

MEDIA ADVISORY

Her Excellency President Dr Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to deliver the 2023 Unisa Founders Lecture

Approved for public release.

Date: Wednesday, 29 November 2023

Her Excellency President Dr Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman President on the African continent and 24th President of the Republic of Liberia will deliver the keynote address at the University of South Africa (Unisa)'s 2023 Founders Lecture to be held at the Unisa Muckleneuk campus on Wednesday, 29 November 2023 at 18:00.

The Principal and Vice Chancellor of Unisa, Professor Puleng LenkaBula is honoured to welcome a guest speaker of such an eminent stature as Her Excellency President Dr Sirleaf, especially on the occasion that Unisa is celebrating its 150th Anniversary.

The idea of a Founders Lecture was introduced at Unisa in 2003, the aim being to encourage the University and its stakeholders to focus on critical issues in higher education at both global and national levels. Over the years, a variety of topics, presented by eminent and renowned scholars from across the Continent and the globe, have established the Founders Lecture as a premium and flagship forum for intellectual engagement of the highest standard.

Previous Speakers include Dr Blade Nzimande, the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Professor Mamadou DIOUF, the Leitner Family Professor of African Studies and History, Middle East and South Asian and African Studies (MESAAS) in the History Department at Columbia University, Professor Thuli Madonsela, former Public Protector and currently Advocate and Professor of Law at Stellenbosch University, Dr Mamphela Ramphele, Founder of the Citizens Movement, Professor George Ellis, distinguished professor of Complex Systems at the University of Cape Town, Lord Sutherland, former Provost at Gresham College and President of the Royal Institute of Philosophy, Professor Paul Zeleza, a world renowned scholar, historian, literary critic, novelist and short-story writer and professor of African Studies and History at the Pennsylvania State University, Dr T Karunakaran, Vice Chancellor of the Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed University, Dr Phil Mjwara, Director-General in South Africa's Department of Science and Technology, Dr Ebrima Sall, Executive Secretary of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Professor Adam Habib, former Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of the Witwatersrand, Professor Barney Pityana, retired principal and Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa, Professor Muxe Nkondo, Unisa Council Member and Chairperson of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee of Council (ASACoC) as well as Her Excellency Chief Dr Jewel-Howard-Taylor, Vice-President of the Republic Liberia.



About Her Excellency Dr Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Her Excellency President Dr Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is a leading promoter of freedom, peace, justice, women's empowerment, and democratic rule. As Africa's first democratically elected female head of state, she has led Liberia through reconciliation and recovery following the nation's decade-long civil war, as well as the Ebola Crisis, winning international acclaim for achieving economic, social, and political change. Recognised as a global leader for women's empowerment, President Sirleaf was awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize for Peace in 2011.

She is a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States' highest civilian award. She was awarded the Grand Croix of the Légion d'Honneur, France's highest public distinction. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation awarded her the Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership, which celebrates excellence in African leadership. The Ibrahim Prize recognizes leaders who, during their time in office, have developed their countries, strengthened democracy and human rights for the shared benefit of their people, and advanced sustainable development. Dr Sirleaf was the first female recipient.

President Sirleaf became President of the Republic of Liberia in 2005 and was re-elected in 2011. During her two terms as president, Dr Johnson Sirleaf focused on rebuilding the country, attracting over \$16 billion in foreign direct investment. She also attracted more than \$5 million in private resources to rebuild schools, clinics and markets, and fund scholarships for capacity building. She successfully negotiated \$4.6 billion in external debt forgiveness and the lifting of UN trade sanctions. She increased the national budget from \$80 million in 2006 to over \$672 million in 2012, with an annual GDP growth rate of more than 7%.

She served as the first female Chairperson of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). She was co-chair of the United Nations Secretary General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The panel is tasked with crafting a roadmap for global recovery and sustainable development. She has held senior positions in the banking sector, including Liberian Bank for Development and Investment, Citicorp's Africa regional office in Nairobi and as senior loan officer at the World Bank.

President Dr Sirleaf has been awarded honorary doctorates by more than 15 institutions in Africa, Europe and the Americas. She has written widely on financial, development, and human rights issues, and in 2008 she published her critically acclaimed memoir, *This Child Will Be Great*.

The event will take place as follows:

Date : Wednesday, 29 November 2023



Time : 18H00

Venue : Function Hall, 4th Floor, Kgorong Building, Unisa Muckleneuk Campus, Pretoria

Members of the media are invited to attend and cover the event or to join via the following link: https://youtube.com/live/xTC8Ah_UITQ?feature=share

- Ends-

For RSVPs and interviews requests, please contact Tommy Huma (Unisa: Senior Media Officer) on 072 218 6197 / humartm@unisa.ac.za OR Edgar Rathelele on 063 731 5456 / ratheme@unisa.ac.za

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