

REMARKS BY
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PRESIDENT OF LIBERIA
TO THE
U S SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICAN AFFAIRS
HEARING
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Thank you so much Chairman Coons.

Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Flake,
Distinguished Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African
Affairs, Friends of Liberia,
Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to offer remarks at this hearing.

I would like to start by extending warm greetings and profound gratitude of the people and government of Liberia to the American people, the US Government, the many American institutions, and faith based organizations for the leadership your country has taken by joining us on the frontline of this battle to turn the tide against this unknown disease that has threatened our very way of life. My colleagues from Guinea and Sierra Leone, also victims of this disease, join me in these sentiments. Allow me to recognize also the extraordinary work of US Ambassador Deborah Malac and the Embassy team.

Chairman Coons and Ranking Member Flake, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks for the personal commitment demonstrated by you and other members of Congress through your numerous phone calls and messages of support.

We express appreciation to President Obama for the bold steps, including the work of Tom Frieden, Director of the Centers for Disease Control, and Rajiv Shah, the Administrator of USAID in coming to our aid. It was the US that awakened the world to the scope and magnitude of the Ebola disease's virulent spread in West Africa; that took the extraordinary step to deploy the US military to help Liberia. It was the leadership of the Obama Administration supported by Congress that opened the space for the disease to stabilize in Liberia and encouraged the rest of the world to respond to this global crisis. It is a demonstration of leadership as important as the role to combat terrorism and other ills around the world.

We applaud the construction of Treatment Units by the DoD and the establishment of the field hospital to treat health care personnel as a significant and timely response to our predicament. Today, our Armed Forces which worked with the DoD can boast of the capability to construct treatment units and other similar type of facilities. The treatment units send a powerful message to our people that Ebola is real that it requires an overpowering response and that the people of the United States stand by us. The units serve us well by ensuring that we can respond to continuing hotspots and possible recurrence. The fact that they are not full is a strong sign of their success and shows that by working together with overwhelming force we have begun to push back on this killer disease.

Honorable Members of Congress:

Several of you may recall that on March 16th 2006, shortly after being elected President in Liberia's first post-conflict elections, I had the honor to address a joint meeting of the US Congress and said that we would pay any price to lay the foundation for durable peace. In 2013, we celebrated the 10th year of peace that enabled us to achieve over 7% average annual economic growth, a fifty percent reduction in the infant mortality rate; seventeen additional years in life expectancy, relief from a crippling external debt, and a restoration of economic and social infrastructure. Perhaps more importantly we have established a free and democratic society thus reversing the many decades of authoritarian rule.

This year changed everything. As the rest of the world, we knew nothing about this disease. It sprung on us at the worst of times. Our sub-region had just begun to recover from years of instability and commenced the process of regional integration. The three most affected countries had embarked on a path of democratic governance. As natural resource rich countries, we were in the process of attracting investors, creating the conditions to accelerate growth with development. This has all been reversed. Today, we are fighting to keep people alive, facing a faceless but deadly enemy.

As I speak to you, the Ebola virus has caused a serious disruption of Liberia's social, economic and cultural fabric. It has destroyed many of our hard fought development gains, wreaked havoc on our economy, exposed the weakness of our public health systems, interrupted our infrastructure development, closed schools, restrained travel, and shattered the lives of our people. The disease has subjected us to a stigma all over the world, creating a fear more destructive than Ebola itself.

With the support of partners like you, we have made progress in containing the virus. Our thirteen Emergency Treatment Units, with a total of 840 beds, has only 136 patients.

Our 70 burial teams have buried 23 persons per day across the country compared to hundreds, months ago. We have seen a drop from around 100 new cases per day at the peak of the epidemic, to only 10 confirmed new cases per day over the past week. Our six active laboratories have tested 60 samples a day, but on average only find 8 new Ebola cases per day. The 4,000 contact tracers which involve community workers are following some 7,000 persons. Doctors, nurses and other health care workers, some 174 of the over 3,000 who have died, are no longer at risk because quality treatment facilities are available to them. We are happy to say that 1312 persons including 345 children, many of them orphaned, have walked away free from the disease.

