ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF
MARKET WOMEN'S FUND
Strengthening the Women who Strengthen the World

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Contact:
SMWF/Liberia: Sekou Konneh, Executive Director, +231-06-519779, sekouwkonneh@yahoo.com
SMWF/USA: Libby Bassett or Dorothy Davis, smwfund@gmail.com

SIRLEAF MARKET WOMEN'S FUND RECEIVES UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL AWARD FOR SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, December 19 – The Sirleaf Market Women's Fund (SMWF) today was honored with the 2008 South-South Cooperation Special Award during the fifth UN Day for South-South Cooperation. Liberia's Minister for Gender and Development, Vabah Gayflor, chair of the Fund's national board, came to New York to accept the award on behalf of SMWF from the President of the UN General Assembly's High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, Qatar's Ambassador to the United Nations.

This is only the second time the award has been given. The first, in 2007, went to Muhammad Yunus, Founder of the Grameen Bank and Grameen Foundation in Bangladesh.

Yiping Zhou, Director of the UN Development Programme's Special Unit for South-South Cooperation which hosted the event, said that the award's selection panel was impressed with how SMWF "empowers women entrepreneurs at the grassroots level to reach their goals and dreams and believes it could serve as a model for other countries in the South."

In accepting the award on behalf of Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the SMWF board and "the market women of Liberia," Minister Gayflor expressed appreciation "for this distinguished honor especially at this time in the history of the women of the Republic of Liberia where they have come from ashes and their lives have been restored."

"In Liberia right now we have competing priorities where everything is down to rock bottom," Minister Gayflor said. "The President during her election promised the market women that if indeed she were elected as President, she was going to ensure that the conditions and environment in which they worked were improved. With the competing challenges she faced, making real her promises was a daunting task, but her friends, the board members of the SMWF, decided to come together and rally to give her support.

"Because of that, today, you have women who are very happy," Minister Gayflor said, explaining how SMWF has impacted the market women's lives. "Their goods have come from the floor and now are on the table. They have crèches and playgrounds for their children. They have literacy programs. They have access to some source of funding. This, for us, is real. This is talking about empowerment of women and

the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Thank you ever so much for this recognition. You can rest assured that we will take it back to Liberia where you can come by to celebrate the success of women's leadership."

Upon hearing news of the award, President Sirleaf sent her personal congratulations to the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund: "Thank you all for all the hard work and the dedication to our market women." On the occasion, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed his belief that "South-South cooperation helps developing countries learn how best to apply successful policies and practices in a context that reflects their national priorities."

To this end, the UNDP Special Unit launched the first ever Global South-South Development Expo that highlighted development solutions from the global south as well as the Human Development Stock Exchange to promote and finance development in the global south.

The Special Unit for South-South Cooperation was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1978. In UNDP, its primary mandate is to promote, coordinate and support South-South and triangular cooperation on a global and UN system wide basis. Its work is broadly organized into three focus areas: Policy, Dialogue & Development; Public-Private Partnership; and Southern Development Exchange.

"What is needed," UNDP Administrator Kemal Dervis said, "are stronger commitments to capitalize on existing innovations, facilitate networks of knowledge sharing and establish funding mechanisms that would help to encourage nascent and innovative programs to reach their full potential."

The Sirleaf Market Women's Fund was created in New York City in 2006 by a group of women from around the world who wanted to assist newly elected President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in her efforts to rebuild post-civil war Liberia. President Sirleaf asked them to help the market women of Liberia. As depicted in the award-winning documentary, "Pray the Devil Back to Hell," by its producer Abigail Disney, a member of the SMWF International Advisory Committee, the market women sustained their families, saved lives and kept food supplies flowing in the face of life-threatening conditions while they marched and negotiated for peace during 14 years of civil war. The market women then were instrumental in getting the granddaughter of a market woman, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, elected President of Liberia in 2005 – the first woman ever elected president in Africa.

During its first operational year, 2007, SMWF raised more than $1 million from the NoVo Foundation and other U.S. donors, which helped build or renovate 10 markets in Liberia. In June 2008, SMWF launched the Adopt-a-Market campaign in New York City in collaboration with the African Women's Development Fund-USA. President Sirleaf and two Liberian market women were honored guests. The result was an additional $1 million for building 10 more markets, beginning literacy training for the market women and creating safe playgrounds for their children. The Adopt-a-Market program allows donors at all levels to participate in rehabilitating the lives of Liberia's market women, who are the backbone of the country.

Other 2008 UNDP South-South Cooperation Awards included the Partnership Award to RPN-TV Channel 9 in the Philippines; the Leadership Award to the InterPress Service; and the Innovation Award to The Africa Channel.

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For more information about the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund, www.smwf.org. For information about UNDP's Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, http://ssc.undp.org