

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Former President of Liberia

“To girls and women everywhere, I issue a simple invitation. My sisters, my daughters, my friends; find your voice.”

Page | 1



Background Information

Born: October 29, 1938

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was born on October 29, 1938, the granddaughter of a traditional chief of renown in western Liberia and a market woman from the southeast.ⁱ In 1971, Sirleaf earned a master’s degree in public administration from Harvard University

Sirleaf’s Resistance

Sirleaf saw her country face challenging periods when she returned from college abroad. She witnessed mass governmental corruption. In 1979, she attempted to stabilize government finances as the Minister of Finance. Her efforts to improve the country's finances proved successful. In 1980 she became the president of the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment but had to flee Liberia because of ongoing war and rebellion. Ellen narrowly escaped the oppressive military government. Even in exile, she continued to serve on a global level. She was the Regional Bureau of Africa and held the rank of assistant secretary-general of the United Nations. Sirleaf wanted more female representation in politics. She was a founding member of the International Institute for Women in Political Leadership. Seeking more excellent leadership, Ellen ran for president of Liberia in 1997. The outcome was not successful because corruption plagued the election. She tried again in 2005 and won the presidency. Sirleaf became president of Liberia on January 16, 2006. She was the first woman elected head of state of an African country. During her presidency, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf promoted education for women and girls, handled the Ebola crisis, appointed women to high governmental positions, and brought peace to Liberia with non-violence.

Achievements

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is the recipient of several prestigious awards, including the Nobel Peace Prize (2011), Presidential Medal of Freedom (2007), Indira Gandhi Prize (2012), and Ibrahim Prize (2017).ⁱⁱ Forbes Magazine named Ellen as one of the “100 Most Powerful Women in the World. Sirleaf has been awarded honorary doctorates by more than 15 institutions, including Yale University, Spelman University, and Georgetown University.

Essential Questions

1. In what ways did Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf resist for justice?
2. How did former President Johnson-Sirleaf advance women's rights during her presidency?
3. ***"To girls and women everywhere, I issue a simple invitation. My sisters, my daughters, my friends; find your voice."***
 - a. What does this quote mean to you?
 - b. How can you use this quote in your life?

ⁱ <https://www.un.org/en/conf/migration/assets/pdf/Ellen-Sirleaf-Bio.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.motivation.africa/10-powerful-quotes-of-ellen-johnson-sirleaf.html>