

**Remarks by  
H.E. Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
President of the Republic of Liberia  
at the  
12<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Meeting of the Board of Governors  
ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development [EBID]  
Monrovia, Liberia  
June 16, 2014**

Mr. Pro-Tempore;  
Mr. President of EBID;  
Governors;  
Ministers;  
The Vice President of the ECOWAS Commission;

Permit me to first and foremost to extend my profound thanks and appreciation to you, Mr. President, the Chairman of the Board who is absent, to the Management and the Governors for making this day a good one by your presence.

Exactly ten years ago, our country was basically starting its journey to recovery and national renewal, picking the broken pieces left behind by a brutal war that destroyed the country's basic infrastructure. For Liberia today to be hosting this meeting is to us an important event marking another turning point in our relentless pursuit to ensure that the country regains its rightful place in the comity of nations.

Despite recent decline and the colossal damage of our civil conflict on the economy of Liberia, the performance of the Liberian economy has been remarkable in the last eight years. Real GDP has averaged over 7%. In 2013, last year, real GDP was estimated at 8.7%, while inflation was contained at 8.5%, reflecting the pass-through of a 14 % depreciation of the Liberian dollar. Inflation is expected to moderate somewhat to 7.0 % in 2014 as we hope international food and fuel prices would remain stable and move toward a downward trend.

We do anticipate a slowing of economic outputs in 2014, with GDP growth projected to be 5.9 %, as mining production levels off temporarily as we go to work to operationalize the significant direct foreign investment that has been mobilized. An increase in our iron ore production in latter years is expected to support a broadening of the growth of our space; added to that, our investments in energy, roads, rehabilitation of our hydro plant are expected to spun growth by reducing the cost of doing business in the country.

We are making substantial strides in implementing our public sector reform agenda, although low capacity, corruption and the combined effects of our civil conflict constrains the space for much more progress than we would like to see.

I am therefore humbled to address this conference, at a time when Liberia is poised to assume the Chairmanship of the Board of Governors of the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development. I want to thank all of you Governors that have supported this.

When the Authority of Heads of State of ECOWAS established in 1979, the ECOWAS Fund for Co-operation, Compensation and Development, subsequently to be transformed in 1999 into a regional holding company called the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) with two specialized subsidiaries, ECOWAS Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and ECOWAS Regional Investment Bank (ERIB).

It is worth noting that Liberia contributed immensely to the realization of this vision from the very inception of the Bank through its development. Dr. Romeo Horton, may his soul rest in peace, was the Bank's first Managing Director who played a pivotal role in starting the Bank's operation. He was succeeded by another Liberian, Dr. Robert Tubman, who sits right there, who was instrumental in ensuring the Bank acquired its own premises.

Specifically tailored to address the manifold issues of infrastructure development, regional trade and transport, service delivery, the Bank has gone through a period of structural and institutional changes over the years, culminating in 2007 into a single structure with the objective of harmonizing its activities under a unified administrative structure.

Over those years, we have seen critical investments in various projects across the region through financing from the Bank. Projects including the construction of seaports, pavement of highway roads linking sub-regional territories, resorts and agriculture investments have all seen remarkable success over the years.

**Mr. President, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,** while all have worked very hard over the years in positioning the Bank to be an active player in our regional economy, we would all agree that we have a lot more to do if we must realize our collective vision of making the Bank, the principal driver of private sector growth

and an effective instrument for poverty alleviation, wealth creation, and job promotion for the well-being of our people of the region.

In this connection, let us remind you of some of the pressing and critical issues we need to consider that I'm sure you will cover over the next few days of your meeting.

### **Resource Issues**

This year marks the end of the Bank's strategic plan (2010-2014), which aimed to inject about US\$1.5 billion into the regional economy over the course of the Plan. However, as a result of resource constraint, especially the lack of concessional resources, the rate of realization of key indicators, such as loan approvals, new commitments, disbursements and resources mobilized, remain below expectation.

An analysis of the performance of the Plan as at 31st December 2013 shows [Mr. President, you mentioned some of these] less than satisfactory realization. For example, in loan approvals (66%), new commitments (51%), disbursements (34%), and mobilized resources (25%). With the implementation scheduled to end in December 2014, and given the current rate, it is clear that we need to do more if the objectives of our institution will be achieved.

We must all analyze very keenly some of the issues underpinning these result, as we work to derive a more realistic but aggressive strategic direction for the bank, going forward.

### **Community Levy**

Our Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, at its 40th Session held in Abuja, Federal Republic of Nigeria, on February 17, 2012, mandated the ECOWAS Commission to give a certain portion of the Community Levy to carry out development projects within the sub-region. For several reasons, this has not yet been operationalized.

We all know it is important if EBID is to play a key role we have envision for it in regional growth and development, the Bank has to be properly resourced. This will require commitment from all stakeholders. This means that Member States should act in concert to ensure that the Bank is well funded. Also, the Bank should be seen by regional institutions and foreign partners as an important player within the sub-region.

### **Opening Up of EBID's Capital to non-regional members**

In the face of the slow payments of capital by regional members, it is important that the Bank and the shareholders consider opening up of a capital portfolio to non-regional members and other institutional investors. The admission of non-regional members will enable EBID to contribute to the economic and social development of Member States through low interest loans. With a larger membership, the Bank will be endowed with greater expertise, and the credibility of its partners would allow it to have access to the markets of non-regional Member States.

The admission in 1982 of non-regional members to the African Development Bank has greatly enhanced the Bank's capital base. Many of us were there and we know that although there were many objections. Those objections were finally overcome and the AfDB was able to open up its capital. Today, the AfDB enjoys triple A ratings from all the main international rating agencies. The Bank and Afreximbank experiences should counter any fear we might have that we would lose control over our institution if we were to consider the idea of including non-regional members.

**Mr. President, Governors,** on behalf of the Government and people of Liberia, I like to wish you a fruitful and constructive engagement and to enjoin you all, that as poverty remains an enduring challenge for all of our respective economies, we must harness our collective know-how and leverage the Bank resources in addressing projects and programs aimed at poverty reduction as strongly articulated in the Bank's mission and vision statements.

Finally, I would like to express our deepest sympathy to you, Mr. President, for the untimely death of his junior brother; may his soul rest in peace.

I wish you a very active and resulting meeting as I and my ministers depart to go to work leaving you to do your work.

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