Am I excited about this progress? Yes, I am! But I also know that more has to be done for we are now in the most critical stage of response.

At ten new cases a day, the crisis is now manageable; but experts tell us that travelling that last mile to zero new cases will be much more difficult, because the disease has retreated and must now be chased down in every corner. To illustrate this, consider the challenge of contact tracing. For each of the patients in the US, there were around 40 contacts that needed to be quarantined and monitored. The challenge in Liberia is greater, with thousands more contacts, often in villages which take hours to reach through dense bush. This is one of the many reasons why continuing your support and our joint work together is so important.

Moreover, full eradication will not be secured until the whole region is freed from Ebola; until there is prevention against future possible outbreak, until we develop a medicine, both preventive and curative to conquer this deadly disease. On yesterday, Liberia hosted a regional Technical Summit with Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Mali to share lessons and best practices. The summit drove home the point that Ebola is not a Liberian issue or a West African issue. It is a global issue that we all must continue to confront. This is why continuing assistance to the combined efforts with our neighbors remain a priority. This is why the US has been right to tackle it at the frontline, here in West Africa. This is why Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of WHO, was right when she noted that this is greatest peacetime challenge the United Nations and its agencies have ever faced. In Liberia, and in Sierra Leone and in Guinea, we continue to live this challenge.

As our response evolves we ask that partners continue to support our efforts. This calls for strengthening community ownership and responsibility for awareness and immediate response action, through the Community Care Centers that are being established with the support of USAID. Here are a few statistics in this regard. Liberia has 218 medical doctors and 5,234 nurses to serve a 4.3 million population at 405 public and 253 private

health facilities. This means we have 1 doctor for 100,000 people, compared with 4 per 100,000 in Sierra Leone, 10 per 100,000 in Guinea and 245 per 100,000 in the United States. As we speak, there are more Liberian doctors and medical professionals in the United States than at home. Most of them left during the war and we were in the process of trying to get them back home, with incentives that measure up to their qualifications. This disease has upset that effort.

Clearly we are far behind and can only sustain the progress and prevent a recurrence through a better trained and better equipped health facilities – better diagnostic facilities for infectious diseases, better hospitals and better clinics. We have asked the 137 partners from some 26 countries who are with us in this fight to join us in this expanded effort.

Above all, Liberia must get back on the path to growth. My government is preparing a comprehensive plan for Liberia's post-Ebola economic recovery, accelerating our work in infrastructure – above all Roads to Health, electricity and WATSAN operations. A major push in the agricultural sector, where most Liberians are employed, will enable us to generate jobs and restore livelihoods. The private sector will play a crucial role.

In this regard, we commend the private sector organized under the Ebola Private Sector Mobilization Group (EPSMG), with the advocacy of ECOWAS and the African Union for their support in making people and resources available to fight the disease. Their efforts will be even more critical in the building of post-Ebola economies requiring from us commitment to create conducive conditions for private capital to succeed.

Liberia is extremely proud that we achieved MCC compact eligibility in 2012 by passing 10 out of 20 indicators, including control of corruption. Liberia again passed eligibility in 2014 by passing 10 out of 20 indicators. Liberia has surpassed the MCC's control of corruption standard for 7 straight years, one of the few developing countries to do so.

An MCC grant would be a game changer for Liberia. It would facilitate our post-Ebola economic recovery and put our development momentum back on track leading to substantial transformation of our economy.

I want to conclude by expressing our gratitude to you, the United States Congress, for the friendship and assistance, without which we would not have made the progress to date. There remains a lot to do – to ensure the resources are properly deployed by the many institutions to which it is directly allocated; to ensure that there is full accountability to you and all our partners and to the Liberian people. Our resolve to meet the challenge that confronts us is strong and unrelenting. We will win this battle.

Once again, I want to thank you and the American people for the opportunity to be with you in this meeting today.