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Office of the Press Secretary  
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## President Bush Meets with President Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia Oval Office

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2:18 P.M. EST

**PRESIDENT BUSH:** Madam President, thanks for coming. This is the second Oval Office visit I've had with the first democratically elected woman President from Africa. The first time we met you were wondering whether or not it was possible to achieve your dreams, and you asked for our help. I was impressed by your spirit at the last meeting.

This meeting, there is no doubt in your mind that you can achieve your dreams. And I am impressed by your confidence, but more importantly, your deep concern for the people of Liberia. And so I pledge our ongoing help to you and your government. I thank you very much for setting such a good example for not only the people of Liberia, but for the people around the world, that new democracies have got the capability of doing the hard work necessary to rout out corruption, to improve the lives of the citizens with infrastructure projects that matter. And we want to help you, we really do.



Secretary State Condoleezza Rice and the President worked out an agreement that I hope other nations follow, and that is, we effected debt relief for Liberia. And I call upon other nations that have got debt with this vital country to follow our lead and to give this country a chance to succeed.

Secondly, today we're announcing an initiative where the Treasury Department is providing monies so that the IMF and other international lending institutions will be able to have the confidence in going forward to help relieve obligations of Liberia. And the reason this is important is you want to give this young country a chance to succeed by eliminating some of the interest obligations and burdens, so that there is room to grow.

And so, Madam President, I love your spirit. We spent a lot of time talking about education. If anybody who understands the importance of education, it's the President. She understands that her country has got vast potential, it's got resources -- but the biggest potential of all is the people. And we want to help

you. Really glad you came back. I'm thrilled to call you friend.

**PRESIDENT JOHNSON-SIRLEAF:** Mr. President, I'm just so pleased for this extraordinary opportunity to meet you a second time in one year. We came back this time to report on progress; to tell you in this first year of our administration, with the strong support of your government -- led by yourself, personally -- we've been able to set our goals. We've identified the four areas in which we want to concentrate our effort, and that's peace and security, economic revitalization, governance and the rule of law, and infrastructure

And under each of these areas we've achieved important first steps. We've set the country on the way to recovery, and now we're back here to tell you that we're about to embark on the next phase. And the next phase is to do even more: get our kids back in school, to create jobs for our people, to open up our economy, restock our mines and our forestry sector and our agriculture, get our refugees and our displaced persons back into their villages and in their communities, on their farms, producing for self-sufficiency.

All of those things are beginning to happen. Our kids are back in school, our enrollment has increased by 40 percent. And now, as I told you, we just need to get this debt off our backs. And that's the last thing you've done for us. And Secretary Rice was just exceptional in taking the leadership yesterday in our forum. And once she did that, others are beginning to follow. And you've just made a great call to all of them to tell them to follow. And we think it's going to happen. If we get the \$3.7 billion external debt off us, we can then access resources, we can expand the progress we've made, we can accelerate the implementation of all of our programs.

And so we're just so pleased about that. We thank you for what is being done in the security sector reform, the training of our new army, the professionalization of our police force. All of that will enable us to consolidate the peace, and then really begin to deliver to the Liberian people. We're fighting corruption, we're starting to put people in court, we've created a court of conduct for public officials, anti-corruption policy and strategy.

All of these things would not have happened, Mr. President, if we didn't have your strong support, and the support of your colleagues in the government, and also on the Hill. We're thankful that we enjoy bipartisan support on the Hill. And we're meeting a lot of them in these two days. And they've just been there for us and giving you the support that you need from there to enable you to continue to support us.

We want you to know the Liberian people are very thankful, Liberian people are resolved never to go to war again. They want the simple things in life: send their children to schools, have jobs, be able to give their families a square meal at the end of the day, be able to get around. And we want you to know that those things are happening. We thank you for what you have done to put us on this path.

**PRESIDENT BUSH:** Thank you Madam President. Thank you very much.

END 2:24 P.M. EST

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