

**Opening Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At First Meeting of Board of Directors, National AIDS Commission
C. Cecil Dennis, Jr. Auditorium, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
October 23, 2012**

Dr. Gwenigale;
The Board of Directors and Commissioners of the National AIDS Commission;
Special Guests;
Representatives of Various Organizations and Entities Here;
United Nations;
Civil Society Partners;
Officials of Government;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to welcome all of you to this first meeting of the Board of Directors of the re-established National AIDS Commission.

Let me acknowledge the presence among us of several special guests: the ILO Director of the Country Offices for Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Gambia, Mrs. Sina Chuma Mkandawire; the Director General of the OPEC Fund for International Development, Mr. Suleiman Jasir Al-Herbish; and the Director of the ILO Program on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work, Ms. Alice Sorgho-Ouedraogo.

I am also pleased to welcome Dr. Betru Tekle Woldesemayat, the new Country Coordinator for the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). We understand that Dr. Woldesemayat comes from Ethiopia and has worked with the National AIDS Authority before joining UNAIDS.

As you know, we've been intensifying activities to strengthen the national response to HIV/AIDS in order to achieve our goals and objectives as early as possible. This is our collective commitment to the Liberian people.

Nationally, our response has featured innovative strategic programs to prevent and control the spread of the virus. We have also placed emphasis on increasing access to services, and protecting the rights of people living with HIV as well as other vulnerable populations. We appreciate the continuous support of our partners – the Global Fund, development partners, non-governmental organizations, civil society and our own relevant agencies.

As a result of government's efforts, we are today launching the Rubber Sector HIV/AIDS Workplace Policy, developed by the Ministry of Labor in collaboration with the National AIDS Commission and its national partners, with substantial financial support from the OPEC Fund through the ILO. The rubber sector is an important part of our economy, as we all know it has the largest number of laborers, and we want to thank Dr. Camanor and all those who've been involved in making this genuine progress in this area.

A key item on the Commission's agenda is the urgent need to mobilize resources to ensure an effective national response to HIV/AIDS and to strengthen its capacity. The Commission was reconstituted based on the strong advocacy of our UN friends and bilateral partners who strongly advised Government to take the lead in its establishment, and we are pleased that we did so. We are therefore counting on the support of our partners to enable the Commission to continue its life-saving work.

For our part, the Government has made an allocation in our fiscal year 2012-2013 budget – which for sure they will say it's not sufficient – but given the numerous national challenges, this amount confirms Government's strong commitment towards achieving the goals and objectives in our national response to HIV/AIDS.

You may have heard that I am one of the three co-Chairs of a High-Level Panel established by the United Nations Secretary-General to craft a post-2015 global development framework when the current Millennium Development Goals reach their target date of 2015. However, because we are all determined not take our eye off the ball of the current MDGs, and we still have three years to go in that regard, we must all work hard to be able to push as much as we can toward achieving as many of the goals as possible. We believe Liberia has a chance to achieve MDG 6 in combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and we call upon all of us to work towards the achievement of that objective.

I am convinced that, with our combined effort and support, we can halt the spread of HIV/AIDS in Liberia by 2015. We can start by ensuring that no child is born with HIV in our country. And given the low HIV prevalence rate here – estimated at 1.5 percent – we can and must work together to eliminate mother-to-child transmission as part of our national efforts aimed at reducing maternal and child mortality.

This is my charge to the Commission; this is our collective responsibility and commitment.

So let me now, in closing, introduce formally the new Commissioners of the National AIDS Commission, charged with specific responsibilities:

Of course Commissioner Ivan Camanor is the Chairman; he continues to carry on the work;

Commissioner Jessie Duncan is for Decentralization and County Support;

Commissioner Stephen Kennedy – Program and Policy;

Commissioner Juanita Ramirez – Partnerships;

Commissioner Wissedi Sio Njoh – Strategic Information Management.

These are the new Commissioners, and we look forward to them bringing to their responsibilities all the efficiency and commitment that is required.

Thank you all.