

**Remarks by Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia**

European Development Day Forum
Brussels, Belgium
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Excellencies, Presidents and Heads of State present;
H.E Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission;
H.E. Marjatta, Rasi, European Union Presidency;
Distinguished Panelists;
Honorable Prime Ministers;
Honorable Representatives of Heads of States;
Officials and Members of the European Commission;
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Permit me to add my thanks to the organizers and in particular Commissioner Louis Michel of the "European Day Forum," for having the vision to bring together the collective wisdom assembled in this room this afternoon and over the next two days. The people of Liberia are honored that I have been asked to participate in this Opening Session.

Mr. Chairman:

As nations voluntarily embrace the concept of a global society, the overarching theme of this Forum, "Enhancing Public Awareness about Cooperation," is timely and relevant to ongoing efforts to foster more strategic partnerships aimed at deeper mutuality in interests and benefits. We are therefore pleased that one of the key anticipated results of this Forum, is to strengthen the effectiveness of the European Union's Assistance.

As I speak on the subject "Perspective on Governance," allow me to share some aspects of the emerging Liberian governance experience, broadly viewed in its social, economic and political dimensions.

There is no doubt that this emerging experience bears wider applicability and broad relevance to other post-conflict societies today even if individual national paths to peace vary in details and relative emphases.

In the case of Liberia, following the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in August 2003, brokered by many of our regional and partner countries present today, and based upon the experience of the National Transitional Government judged widely as non-performing, there was little question that any genuine effort at post-conflict recovery and stability must revolve around comprehensively reshaping the governance of our national affairs. We realize therefore that we have to do things differently, better and more quickly, as we strive to meet the raised expectation of our people, and of women throughout Africa and the world.

Thus, since the Inauguration of our new Government on January 16 of this year, we have lost no time in setting en train those policies and measures aimed at what we define as good governance an effective and effective and efficient management of national resources for the people, of the people, by the people. This has meant moving first to address the root cause of our collapsed economy – poor public financial management. The corrective measures taken are actively supported by our Partners generally and specifically through the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP). As a result, we have made notable progress in our budgetary, expenditure and revenue management and control. We have also initiated studies aimed at reform of our tax system to bring it more in harmony with sister ECOWAS Countries, and we have started to develop policies that will lead to dissolution or more efficiency in operations of state-owned enterprises. A banking system under stress is now being revived through policy changes at a reformed central bank. A robust civil society and media enjoy unprecedented freedom in carrying out their watchdog function, while a Truth and Reconciliation Commission has begun its work in fostering the processes of contrition and forgiveness. At the centre of this effort is a comprehensive anti-corruption program, which aims to ensure that public officials and institutions conduct their businesses with integrity and a sense of a new national ethos. The adoption of a Public Service Code of Conduct will soon be submitted to our National Legislature for enactment into law. Relatedly, a new anti corruption policy has been formulated with full implementation strategy drawing on the policy to be completed by end year. A judicial system long characterized by lack of capacity and credibility is under reform spearheaded by a changed Supreme Court. The GEMAP program itself is being revisited to include national capacity building, thereby ensuring sustainability in the transfer of enhanced know-how and systems in all relevant institutions. Measures that promote a conducive environment for attracting private capital and investment are underway.

The policies and programs upon which these measures are based are articulated in an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy which is nearing completion as the basis to a successor regime to the IMF Staff Monitoring Program which will be successfully completed by year end. In this context, the issue of governance represents cross-cutting parameters in all aspects of our national policy direction that emphasizes national security, revitalization of the economy, rehabilitation of infrastructure and basic services delivery. Importantly, in the implementation of our programs of national reform and reconstruction we remain very clear that our efforts must go well beyond the centers to embrace all fifteen of our administrative subdivision with a view to enhancing local governance through program of decentralization.

While clear in our vision, strategy and commitment, and despite the gains, we are still behind in the achievement of our goals. This is due to the realities of the serious dysfunctionalities that result from years of conflict – a bloated and deskilled civil service, a distorted value system of violence, indiscipline and dishonesty, a lack of confidence in the commitment to reform. Added to this are the risks evolving from the inactivity of a dismantled army and security sector long in need of restructuring and reform.

To meet these challenges will require that we practice good governance in all its dimensions by ensuring that principles such as transparency, accountability and democratic values are more than just buzz words and clichés. It must be acknowledged

that these guiding principles are all part of a new emerging political culture not only in our country Liberia, but, I dare say, in other countries that share similar social, political and economic realities.

