

**REMARKS DELIVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY, PRESIDENT
GEORGE MANNEH WEAH AT A MEDIA STAKEOUT
DURING HIS FIRST OFFICIAL
STATE VISIT TO THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA –
MONDAY, MARCH 5 – 6, 2018**

- **Your Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari of the Federal Republic of Nigeria;**
- **Distinguished Members of the Nigerian Government;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

First of all, allow me to thank you for your kind invitation extended to me and my delegation to make this State Visit to you and your Government.

We have come on a mission of gratitude and respect for the extraordinary and exceptional role that you, our Nigerian brothers, have played – and continue to play – in maintaining peace and stability in the West African sub-region, and more particularly, in Liberia.

Although yours is the largest economy in Africa, with the most powerful army in our sub-region, you have never used your wealth and military prowess to expand your territory, threaten your neighbors, or de-stabilize any sovereign nation in the region. Instead, you have dedicated your resources and expertise to establish and maintain peace in West Africa, and, to even enforce it, when deemed necessary by the protocols of our regional associations.

You have stood up steadfastly and without exception for freedom and the rule of law in our sub-region. And you have consistently taken the risk of “putting boots on the ground” when democracy has been threatened, as was the case during Liberia’s civil conflict. Many of your brave and courageous men and women in arms have become martyrs in the cause of freedom, and to them, and their families, we owe a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. You are indeed your brothers’ keepers.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

Campaigns, elections, and inauguration are now over and the real work of governance has begun in Liberia. Hopes are high and expectations are even higher.

We inherited a broken system. Since the Ebola Epidemic and the withdrawal of the UNMIL peacekeepers from our country, our economy has not recovered. The prices of our two basic export commodities, rubber and iron ore, continue to fall on the world market; our diminished foreign exchange earnings from the export of these and other commodities are used mainly on the importation of food and other commodities; causing massive trade deficits; youth unemployment is at an all-time high, and prices of basic commodities continue to increase.

Our people have voted for change, and for hope. And change is finally here. But mere political change is meaningless without development, prosperity, and growth.

Your Excellency, we need Nigeria's help to jump-start our economy. You played a major role in bringing peace to Liberia; you help to reform our Army and today it is performing its duties to the highest professional standards. As we speak, they are serving in a peace-keeping mission in Mali.

You have also built and expanded the capacities of Liberians in so many ways. For example, during our recent observance of Armed Forces Day in Liberia, we were informed that two of our military personnel will soon be graduating as pilots from one of

your esteemed institutions. We would like to see a continuation and expansion of that program, for both men and women.

My administration's Pro-Poor Development Agenda is intended to tackle the many economic and social problems that my government has inherited, especially in addressing the large fiscal and infrastructure deficits, the urgent problem of youth unemployment, and reviving the education, agriculture, mining, and health sectors. Your sustained technical assistance for capacity building in these sectors is most welcome.

For example, Nigerian teachers and medical volunteers to Liberia, under the Technical Assistance Corps (TAC) Agreement with Liberia has been very crucial in boosting capacity development in Liberia, and it is my hope that this assistance can be considerably increased to address – with urgency – our most pressing socio-economic needs at this time.

More specifically, under the Bilateral Teacher Exchange Program, we are seeking 6,000 plus teachers to make up for the shortage of good teachers in our educational system.

In agriculture, we are seeking experts and extension workers to build capacity in the sector, particularly with crops, (such as

cassava, for example,) which lend themselves readily to value-added propositions and export earning potential.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I hereby declare that Liberia is now open for business to the Nigerian private sector. There is a need to address the current volume of trade between our two countries, which is very low and does not exceed \$5 million, by some estimates.

Yet, the Liberian banking sector is dominated by Nigerian banks, and I am made to understand that their Head Offices in Nigeria may be considering reducing their support or even shutting them down because of the recent downturn in our economy.

If this is true, I urge them not to do so, as I am optimistic that trade and commerce will increase in the near future.

There are also major shortcomings in the electricity and power sectors, in road construction, in housing, in mining, and in fisheries, to name a few, that could be of serious interest to Nigerian investors, either as individuals or companies, or through joint-ventures or public-private partnerships.

We invite all of you to come to Liberia and explore the many new opportunities for investment that are bound to increase under this new political dispensation. I promise you that you will find a government that is not only business-friendly, but ready to do business.

On a personal note, President Buhari, it is my intention, with all due respect and affection, to frequently seek your wise counsel and advice as I embark upon this arduous task of nation-building, reconstruction, and transformation of my country.

Nigeria's historical benevolence towards Liberia cannot be quantified. And once again, we seek your urgent and critical assistance.

I THANK YOU.