

Quote, Unquote – ANSWER KEY

Liberia's 'Iron Lady' Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf Is Africa's First Elected Female Head of State

MONROVIA, Liberia— As they lined up to cast their ballots, excited women chanted and waved signs that read “Ellen—she’s our man.” Liberian women came out in throngs to vote for a 67-year-old grandmother running for president of the African nation. And it paid off. At press time, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf had won almost 60 percent of the vote to become the first elected female head of state on the continent of Africa.

In the runoff election held November 8, Johnson-Sirleaf even beat out Liberia’s most famous citizen, George Weah, a millionaire former soccer star. Weah, who got 40 percent of the vote, contested the election results, claiming that the election was fixed.

Some women waited hours to vote for Johnson-Sirleaf. Mabel Tobee got in line at 5 a.m. but didn’t cast her vote until 6 p.m. “It would be good for a woman to rule this country,” she told *The New York Times*.

Hawa Kenneh waited too. Carrying her 1-month-old baby in a ragged cloth sling, Kenneh voted at a camp for people who had fled their homes during Liberia’s civil war. “I want a better future. Maybe a woman can bring it,” she told a *New York Times* reporter.

Mothering Liberia

Though she’s a tiny woman with six grandkids, Johnson-Sirleaf’s 30-year career in government has earned her the steely nickname “Iron Lady.” Educated at Harvard, she’s served as Liberia’s finance minister and worked as an economist for the World Bank and the United Nations. She has been jailed twice for speaking out against Liberia’s past military regimes.

“She’s fearless. No men intimidate her,” Yassine Fall, a Senegalese economist who works for women’s rights in Africa, told *The New York Times*.

The Iron Lady says she won’t rule Liberia with an iron fist, however. “In the past, I’ve been considered as one with a strong will, as a firm disciplinarian. But now I’m most concerned with being a mother to Liberia. I want to heal the deep wounds of this nation,” she wrote in *Newsweek*.

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