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ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES

*Remarks by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Liberia
on the Occasion of the 10th Anniversary Commemoration of the
UNIFEM-Managed UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women
16 February 2007, ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters*

Distinguished guests and friends,

I am deeply honoured to participate in today's 10th anniversary commemoration of the Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. I only regret that my schedule made it impossible to be with you in person.

I want to acknowledge the United Nations General Assembly for its foresight and wisdom when it established the Fund, soon after the Fourth World Conference on Women. I also want to thank the United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM, for ensuring that we pay heed to this 10-year milestone. Over the past 10 years, the UNIFEM-managed UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women has supported 226 projects in 100 countries. In recognition of its importance and influence, we come together today because it is time to act. It is time to build the Fund, it is time to expand its impact and reach.

I've said before, my greatest constituency is women, and so I have a special, special obligation and responsibility to them. One of my earliest Presidential initiatives was to ask Parliament to enact a law against rape, which for the first time made it a crime. This law and its subsequent enforcement will help end the culture of violence and impunity, so that women and girls in Liberia can enjoy their full human rights.

The Trust Fund is Liberia's ally in this effort. And, I speak from personal experience. In Liberia, currently three initiatives are benefiting from Trust Fund grants. They are helping us to implement the laws that we make. These grants are contributing to the movement in my country toward accountable government — a government that takes the rule of law seriously, and that implements the laws that Parliament passes. Liberians seek a government that provides security for all our people.

I have witnessed too much violence in my lifetime, and am, sadly, all too familiar with the terror, abuse, and wreckage of lives and communities. In 2001, as part of UNIFEM's effort to mobilize the UN system to seriously address the impact of armed conflict on women, and women's role in peace-building, Noeleen asked me and Elisabeth Rehn, former Minister of Defence of Finland, to visit 14 areas of armed conflict. In these areas we talked directly to women, we heard first-hand how rape was used as a weapon of war, destroying women and communities.

Our report, *Women, War and Peace*, is still relevant. Its recommendations on ending violence and sexual exploitation, promoting access to justice and services, show the way to build a vigorous, multi-pronged push to end sexual violence.

As I've said many, many times, I am a stalwart supporter of the movement to strengthen UNIFEM and elevate its status so it can fully support the UN's efforts to assist countries to take the necessary actions to end violence against women. So, I urge us all to use this 10th anniversary moment in time to strengthen our commitment to end violence against women, to strengthen our commitment to UNIFEM, and to grow the UN Trust Fund, an essential tool and support in this critical effort.

Thank you very much, and have a good meeting.