

**Remarks by Her Excellency
Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
on the Occasion of the Formal Launching of the Extractive
Transparency Initiative In Liberia
Tuesday, 10th July 2007**

We are deeply grateful to our many partners for coming together today to celebrate another important milestone in our history.

In Liberia, we face a paradox: our land is rich, and yet our people live in poverty. Across our country, in every direction, our abundant natural resources promise vast riches. Diamonds, iron ore, gold, and other minerals are among the many buried treasures that fill Liberia's earth. Above the soil, millions of hectares of valuable forests cover our landscape. And beneath the sea, our offshore continental shelf may well be home to future discoveries of oil and gas.

It is from the blessings of these natural riches that all Liberians should benefit. Mining and forestry alone will generate millions of dollars in earnings and foreign exchange in the coming years. If managed properly, these earnings should translate into very large increases in government revenues this should create the money that the Government can use to improve the lives of all Liberians-to build health centers, to hire more teachers, to construct roads, to provide electricity and water, to lift our people out of poverty and bring about a better future for our children.

And yet for decades, far from fighting poverty, the wealth from Liberia's natural resources has been plundered. The corruption of the past has meant that just a few pockets have grown full, while the vast majority of Liberians have been deprived of the fruits of the country's resources. Tragically, the revenues from our extractive industries were also used to fuel conflict. Thus, instead of moving our country forward, the exploitation of our natural resources has set us back even further.

Today we face a historic opportunity to turn this natural resource "curse" into a blessing. The United Nations has recently lifted its ban on the export of Liberia's diamonds, which followed the removal of the ban against timber last year. The opening of these crucial sectors will provide a boost to our economy. Thousands of our people will gain employment opportunities and have the chance to learn valuable skills. Many millions of dollars of greatly needed investments will flow into the country. It does take some time but this is on the way; this will happen.

As this happens, it is imperative that the re-opening of these extractive industries is rooted in transparency and accountability. Only then can we ensure that the future revenues are used for the benefit all people, and that they contribute to broad economic growth.

From the Government's perspective, we are firmly committed to breaking with the corruption of the past. Since our assumption of office 18 months ago, we have placed public accountability and improved governance at the very top of our priorities. People tend to forget but we have taken several strong positive steps in keeping with this commitment. Let me recall some of these:

Early on in my administration, key government officials were required to declare their assets

- Cancellation of 87 forestry concessions and review of all concession contracts concluded during the NTGL to ensure that the national interest was protected;
- The ratification of the AU and United Nations Conventions against corruption;
- Formulation, adoption and publication of anticorruption policy and strategy;
- Appointment of new a Auditor General under a new law that enables him to maintain his independence by reporting to the National Legislature rather than to the Executive;
- The Asset Freeze Legislation which has been submitted to the National Legislature;
- Dismissal of government officials for whom circumstantial evidence exist on their violation of the public trust;
- Ongoing Case against former officials of the previous governments is currently going through the legal process resulting from evidence provided in the ECOWAS Audit Report;
- And several other things now being discussed including preparation by the GRC of the draft legislation of the code of conduct for public servants and the establishment of an Anti-Corruption Commission.

To enhance national effort in this regard we authorized the full implementation of GEMAP as a tool for improving governance. We have also made progress in improving financial management and our monthly fiscal reporting is contributing to a more transparent management of the budget. Our goal of ensuring transparency in the extractive industries sector is thus part and parcel of our broader agenda of good governance and development. We still have a lot to do and the inherited challenges are daunting but give the government for important and meaningful first steps in this direction.

Today, the Government of Liberia declares its full support for the implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. In this effort, we follow the example of more than twenty countries around the world that have voluntarily pledged their support for a more open, equitable and responsible management of extractive resources. Liberia's participation in this Initiative builds on the Government's additional efforts to bring about transparency in the mining and forestry sectors, including our ongoing involvement in the Kimberly Process and our steps towards Certification, as well as the chain of custody under our new forestry law. The landmark Forestry Law that was passed last year provides for the sustainable and beneficial use of Liberia's forest resources. It helps ensure that local communities play an active role in the approval and monitoring of timber concessions, and that the communities themselves benefit from the revenues. Like the EITI initiative, the forestry law helps lay the foundation of accountability, transparency and empowerment in one of our most important sectors.

In this important effort, the Government cannot work alone. We are deeply grateful for the participation of our many partners here today. Moving forward, we will collaborate closely with our partners from civil society, including in particular the Publish What You Pay Liberia Coalition. Likewise, the active engagement of our partners in the private sector is absolutely critical to the success of the initiative. We also look to our donor partners to provide essential technical and financial support to the EITI process as we strive to attain our goals.

Today, in concert with our many partners, we affirm our commitment to the EITI process and to the responsible stewardship of revenue streams and public expenditure. The past misuse of Liberia's bounty has thwarted our progress as a nation. Today we look to these natural resources as a source of great opportunity: an opportunity for our land to fuel development and poverty reduction, instead of destruction. We are confident that the EITI process will help us light the way to a new chapter in Liberia's history. A chapter in which transparency and

accountability triumph over corruption, and in which all Liberians are enriched by the splendors of our land and natural bounty.