

LIBERIA IS IN NEED OF U.S.
ASSISTANCE**HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 28, 2006

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to continue my supplication for increased U.S. support for the people of Liberia and to enter into the RECORD a Washington Post editorial dated March 20 which outlines why the United States should lend itself to providing assistance to the poverty-stricken West African country.

When the country of Liberia was founded by freed American slaves in 1847, it held a world of promise. Today, however it is suffering from profound poverty—a product of a civil war that has driven more than 3 million Liberians from their homeland. More than 8 in 10 Liberians cannot find work. Underdevelopment plagues the country—a country with no running water and no electricity. Founded by the dream of freedom, it now suffers from a distinct deprivation that the United States can now address through their support of the newly elected president of Liberia Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and her goals for her countrymen and women.

This month, President Johnson-Sirleaf addressed a special joint-session of Congress and met with President Bush. She outlined the many things that are needed to be done in order to ensure her country thrives. “We must revive educational facilities, including our few universities. We must provide essential agricultural extension services to help us feed ourselves again, developing the science and technology skills to insure that we prosper in a modern global economy,” she told Members of Congress. President Johnson-Sirleaf has expressed the urgency of resettling displaced Liberians, the rehabilitation of the core of an electricity grid to high-priority areas and institutions, in addition to the demobilization of former combatants and restructuring of their army, police and security services. President Johnson-Sirleaf, as Mr. Fred Hiatt mentions in his editorial, is one reason why President Bush should help Liberia. A Harvard-trained economist, and former World Bank and United Nations official, she is committed to uplifting her country. A second reason, according to Hiatt, is the fact that if nothing is done at the present time, the cost of repair in Liberia will be “far more difficult and expensive” later on.

Mr. Speaker, all these are pressing reasons to assist Liberia and I am certain that with President Johnson-Sirleaf's commitment and U.S. aid, the economy and social conditions of Liberia can be revived.

[From the Washingtonpost.com, Mar. 20, 2006]

THE CASE FOR CARING NOW

(By Fred Hiatt)

On one of her visits to her native Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf told a joint session of Congress last week, she was placed in a jail cell with 15 men. “All of them were executed a few hours later,” she said. “Only the intervention of a single soldier spared me from rape.”

Now Johnson-Sirleaf, 67, is the newly elected president of her unhappy African country, and if you think she was trying to seize Congress's attention with that anecdote of 20 years past, you are no doubt correct.

After all, the world is full of unhappy countries that have won sympathy here, and then been rapidly discarded. Think Haiti, for example, or Afghanistan, which was of interest to Ronald Reagan, forgotten by George H.W. Bush, neglected by Bill Clinton and then (not coincidentally) a crisis again.

Now Johnson-Sirleaf, Africa's first female elected leader, is enjoying her moment of fame and good feeling. Laura Bush and Condoleezza Rice attended her inauguration in January. Congress greeted her as a hero last week. President Bush will receive her tomorrow. After a quarter-century of coups, dictators and civil wars in Liberia, this is a moment of restored democracy and hope.

Do not assume, however, that Johnson-Sirleaf therefore will stoop to unseemly flattery or diplomatic spin. After all her years of exile, harassment, surveillance and prison with all the misery waiting for her back home, she seems to have no time for that.

As in: When she is asked during a visit to The Post how she will plead her case for aid to Bush, given draining U.S. commitments to Iraq and Afghanistan, she replies, “For the reason you said—he needs a success. Billions are being spent on Iraq, billions are being spent on Afghanistan—and it will take a fraction of those billions to make Liberia a success story.

“I think he needs one, and we're going to give him an opportunity to have one.”

It's not that Johnson-Sirleaf, stately in traditional dress, comes across as ungrateful. In her address to Congress, she thanked the United States for its help in brokering an end to Liberia's vicious civil war and for sending money to get the country going again.

But, she says, “we still have problems. I can't tell you we're out of the woods.”

Any Western leader might regard that as an astonishing understatement. Johnson-Sirleaf works out of a dilapidated palace that, like the rest of her country, depends on generators for electricity.

“We have a city that's dark,” she says. “We have a city where many young children don't know that water comes out of a tap.” At night, children gather on street corners to do their homework by the spillover from private floodlights, since they have no light at home. Many others do no homework because they can't afford pencils, or can't attend school at all.

Civil war drove most of the country's 3.5 million people from their homes. Some 45 percent of the population is 14 or younger; many of those children were press-ganged into armies and know no other life. Life expectancy is 42.5 years. Unemployment is 80 to 85 percent. Of every 1,000 children born, 132 die in infancy.

Why should the United States care? The standard answer of traditional historical ties, based on the freed American slaves who founded Liberia, may have worn thin after all these years. But there are two others.

One is that helping is cheaper in the long run than the alternative. When conditions in a country become too atrocious to bear—when drug-addled marauders take to chopping off the hands of children who get in their way, as in Liberia's neighbor Sierra Leone—public opinion may (at least some of the time) force the United States, Britain or the United Nations to intervene. By the time that demand comes, the destruction is so complete—in Liberia, roads, hospitals, water pipes, everything has crumbled—that repair is far more difficult and expensive.

The second is Johnson-Sirleaf herself: Harvard-trained economist, former World Bank and U.N. official, democrat. She espouses an anti-corruption, socially inclusive vision that aid officials can only dream of finding in most poor countries. Courageously, for he

still has many followers, she has asked that former dictator Charles Taylor, now in Nigeria, stand trial for his crimes.

When her hour at The Post is over, she waves off the usual pleasantries and asks: What will emerge from this interview? What will Liberia get out of it? And suddenly “grandmotherly,” the adjective you often hear applied to her, reminds you less of the woman who sneaked you an extra cookie when your mother wasn't looking and more of having your hands checked for cleanliness before being seated at the Sunday dinner table.

Well, Madam President, I'm afraid this column is the best I can do. I hope you get more out of President Bush tomorrow.

COMMEMORATING THE 185TH ANNI-
VERSARY OF GREEK INDEPEND-
ENCE**HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN**

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 28, 2006

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in proud recognition of the 185th anniversary of Greek independence. This special day for Greece commemorates the strength and determination of its people to restore their democratic roots and identity.

The political philosophies of both the United States and Greece have been challenged by oppressive powers, and both nations have proudly defended their right to self-government and individual freedoms. After showing a desire to be free from the Ottoman Empire in 1821, Greece endured eleven long years of war to succeed in gaining independence. American and Hellenic cultures greatly respect their tradition of independence and recognize the importance of democratic principles.

The United States and Greece have always enjoyed a friendship and alliance in international and cultural endeavors. I am pleased that the Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis and other dignitaries paid a visit last week to Washington, D.C., to celebrate this anniversary since Hellenic principles resonate in our culture and politics. The United States was founded on the principles of democracy developed thousands of years ago in the city-states of ancient Greece. The beauty of Greek architecture can even be found while taking a walk through our beloved Capitol building. Likewise, our country's influence on Greece can be seen in their first Constitution, which was based on our Declaration of Independence and the principles behind the American Revolution.

On a cultural level, since Greece resurrected the Olympics in 1896, they have symbolized peace and excellence for people around the world. The Olympics show that great athletic skill and spirited competition can bring nations together despite their differences. We saw at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy, how Hellenic ideals such as equality and friendship have stood the test of time and continue to flourish at a global level. Hellenic culture, whether through its development of democratic government or its espousal of friendly competition, encourages people to come together amicably even during the most difficult of times.

Mr. Speaker, it would be hard to imagine a United States of America, or even the world,