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BY

**HER EXCELLENCY
MADAM ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA**

TO

THE ARMS TRADE TREATY CONFERENCE

NEW YORK, 10 JULY 2012

Video Message by
H.E. Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
To the Arms Trade Treaty Conference
New York
July 10, 2012

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Dear Friends:

I extend warm greetings, as you deliberate on the matter of an Arms Trade Treaty which is of immense importance to me and my country, Liberia.

As you are all aware, I lead a country which is experiencing the terrible effects of more than 14 years of a devastating war with itself, one which destroyed tens of thousands of lives, and hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars in social and economic infrastructure.

Although I can proudly report on the phenomenal progress we are making to consolidate peace, reconcile our people, build democracy, reconstruct socio-economic infrastructure and encourage investments, our experience leads me to make a plea for the adoption of an Arms Trade Treaty. The Liberian experience and other experiences in Africa and other parts of the world show that without such a treaty, armed violence and wars will continue to be fueled by irresponsible arms transfers.

I know that even with a UN and regional arms embargo on Liberia and other countries, more than 2.2 billion dollars worth of arms and ammunition found their way into the targeted countries, thus proving that the current system, without a treaty, is not working.

The case of bullets and ammunition reminds us of how their absence during the battle for Monrovia between rival armed groups in June 2003 temporarily ended the terror on the City's population until fresh and illegal supplies arrived. That is why this Treaty not only needs to regulate transfers of small arms and light weapons, it also must regulate the bullets and ammunitions which actually kill people, and without which guns may be reduced to silence and peace efforts would bear fruits.

As a Development Economist, I am acutely aware of the devastation to African economies due to armed violence. One cannot but be appalled by the cost of

conflicts for Africa which loses at least \$18 billion a year. This is money our continent can ill afford to lose. To put this in context, in 2008, the MDG Africa Steering Group identified an annual requirement of \$14 billion to scale up “effective HIV prevention and universal access to AIDS treatment” across the continent.

Considering that all low and lower-middle-income countries which allocated more than 10 percent of central government expenditure to the military in 2009 scored poorly on corruption indices that year, a robust ATT must create anti-corruption standards which States can use to assess specific transfers on a case-by-case basis.

My country recognizes and appreciates the work of civil society organizations, which helped our people to access much needed food, water and medicines when there was hardly a functioning government. When States forget that they exist, first and foremost, to protect their citizens, it is vital that civil society continues to remind us of our responsibilities and obligations. It is therefore crucial that we support the diligence and perseverance of NGOs, which have spearheaded this treaty process for many years and which must press on until the very last minute of the negotiations.

Finally, I call on the governments of Africa and the world to be bold in our work towards the ATT. The treaty provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to agree tough controls on the arms trade that would significantly help reduce armed violence in Africa and across the world, an opportunity that is truly priceless.

Delegates, Excellencies, Friends: Let us make history in the next few days and change the world for the better. Millions are counting and watching us to ensure that we deliver an Arms Trade Treaty that will truly make a difference in the lives of the world’s people. I do believe that we can do it!

Thank you!