

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT**

Voleine Amilcar, ITVS  
Mary Lugo  
Cara White

415-356-8383 x 244  
770-623-8190  
843-881-1480

voleine\_amilcar@itvs.org  
lugo@negia.net  
cara.white@mac.com

For downloadable images, visit [itvs.org/pressroom/](http://itvs.org/pressroom/)

For the program companion website, visit [pbs.org/independentlens/ironladies](http://pbs.org/independentlens/ironladies)

**“IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA” TO HAVE ITS BROADCAST PREMIERE  
ON THE EMMY AWARD–WINNING PBS SERIES *INDEPENDENT LENS*  
ON TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2008**

***Film Goes Inside Liberia for a Look at the Country’s History-Making  
New President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf***

(San Francisco, CA)—After nearly two decades of brutal civil war, Liberia was a nation ready for change. In January 2006, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was inaugurated president, immediately earning a place in history as the first woman ever elected president of an African nation. Since her victory, President Johnson-Sirleaf has appointed women to key positions throughout the government. This diverse group, along with other women across the country, has adopted their popular president’s nickname: They are the “Iron Ladies of Liberia.” The film follows the president and the extraordinary women surrounding her as they develop and implement policies to rebuild their ravaged country and prevent a descent back into civil war. **IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA** will air nationally on the Emmy Award–winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Terrence Howard, on Tuesday, March 18, 2008, at 10:00 PM (check local listings).

Liberia’s problems are overwhelming: crippling debt, rampant corruption and cronyism, and a shattered infrastructure. President Johnson-Sirleaf, a 69-year-old grandmother, must face down criticism from all quarters—the “market women” who helped get her elected but now face relocation from their illegal market stalls; opponents in the Liberian House of Representatives who are resistant to change; decommissioned army officers demanding their pensions and threatening riots; and the workers at the Firestone rubber plantation, who were promised outrageous salary increases by Liberia’s previous president, Charles Taylor, but who continue to live in squalor. Yet despite these obstacles, President Johnson-Sirleaf achieves great success in her first year in office; among her triumphs, she restores electricity for the first time in decades to Monrovia, the capitol city, negotiates debt relief with the United States and forges a new partnership with China to rebuild much of her country’s crumbling infrastructure. **IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA** is a unique behind-the-scenes look at the rebirth of a nation and democracy in action, under the steady hand of a woman determined to use the power she has been given to help her people and her country.

**IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA** will be showcased in *Independent Lens*’s national Community Cinema program, the monthly screening series that brings together local public television stations and leading community organizations to hold monthly screenings in more than 40 markets across the country, connecting communities with organizations, information and the opportunity to get involved around the topics presented in the films. More than 400 events nationwide are planned for the coming season. For more information, visit <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/getinvolved>.

-More-

To learn more about the film and the issues, visit the companion website for **IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA** at *Independent Lens* online. Get detailed information on the film watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions. **IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA** companion website launches January 29 at [pbs.org/independentlens/ironladies](http://pbs.org/independentlens/ironladies).

### **About the Subjects**

#### **Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia**

Her Excellency Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, president of Liberia, has a résumé that reads longer than the Nile, with a backstory to match. Admired by peers and supporters for her relentless commitment to rebuilding her war-torn country, Johnson-Sirleaf was born and raised in Liberia. She graduated from the College of West Africa (Monrovia) and holds a degree in accounting from Madison Business College (Madison, Wisconsin) and an economics diploma from the University of Colorado. In 1971, she completed her master's degree in public administration at Harvard University. On her return to Liberia, she was appointed assistant minister of finance under President William Tolbert. Later exiled for her ties to Tolbert's now-overthrown government, Johnson-Sirleaf continued honing her financial and economic skills with Citigroup and World Bank in Nairobi, Kenya. She returned to Liberia in 1997, determined to run for president, and served on the boards of the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank and as the director of the U.N. Development Program. After a narrow victory in the Liberian primary elections, the National Elections Commission of Liberia declared Johnson-Sirleaf president-elect by a 20 percent margin on November 11, 2005. Since taking office in January 2006, Johnson-Sirleaf has earned praise for her focus on economic development and her peace-building efforts.

#### **National Police Chief Beatrice Munah Sieh**

Beatrice Munah Sieh, who had risen to the rank of deputy chief in Liberia's police force, fled to the United States after a gunman shot up her house in an assassination attempt allegedly ordered by her former boss, the chief of police. She settled in New Jersey, where she worked for 10 years as a middle school teacher and raised her kids as a single mom. She returned to Liberia when President Johnson-Sirleaf offered her the job of Liberia's chief of police. There is immense pressure on Sieh because for Liberia's struggling democracy to be healthy, maintaining order is critical. At the same time, she must reform an institution that is known to be repressive, rather than helpful, to most Liberians.

