

REMARKS

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. GEORGE MANNEH WEAH
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

ON THE OCCASION

OF THE

77TH CELEBRATION OF UNITED NATIONS DAY

ONE UN HOUSE
MONROVIA, LIBERIA
OCTOBER 24, 2022

The Dean and Members of the Cabinet;
The Doyen and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Mr. Niels Scott, UN Resident Coordinator;
Heads of UN Agencies, and International Donor Partners;
Other Members of the Liberian Government here present;
Members of the Fourth Estate;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a pleasure for me to be here today at the invitation of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Liberia, to join the United Nations Family for the celebration of the 77th United Nations Day.

The theme of this year's Forum, "The Future we want, the UN we need: Reaffirming our collective commitment to national peace and development," emphasizes the critical role peace plays in galvanizing the people of Liberia to contribute their collective quota towards the realization of national development.

As I have said on many occasions: without peace, there can be no sustainable development. This is more than a mere observation; it is – in fact – my firm conviction. And because of this, I have dedicated every effort since my incumbency to ensure that peace prevails in Liberia, our native land.

EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

You will all be aware that a successful Peace Agenda must always consist of at least three (3) distinct phases:

Firstly, achieving the peace;

Secondly, consolidating the peace so as to prevent reversals; and

Thirdly, sustaining the peace.

As to Count One, we are all aware of the historic role that the United Nations played, through UNMIL, in ending the civil wars and establishing the peace in Liberia that we now enjoy. We as Liberians will always be grateful.

As to Count Two, since 2005 when the armed conflicts ended, the continued presence of UNMIL provided the peaceful space to allow Liberia to rebuild critical institutions of society and consolidate the peace. The UN was also of invaluable

assistance to us in strengthening the capacity of a wide range of Ministries and Agencies, and developing new post-war policies to ensure that the rule of law is respected and upheld. All of these efforts greatly contributed to the consolidation of the peace and stability which has fostered Liberia's continued growth since the guns were silenced.

My Administration inherited that peace in 2018, and since then we have spared no effort to continue to maintain and consolidate it, and to prevent any reversals.

However, when it comes to Count Three, sustaining the peace, this can never be done without development. Development must be seen as a dividend of peace.

For development to contribute to the sustainability of a hard-won peace, it must be felt as a tangible dividend by all members of a given society. Citizens will only become and remain committed to peace when the peace dividend of development brings meaningful improvement in their lives.

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

It is in this regard that when I stood before you last year on this same occasion, I called on you to partner with the Government of Liberia to support and assist the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development to deliver the Peace Dividend on a community level.

I highlighted the urgent need for us to focus our collaboration on addressing some of the challenges faced by many of our people - especially those living in poor rural and urban communities, who do not have access to basic social infrastructure and services and to income-earning opportunities.

I then called on you to assist us in completing the design and moving to implementation of a new national community development program, that would directly address the needs of our people at a grassroots community level, which would then complement other ongoing initiatives being implemented by my Government.

The guidance I provided to you and the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning at that time, was that you should finalize the development of a program that would help address many of the needs that the communities expressed to me during my County Tours covering the entire country in 2021 and 2022.

I requested a program that would bring water, solar lighting, feeder roads, sanitation facilities, and farming equipment, among other things, to address the needs of our various communities around Liberia.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Today, I wish to thank the United Nations for responding to that call. Today, I am here to officially launch the Accelerated Community Development Program - ACDP - which will be implemented as a partnership between the Government of Liberia, the United Nations, the World Bank, and other development partners. This will be a Special Flagship Program under the Office of the President, and will be implemented for the benefit of all Liberians.

I know that this initiative is coming a year before the Presidential and General Elections, and that there are some who will say this is a political project to win votes. Let me make it clear. This is not the case.

Work on this program began several years ago. The feasibility study was done in 2019 by Price Waterhouse Coopers. Also in that same year, we also sent a number

of high-level officials of Government to Senegal to observe and study a similar program, called the PUDC.

Since I spoke to you last year to kick off this program, we have been putting all the elements in place and mobilizing the financing to ensure that when we start, we have the resources needed to continue.

I also want to state that the United Nations Development Program - UNDP - will serve as the Implementing Partner for the program, based on its strong experience and knowhow in rapidly implementing similar programs in countries such as Senegal, Togo, Gambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Accelerated Community Development Program (ACDP) will be operated under the direction of a National Steering Committee, which will be chaired by me, and whose membership will be comprised of various Ministries and Agencies, Civil Society Organizations, and our International Partners. This program will be implemented in a manner that is transparent and that has the full ownership and involvement of the respective communities. At the end of the day, I want the ACDP to produce real concrete and tangible improvements in the lives of our Liberian citizens.

EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I would like the ACDP to be one of the largest investments in community development that this country has ever made. As such, I have requested the Minister of Finance and Development Planning to work with the UNDP, World Bank, African Development Bank, IMF, and the rest of the International Partner Community to conclude financing of approximately US\$100m for the first phase of the program, which is to be implemented over the period 2022-2025.

I also hereby direct all Ministries and Agencies to collaborate in the implementation of the program and channel any support necessary.

Thereafter, our aim and intention is to transition the program into a permanent national community development mechanism, which will be open to direct applications from communities for support.

For all our partners here, I do wish to invite you to collaborate with us on this initiative. As you should realize, we are putting in place the building blocks for sustained long term development. We are solving the critical constraints of infrastructure and connectivity by improving our road networks. We are solving the problem of energy and electricity, which is key for private sector investments. We are improving governance and tackling accountability.

But even while we make these essential investments, we also need to ensure that ordinary Liberians can see real improvements in their lives. We need to ensure that farmers can bring their goods to markets, that in every village, men, women and children can have access to water and solar-powered electricity, that the very poor among us can have the dignity of a proper sanitation facility, and so on. This was my commitment when I took office in 2018, and it remains by firm commitment today. But I need your support to help make this happen.

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The UN is playing and can play an even more vital role supporting the Government of Liberia to deliver on the PAPD.

We have seen over the past years an increasingly vibrant UN, working with the Government, traditional leaders and authorities and civil society, with the support of the EU and Sweden, to implement the Spotlight program and other gender initiatives which are proving highly effective in addressing issues of Gender-based Violence.

As a country, we are now beginning to get the upper hand on fighting Sexual and Gender Based Violence, and this partnership is playing a key role.

We are also aware of the preventive diplomacy of the UN as it continues to play a key role in rallying the international community to our cause, especially leading up to the elections next year. I have made it clear that I am committed to peaceful, free and fair elections. I welcome the support of the UN and the international community in echoing this message and holding my government and other political stakeholders accountable to realize this objective.

Today, after over 10 years, a new national Census enumeration process begins. The UN is a major partner to the government on the Census, and I want to thank not only UNFPA, but also the key donor partners - World Bank, Sweden, USAID, and Ireland, for the outstanding partnership and financial contributions that are helping to make this census possible.

Finally, I would like to call for a stronger and deeper involvement of the UN in coordinating sub-regional programming in the Mano River Union. The sustenance of peace and stability in the sub-region requires an integrated approach in promoting good governance, economic development, and strengthened state-civil society relations. The UN can and must play a role in helping to facilitate this.

EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

In closing, I wish to reaffirm Liberia's full commitment as a founding member to the principles and values inherent in the Charter of the United Nations. I therefore call for a strong and inter-connected multilateral system to promote international solidarity, and for a United Nations fit for purpose; so as to meet the needs and aspirations of all mankind.

I thank you.