

Remarks by:
H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
At the Launch of the
Five-Year National Action Plan on the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons
Monrovia City Hall

March 25, 2014

(As Delivered)

Greetings:

I said to Minister [Juah] Lawson that it isn't often that we're able to pull the Minister of Finance into a meeting particularly when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Mission is in town. But this signifies to her the support for this all-important endeavor.

Today, we assemble here to make good the Government of Liberia's commitment to the fight against trafficking in persons. This menace has plagued our society for a long time and we have declared our collective actions against it since the endorsement of the National Action Plan (NAP) by the cabinet on October 30, 2013. The launch of the Five-Year National Action Plan on the fight against trafficking in persons further makes Liberia a better place where the rights of defenseless people are always guaranteed and protected.

As pointed out by the Minister of Labor, this action today began in 2005 when the Transitional Legislative Assembly of the National Transitional Government passed an Act that banned and criminalized all forms of human trafficking in Liberia. This was further enhanced in April 2013 when the Government amended the Penal Law regarding extortion, environmental crimes, trafficking in human beings and illicit migrant smuggling, thereby reinforcing the legal framework responsible for dealing with these interrelated international crimes.

Prior to putting in place the legal framework and relevant structures to face the menace of trafficking in persons in the country, the Government of Liberia had earlier acceded to the United Nations (UN) Convention against transnational organized crime and its protocol to prevent, suppress and punish perpetrators of trafficking in persons; especially women and children.

The Fight against Human Trafficking has become one of the major activities of our Government. As a way of taking measures in the fight against trafficking in persons, the Government has made progress in fighting this illicit crime through numerous programs. Actions by the National Taskforce headed by the Ministry of Labor demonstrated the government's intolerance on human trafficking.

The National Task Force has successfully put into place a Standard Operating Procedure in the fight against human trafficking. The Standard Operating Procedure outlines basic principles and guidelines in the provision of assistance to victims of human trafficking.

It clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of all statutory and associate members of the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force and maintains an informed referral pathway for victims of human trafficking to access services and support from the Government of Liberia and other partners.

Further, the National Task Force has successfully completed, which is why we are here today, this five-year National Action Plan for the Fight against Human Trafficking. This Action Plan has created well-organized conditions for the prevention and combating of trafficking in humans, as well as protecting victims of such crime thru informing potential victims of the incident, supporting institutions and individuals responsible for legal actions regarding the crime and carrying out awareness about it.

The capabilities of institutions charged with the responsibility of prosecuting perpetrators engaged in the trafficking are also enhanced by informing victims of the incidents that constitute trafficking in persons.

As we launch the Five-Year National Action Plan, Liberia wants to tell the world and would be perpetrators that the Government is ready to combat this serious crime that affects the lives of people especially women and children.

The [Acting] Minister of Justice has exerted very firmly her commitment to pursue that process.

Let me endorse what Mr. Emmanuel Kollimealyne said that our actions should match the pronouncements that there will be zero tolerance towards perpetrators.

Parents should take note of what [United States] Ambassador Malac said about those who would come and persuade their children on the basis of promises to do great things for them only to find out that they are subjected to servitude.

To further express Government's seriousness about fighting this crime, three expatriates have been indicted and are in prison awaiting trial, other perpetrators have been prosecuted and in one case, two individuals were unanimously found guilty on December 31, 2013 for illicit trafficking of some Moroccan and Tunisian Nationals. To our surprise and disappointment, a motion for retrial was granted by the Judge but the Government is still pursuing this matter to its logical conclusion to ensure that the victims get the justice they deserve.

As is well noted, trafficking in persons is one of the biggest illegal activities against the violation of human rights in the world. Liberia must, therefore, join other countries in strong action to combat this crime. Please, therefore, join me in launching this Five-Year National Action Plan, which serves as a roadmap of the Government of Liberia's fight in combating trafficking in persons. Today signifies that the Government and all its partners, including civil society and the nation at large, is going to be robust in this fight against human trafficking.

Thank you for being a part.