#### **Minister of Finance Dr. Antoinette Sayeh**

Her ministry, Dr. Antoinette Sayeh admits, is notorious for being the most corrupt in all of Liberia, a veritable "mafia" by her own description. In a bold move to attack the culture of corruption, she fired the entire group of senior officials in her ministry. Finances will be key for a thriving democracy to take root in Liberia, so Sayeh must carry out the president's attacks on corruption while convincing donors that Liberia is on the rebound. At the same time, she must deal with a crippling national debt. Sayeh and the president, who together will set the national budget, will have the last word on who will receive the precious dollars needed to rebuild the country.

### **About Liberia**

Liberia, officially the Republic of Liberia, is a country on the west coast of Africa, bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Liberia, which means "land of the free," was founded in 1821 as an independent nation with support of the American government, for free-born and formerly enslaved African Americans.

-More-

## **About the Filmmakers**

### **Director Daniel Junge**

Named by *Filmmaker Magazine* as one of 25 up-and-coming filmmakers in 2003, Daniel Junge had his feature-length directorial debut with *Chiefs*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival, where it won the award for Best Documentary, and subsequently received national airing on PBS. Also directed by Junge and broadcast nationally on PBS was *Reading Your Rights*, which documents a First Amendment rights battle in Colorado and earned a regional Emmy nomination. Other films by Junge include *Big Blue Bear* (Australia Broadcasting Company), *We Are PHAMALy* (Tribeca Film Festival) and the narrative film *Road Movie*. As creative director for the series *Common Good*, Junge oversaw the writing and editing of all episodes and personally directed four segments: “The Learning Zone,” “My PHAMALy,” “Neighborhood” and “Down by the Riverside.” The series earned four regional Emmys, three of which were awarded for Junge’s work. As creative director for Just Media, a Colorado nonprofit production company dedicated to social justice, the environment and education, Junge is currently working on films in Sudan, Afghanistan and Brazil, all due for completion in 2007–2008. Junge was born in Sheridan, Wyoming. He earned a B.A. from Colorado College, then attended film school at New York University. Junge has worked in the Los Angeles, New York and London film/television industries as an assistant director, assistant editor, researcher and production assistant. Junge has taught as a guest professor at Colorado College and speaks regularly to classes at the University of Colorado. He lives in Denver, Colorado, with his wife, Erin, and two large dogs.

### **Co-Director Siatta Scott Johnson**

Siatta Scott Johnson was born in Buchanan, Liberia, in 1974 and raised in rural Grand Bassa County. She speaks English, Liberia dialect English and Bassa fluently and is the mother of two. Johnson fled Grand Bassa in the early 1990s with the outbreak of war and eventually settled in Monrovia, where she was caught during the last of the violence in 2003. Johnson earned her B.A. in mass communications from the University of Liberia after the school reopened following the civil war. She holds certificates in political reporting from the University of Liberia and in media from the Press Union of Liberia/UNMIL, and she has a diploma in journalism from the Liberia Institute of Journalism. She has five years of experience as a reporter and producer at DCTV, one of Liberia’s few broadcast television stations, and is a founding member of Omuahtee Africa Media.

### **Producer Jonathan Stack**

During his 20-year career in film, Jonathan Stack has produced and directed more than 75 films and television documentaries, including the Academy Award–nominated and Sundance Grand Jury Prize–winning *The Farm*, about Louisiana’s infamous prison. It is one of two Academy Award nominations Stack has received during his career. His first film about Africa, *Liberia: An Uncivil War*, was nominated for two Emmys. It told the story of the last days of this beleaguered nation’s 20-year-long civil war. For Stack, the link between a prison plantation in the South and Liberia, a nation founded by freed slaves from the United States, has inspired much of his work. While *The Farm* reflects the legacy of slavery’s history in America, *An Uncivil War* is a shocking portrait of slavery’s legacy in Africa. During his many visits to Liberia, Stack helped organize and raise money for Omuahtee Africa Media, of which Siatta Johnson was a founding member. The collective goal was to train and inspire young Africans to share their own stories. The chance to team up with Omuahtee and Just Media to help tell the latest and most optimistic chapter in Liberia’s history was irresistible.

### **Producer Henry Ansbacher**

Henry Ansbacher is the founder of Just Media and has served as its executive director since 2000. Just Media’s mission is to raise awareness in the broadest audience of current social and environmental issues through the development and production of innovative and compelling media projects. Just Media is at the vanguard of a rapidly growing movement promoting media as a potent agent for community benefit. In his leadership position at Just Media, Ansbacher has produced more than 25 documentary shorts featuring social entrepreneurs. This effort culminated in 2004 with the launch of *Common Good*, an Emmy-winning half-hour magazine show featuring social entrepreneurs.

-More-

The feature film *Chiefs*, a documentary about the Wyoming Indian High School basketball team, was Ansbacher's first feature film producer credit; the critically acclaimed film won the award for Best Documentary at the Tribeca Film Festival. Since that time, Ansbacher has collaborated with *Chiefs* director Daniel Junge on *Reading Your Rights*, *We Are PHAMALy* and a number of other broadcast documentaries. Their 2006 effort, *Big Blue Bear*, received a regional Emmy for Outstanding Cultural Documentary.

***About Independent Lens***

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10:00 PM on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history.. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen. Further information about the series is available at [www.pbs.org/independentlens](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens).

###