Sirleaf and entourage returned Monday night at the end of the ECOWAS heads of states Summit. However, the President left the country on Tuesday, to participate in the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) Forum scheduled to convene in Berlin, Germany beginning June 25-28.

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