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MISSION STATEMENT

The Africa Faith and Justice Network, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, educates and advocates for just relations with Africa.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Moved to action by their personal experiences in Africa, three Catholic missionary congregations namely the Missionaries of Africa, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritains), and the Society of African Missions, founded the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in 1983 to transform United States policy towards Africa and her people. Since that time, membership has grown and remains committed in faith to advocate in Washington, DC for U.S. relations with Africa that foster justice and peace, and to educate the public across the United States on the truth about Africa.

Gender Empowerment through Governance

By: Marian Amonoo-Afari; intern

Gender equality is a battle that even developed countries struggle with today. In Africa, women are fighting against the weight of tradition and other injustices. Socially, assigning roles based on gender is a practice that is very prevalent. There are very few women in government and those who make it face serious challenges to keep their position or even to get a promotion. This means that women are not being heard because they are absent at the table.

In Liberia, Malawi, and Central African Republic (CAR), women have become Heads of states in order to rebuild what men have destroyed. As head of state Presidents Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, Joyce Banda of Malawi, and Catherine Samba-Panza of Central African Republic have made history ahead of many developed nations. The world and particularly African women are paying close attention to their work. This article is a postcard of these African women heads of state.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf

Described as a post-war leader and one of the most powerful women in the world by Forbes, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf came into power right after the brutal war in. Being the first woman to be elected into office in modern Africa, Johnson-Sirleaf had the world's attention on her. She began to rebuild the country during her first term in office which gave her more favor and recognition from the citizens, who then rewarded her with a second term. Later on, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her efforts of peace building and development in Liberia. Her main goal was to make Liberia an investment friendly country and develop the country through foreign investments.

President Johnson Sirleaf has been accused numerous times of misusing funds and investing in the wrong projects particularly foreign companies rather than the Liberian people. According to the New York Times, "in 2009 and 2010 Mrs. Johnson Sirleaf's government awarded more than 1.6 million acres for palm oil production." This land went to a Malaysian company while villagers were left displaced with no farm land. When villagers made accusations about the company's misuse of the land, the president confronted them and told them that they had to stay out of the way in order to bring more investments to the country.

Joyce Banda

Malawi's former President Joyce Banda (2012 -2014) became president after the death of President Bingu Wa Mutharika. President Mutharika's government was very corrupt to the point that his vice-president was arrested for treason. When President Mutharika, ran for a second term he added Joyce Banda to the cabinet as vice-president. It can be argued that she was added to the ticket because he wanted to sway votes to his side, but whatever his main reason was, it worked. She previously served as Minister of Foreign Affairs which helped her get investors in the country and also improve Malawi's relations with neighboring countries and the West. She was an advocate for youth empowerment, education, and village transformation.

She was committed to the rule of law. Under her presidency, former government officials were prosecuted and charged for treason and corruption. She reached her tipping point when her own officials were discovered to be taking government's money home and using these funds to buy cars for their own use. According to Lameck Masina of *ThinkAfrica Press* there were "over 60 individuals who were arrested and accused of exploiting a loophole in the government's payment system" and through that \$250 million was lost. Banda's solution was to close up the loopholes and fire the officials before any further investigation could be done.

Catherine Samba-Panza

President Catherine Samba-Panza of Central African Republic (CAR) faces a very difficult challenge, namely to bring peace to a country facing a very complex war. This landlocked country has withstood a series of greedy, power hungry, incompetent, and cruel political leaders since its independence. More can be said about France, CAR's former colonizer, in the causes of instability of this great nation.

Catherine Samba-Panza was chosen to lead a transitional government, practically to rebuild the country. Catherine was born to Chadian and Cameroonian parents, an extraordinary exception to African politics which is largely regional and ethnocentric when it comes to choosing leaders. For a one year term, she was mandated to bring about peace and hold election of leaders to replace her transitional government. The war is still not over and elections are scheduled for February 2015. According to the transitional charter in CAR, the interim president cannot run for the office of president, but is tasked to organize free and fair elections. Looking at her short presidential tenure there has been some political development, but more needs to be done. Assessing her political career, it is safe to conclude that she has done well and if she was given more time she could achieve greater things for the people of CAR.

Looking at these three female leaders it is obvious that women can be leaders and hold high level offices. It is not because they are women that they are immune to errors. Women have the potential to be as corrupt as some male leaders and they also possess the same competence to be as positively effective as other male leaders. These women are an inspiration to all of Africa. The women married to successful politicians and who continuously give political advice to their husbands, it's time to heed their own advices and run for office.