As we put into place measures that strengthen governance on the domestic front, we must also reexamine and retool the dynamics of the relationship between donors and recipients so that the relationship is more symbiotic and mutually beneficial. For example, it is clear that human resources being the most valuable resource of any nation, human recovery and human development are the best way to ensure that development assistance will be sustained in the long run and will alter the quality of life in a positive way for our citizens. However, our experience shows that it is easier to get support for hardware than it is to attract assistance for some of the seemingly intangible but critical needs of our people. Another example in our experience is that corruption issues manifested in the design of strategies and the establishment of special bodies get much support (as indeed they should) but the Judiciary does not. Clearly, judicial reform and strengthening of the pillars of integrity go hand in hand with any type of anti-corruption strategy. Thus, it is clear to us that building the capacity of our courts and strengthening our correctional institutions are key elements in ensuring a functional democracy and the rule of law. The one should not be developed at the expense of the other but should be seen as interlocking and complimentary.

The same applies to the issue of national capacity. The Liberian experience is clear in this regard. Unless we are able to attract and retain the indigenous professional skills required, implementation of reform measures will remain behind schedule risking policy failure or reversal. Thus, if we continue the policy line where emphasis is not placed firmly at the points where change and reforms are most needed and critical, the implication for many post-conflict countries is that if human recovery is delayed, such nations run the risk of delaying the transition from dependency to self-sufficiency through the exchange of aid for trade; or run the risk of the unthinkable, which is slipping back into conflict. The record of post-conflict countries is clear in this regard.

Another reality in our global community today suggests that accountability should be a two-way street. Recipient governments must be transparent, but we must respond to the demand of our people that we get the same level of accountability from donors. In Liberia, we remain grateful for the generosity of the international community in our transition from war to peace and in our current state of reform where we are seeking debt relief and support for programs that will reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of our people. However, sometimes it is not clear how much money is being spent by bi-lateral and multi-lateral organizations in the name of Liberia. In other instances, some of the development programs of the donor community do not necessarily fit into our own domestic development agenda largely because home governments are not always involved in the planning stage for many projects, especially those implemented by international non-governmental organizations. In order to make our partnership more effective, some of these methods of doing business must change, that is the full implementation of measures agreed in Paris to enhance aid effectiveness and in Glen Eagles in the level of aid.

The challenges we face in strengthening governance in its social dimensions is perhaps the most difficult in a post-conflict country like Liberia. This is partly because in addition to the challenging issues of scarcity of resources, high illiteracy rates, being at a higher risk

of becoming victims of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, the dysfunctional nature of such a post-conflict society makes nation building a more daunting task. We have found also that illiteracy does not equate to ignorance and thus the involvement of traditional leaders and elders into the decision making processes can bring added value to nation building initiatives. In addition, the ethnic, religious and other forms of diversity that underlay the Liberian experience can be harnessed into pillars of strength, but this can only be achieved when people are convinced that the government to whom they have delegated the authority to govern will do so in their best interest. In the Liberian experience, it is important that we change government and that government does not change us. This is why the serious delays in the implementation of agreed programs must be addressed – the time between commitment and cash must be shortened if the hope and confidence of our people is to be maintained as a means of building consensus.

Given the social and economic challenges in strengthening governance in Liberia mentioned above, it is not surprising that when one adds the political dimension, the picture gets more complicated. Because no one political party has a majority in our Legislature, political consensus does not happen over night. The dialogue, discussion and decisions that surround political decisions is healthy for an emerging democracy like ours, but as our political systems mature, we must work toward a significant reduction in the number of political parties and move towards the kinds of coalitions that would signal that we are finding common grounds to exercise our freedom.

Ladies and gentlemen, even though I have not been asked to address the key challenges in strengthening governance, because I am who I am, I would be remiss if I did not reinforce the inescapable need to recognize gender equality as an indispensable element in any governance program. Programs that focus on such areas as education of the girl child and that sensitize people to the evil of gender base violence and crime against children must be given special consideration and support. These most vulnerable members of our society deserve added protection and the allocation of special resources to make up for the years of inequity and neglect which they have faced.

In closing, let me urge the participants here over the next two days to dare to think outside the box and challenge some of the generally accepted paradigms that drive the dynamics of development assistance. This is not to say we should challenge the status quo just for the sake of doing so but rather we should be more circumspect in analyzing the parameters that define the rules that govern the relationships that drive our global society. The challenge is ours to find the fulcrum that will truly balance our various economic, social and political needs with our desire to live in a world where good governance, accountability, transparency and the rule of law are accepted as universal and interlocking foundations on which we build and sustain global peace.

In Liberia, we dare to think that our national experience – our success in post conflict – will prove to be a barometer of the effectiveness of strategic partnership of international cooperation given the substantive investment already made in our transition from conflict to peace and sustainable development. The Liberian Government will continue to strive to meet its part of the commitment to this partnership and we count on the European Union and other international partners individually and collectively to do likewise.

I thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts with you and for your kind attention.