
Remarks by
Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of Liberia

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Your Excellency Sheikh Hamad Al-Attiyah;

EITI Board Chairman, Dr. Peter Eigen;

Mr. George Soros;

Mr. Van der Neer;

Distinguished Panelists and Participants:

Mr. Deputy Prime Minister, let me first thank you for the warm hospitality which we have received since our arrival. I am pleased to be here, to join the other participants in the exchange of views and experiences on the progress and the challenges of transparency in natural resource financial management. Dr. Eigen, I thank you for the opportunity.

As many of you know, a few years ago, Liberia was the epicenter of a regional war, the example of a failed state, a nation brought to its knees, a people impoverished as a result of the misallocation and misuse of the proceeds of natural resources. International sanctions imposed to remove the source of funding for the purchase of arms that fueled the regional conflict, exacerbated the deepening poverty of a people left to survive by any means possible. Rent seeking and

corruption became a way of life to support conspicuous consumption at the top and a source of livelihood at the bottom.

When my administration took over in January 2006, we knew that we inherited dysfunctional institutions, an entrenched criminalized value system, a system in which impunity had been the norm for a long period of time.

It was for this reason that we declared corruption Public Enemy No. 1. We sought to settle huge salary arrears and to improve compensation levels to minimize vulnerabilities. We established transparent budget and financial reporting processes with the Legislature and the public exercising their specific roles. We activated or strengthened the institutional pillars of integrity – the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission and the General Auditing Commission. We are in the process of completing the restructuring of the Civil Service and establishing internal auditing systems. We formulated, submitted or endorsed to our national Legislature several laws to govern the behavior and action of public servants – a Code of Conduct, the Freedom of Information Act, the Corruption Offenses Act, the Public Broadcasting Act.

Despite the progress, the challenges remain. Our effort to punish violators of the public trust is hampered by a weak judicial and correction system. Our Legislative process in the passing of draft Legislation could be more aggressive; the watchdog role of our civil society and media could be more investigative and constructive.

Although there have been dismissals, suspensions and exposure of violators attesting to our commitment to fight corruption, more timely action and hard decisions by the Executive would give stronger evidence to the commitment to zero tolerance of corrupt practices.

Perhaps more important among the actions taken by the Administration to fight corruption, is the decision to activate the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the Publish What You Pay (PWYP) Coalition to which the country committed in 2005 through the National Transitional Government of Liberia. In this effort, Liberia has gone beyond the required to include forestry operations which had been the source of resource misallocation in the past. A group of capable and committed professionals from civil society joined by relevant Ministers of Government form part of the Multi-Stakeholders

Steering Group (MSSG) which implements this commitment with full authority and independence. Several of them are in this room and we would like to commend them in this public manner. We also congratulate Mr. Alfred Brownell and Mr. Negbalee Warner who have been elected to serve on the EITI International Board.

We are pleased that Liberia's first LEITI report was released last week. The report provides, for the first time in the history of our country, an open and transparent reconciliation of the records of Government and the concerned industries as to payments made by the industries and that which was received and recorded in Government accounts.

We are excited by the results of the report prepared by a professional team from Canada. It not only gives an account of the flow of funds but discloses certain systemic weaknesses which we must correct to ensure full compliance by the concerned industries and proper accounting of Government. We are pleased that members of the LEITI Secretariat and Board, and the PNYP coalition are here to share their experiences and challenges with the participants.

This is not the final step of this initiative. We must now ensure that the resources paid to Government are properly allocated through the budgetary process to those activities that lead to economic expansion and respond to the social needs of the people. This will require commitment on the part of all three branches of our Government.

In closing, I want to assure you that my administration will remain committed to continuing the fight against corruption and enhancement of the processes of transparency and accountability through the LEITI and PWYP.

Thank you.