

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT G. WAYNE CLOUGH  
Visit of Liberia President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, September 13, 2006

It is a great honor and pleasure to welcome Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to Atlanta and to Georgia Tech. We are also pleased to welcome Liberian Ambassador Charles Minor, Deputy Chief of Staff for the Republic of Liberia Amara Konneh, and Femi Oke from CNN.

Georgia Tech is one of America's top ten public universities and one of the nation's foremost technological universities. We have a long history of educating technological leaders and conducting research in science and technology. Those are the things you would expect from a leading technological university.

But we also excel at three other things that are not so ordinary and these are especially relevant to this visit by President Johnson-Sirleaf. First, we collaborate across the traditional academic disciplines. At Georgia Tech, scientists and engineers gather around problems and issues. Each one brings his or her

special expertise to the table, and they work together to come up with innovative solutions and new ideas.

In addition, we deliberately bridge the gap between leading-edge technology and public policy. Here on our campus, scientists and engineers work together with experts in international relations and public policy. This collaboration helps Georgia Tech policy and international affairs experts to be effective in addressing the issues presented by technology, and it helps our scientists and engineers to do their work within the broader context of social and policy issues.

Liberia has already seen an indication of that bridging of disciplines in the work of Georgia Tech Professor Mike Best and his students. Mike Best is simultaneously an assistant professor in Georgia Tech's Sam Nunn School of International Affairs and an adjunct assistant professor in our College of Computing. His work joins together the important fields of leading-edge communications technology and international affairs and public policy.

Mike is currently leading a research project in Liberia that is sponsored by the Open Society Institute for West Africa. He has involved five Georgia Tech graduate students – three from the College of Computing, one from the School of Public Policy, and one from the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs. Under Mike’s direction, these students are studying Liberia’s information and communication technologies, which have been devastated by the civil war which just ended two years ago. During the coming months, three of these students will travel to Liberia’s capital city of Monrovia to conduct an audit of the country’s information and communication technologies, then work with government officials on developing a national information and communication technology policy. They will also study ways in which computers and communications technology can be used in Liberia’s development.

Mike Best and his students also demonstrate the second special aspect of Georgia Tech’s expertise, and that is our commitment to be a truly global university that reaches out to cooperate with others around the world and bring our expertise to bear wherever we can help to improve the quality of life.

One third of our undergraduate students study abroad, and they are often engaged in projects that provide assistance to their host nations, from supplying clean water to villages in Honduras to surveying and discussing the immense infrastructure and environmental problems caused by thirty years of war in Angola. Our graduate students in city planning have helped a canton in Ecuador to plan for population growth, and developed a plan to revitalize and preserve a historic section of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

In Africa, we've helped Rwandan coffee growers use the Internet to become more effective and efficient; provided public policy advice to the West African Telecommunications Regulatory Association; studied cyber-café use in Nigeria; and worked on cyber security across the continent.

These are just a few examples of the many ways in which Georgia Tech is engaged with nations around the world in sharing our expertise. This visit today demonstrates our continued interest and hopes to expand our involvement with the

African continent and Liberia. For example, we would like to expand the scope of our work on communications technology from the national policy level to address other issues such as access, security, and building capacity. And we think it would be really exciting to work together with the University of Liberia, which is even older than Georgia Tech.

The third special characteristic of Georgia Tech is that we are widely recognized and respected across the United States and increasingly around the world for our ability to develop practical applications for the discoveries and technologies that come from our research labs. We have an entrepreneurial and innovative personality as an institution. Throughout our history of more than 120 years, we have always been focused on practical problem-solving. We believe that it is not enough just to develop new technology and put it on the shelf. We are committed to putting new technology to work to make the world a better place.

Africa and Liberia offer a unique opportunity to do that, because there is no existing technology to hamper you. That may sound

like an odd statement, but think about it for a moment. Here in the United States, for example, we have an incredibly extensive grid of fixed telephone lines that criss-cross every community and connect every house, and it is hard for our telecommunications companies to dis-entangle themselves from that technology grid which was designed to serve the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Liberia, the copper wire phone lines were looted during the civil war and there are no longer any working phone switches, so there is nothing to prevent you from leap-frogging over the old fixed land-line system and right into new mobile technologies. And we hope that we can help Liberia move toward using new technologies like this in practical, efficient, and effective ways.

Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf earned the nickname "Iron Lady" over the course of a 30-year political career that carried her through imprisonment and exile to election as Africa's first female president. The imprisonment and exile result from her opposition to the violent and devastating regimes of former presidents like Samuel Doe and Charles Taylor. And she now faces the daunting task of helping her country recover

from civil war and the legacies of Doe and Taylor. But if anyone can do it, it is President Johnson-Sirleaf. She brings to that task intellectual vigor, a deep commitment to justice and peace, and a tremendous level of experience and expertise.

President Johnson-Sirleaf studied economics and accounting at the College of West Africa in Monrovia, then came to the United States, where she graduated from the University of Colorado, then earned a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University. Her career in Liberia included service in positions of leadership that ranged from cabinet minister to standard bearer for the Unity Party. Her career in exile included international experience working for Citibank and the World Bank in Nairobi. She also worked as director of the United Nations Development Program, which meant she was essentially an assistant secretary-general of the UN.

In 2003, then-President Charles Taylor was forced into exile and the civil war that had killed 200,000 Liberians was finally brought to an end. This positive turn of events enabled Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to return home. She headed the Governance

Reform Commission that was set up as part of the settlement that ended the war, and then was elected President of Liberia last October.

Madam President, it is an honor to introduce you to speak on the role of computers and communications in the post-conflict redevelopment of Liberia.