

## **Introductory speech representing the MRU at Brussels**

Your Royal Highness Queen Mathilde

Your Excellency Vice President Mogerin

Prime Minister Michel

Colleagues Heads of State

Ambassadors, Excellences, Ministers

Heads of Delegation

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Although I stand here as the leader of Liberia, I am honored to have been designated by my colleagues to make remarks at this conference on behalf of all of us, the Governments and people of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, the three countries most affected by Ebola.

The fact that we are able to stand here together today is a recognition that the Ebola disease does not follow national boundaries; does not discriminate based on nationality or religion and has no respect for time or space. It also means that our three countries are beginning to triumph over the deadly disease that has threatened the sovereignty of each of

our states.

We would like to express our profound gratitude to the European Union and all international partners who have joined us on the frontline of the battle to turn the tide against this deadly disease.

Over the past decade, our three countries had made significant gains in a process of reconstruction after years of conflict, a conflict often fuelled by external natural resource exploitation which left scarce resources to build the systems, structures and institutions required to face the dynamics of a changing global environment.

We entered the year 2014 with challenges to our economies brought about by the decline in the global prices of key primary commodities. In mid year, this unprecedented disease hit us and by early August spread rapidly throughout communities, thus becoming an epidemic.

We were confused and frightened. We did not know what to do to confront this unknown enemy, an enemy we could not see; we could not hi

de from them. We did not understand. Our people fell sick, and our people died. Families and communities were torn apart. The disease struck down the best in our society - doctors, teachers, mothers, religious leaders - those upon whom communities depend. It robbed us of our ability to care for others, that which defines our own humanity.

Our health systems collapsed when doctors, nurses and health care workers without proper protective gear, died treating the sick, many times on the belief that the symptoms reflected known diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. Others died of diseases other than Ebola for lack of access to health facilities. Airlines stopped or sharply reduced services; borders closed, trade and travel routes were suspended, schools closed, public gatherings were restricted, farms and markets ceased activities; contractors, consultants and investors left the country, commercial activity plummeted, fiscal balances weakened as revenues fell and expenditures increased largely on health operations.

Overall economic activities declined. As a result GDP projected for 2014 across the region at 7.3 percent reduced to 2.5 percent and according to forecast may deteriorate even further in 2015.

In the midst of all this, we faced the terrifying prediction that 1.4 million or at minimum, some 20,00 persons a month would die in the three neighboring affected counties before the end of January.

Today we can report significant progress in containing the virus. Economic activity is gradually returning, cross border markets are once again working, farmers are back on their farms preparing for the planting season. Schools are opening. We owe this success, first and foremost to the people of our communities who took on the responsibility and the leadership to confront the disease.

We also owe this to you our partners - the UN System, the European Commission, many multilateral and bi-lateral partners, NGO's and private sector groups who joined in supporting national leadership which was determined to take charge, to formulate our own agenda, to organize our health teams, to demonstrate the political will to make the hard decision against long standing cultural practices.

We are very mindful that our work is not complete We must get the number of cases down to zero for the required number of days. The leadership of our three countries are committed to do so realizing that this is

the essential first step to economic recovery, and resuming work on our development agenda.

We need our international partners to remain committed to us on this journey as we build our resilience to manage any possible future outbreaks of the virus. Just as importantly, we need to respond to the economic impact of the disease, to stabilize our economies, to return to the path of inclusive economic growth on which we had embarked before the virus hit.

In recognition of an interdependence that required a shared vision despite individual, country-specific needs, our countries came together in a show of unity, in joint meetings of our technical teams in Monrovia, Free town and Conakry.

At an Extraordinary Summit of the Mano River Union in Conakry on February 15, our three nations agreed as a first step on a common strategy to get to zero within a period of sixty days or by April 15.

This is a tall but achievable feat which calls for focus on infection prevention and control, social mobilization, community engagement, cross-border surveillance, collaboration and coordination. We recognize that staying at zero for the required number of days depends on our collective political will to work together with our joint technical teams to translate strategies into action.

As we move in this regard from treatment to prevention, we urge our international partners to support common but differentiated country strategies for the reopening and strengthening of healthcare systems that will have a capacity to minimize the risk of recurrence of the virus. These strategies include the establishment of short term regional emergency response capabilities and a long term regional Center for Disease Control. Moreover, we urge partners to plan and manage their exits responsibly, dictated by the epidemiology of the disease, whilst ensuring that capacity is transferred adequately to national institutions.

The impact of Ebola on our economies has been profound - declines in growth, public revenues, private consumptions, investment, employment, agriculture production and productivity. The most important long term response to Ebola therefore rest in plans and strategies for economi

c recovery.

This requires a focus on private sector led growth, expanding and attracting investment with the highest potential to create a large number of sustainable jobs and to support the expansion of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises, thereby promoting the missing linkage to large scale enclaves operations.

Given our relatively small market size and large infrastructure deficit we believe that a regional approach would achieve the best recovery results. This can only be achieved with your support, the support of partners who will be willing to allocate resources to a regional plan that is home grown. There is no doubt that this will require significant resources, perhaps even a "Marshall Plan" as suggested by World Bank President Kim . We believe however that this can be achieved through allocation of the additional resources committed by the European Union. Resources can also be sourced from the CCR Trust Fund established by the International Monetary Fund and by regional envelopes by the World Bank and African Development Bank.

Our task would be to formulate a regional plan, road map and a coordinating structure. We propose to conclude these within the next month and prepare a presentation for a side Consultative Group meeting during the April Spring Meeting of the IMF and World Bank.

If we are to achieve our economic goals, more will be required. Our investing partners must give back more in fair taxes, fair pricing and fair high-level job opportunities. In turn we must do more to create a conducive environment by making it easier to do business and by better control of corruption.

We urge development partners to utilize country systems for disbursement and implementation of Post-Ebola recovery activities.

We welcome equally the call by the Economic Commission for Africa to provide direct budget support and debt cancellation for our affected countries and urge partners to renew their commitment to mutual accountability by giving full disclosure of all resources committed to them for the fight against Ebola.

We express gratitude to Brussels Airlines, Royal Air Maroc and Air France that maintained flights to our three affected countries and to Air Cote D' Ivoire which has resumed flights.

Finally, we want to thank the European Union for hosting this event, providing us a forum to exchange views on the progress and the challenge

s that resulted from this disease as well as on the way forward to restore dignity and accelerate development to our people.

Thank You. Merci a tous.