

Address by

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President of the Republic of Liberia

At the

GOL – LRDC Partnership Meeting

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Good afternoon. I have returned to speak to you about our mission and program for the future. Some of our next key steps are highlighted in our budget and budget message for 2006/07, and we are working on detailing our objectives and plans for the next year more fully in our I-PRSP, which is well under way and should be finalized in the coming weeks. You will have an opportunity to get details on that and we hope you will provide some enriching inputs.

For now, let us step back and look at the bigger picture. How do the pieces fit together in our vision for the long run, and where do I see us going?

First, we need a peaceful and secured Liberia. The signs of peace are increasingly evident thanks to the able assistance of the UN military forces. We have completed the deactivation of the Former AFL soldiers and we are well along in the process of recruiting 200 new soldiers and vetting the first class of recruits for training. We have deactivated the ineligible members of our Special Security Forces and are in the process of restructuring and retraining our National Police Force.

However, our own security forces still fall short of the capacity to assure the responsibility to keep the peace and ensure civil order. Liberians must feel safe to go to any corner of their country and investors – Liberia and foreigners alike – must be confident that their investment is secured.

To achieve this, we must recruit more new AFL troops and police officers. We need to effectively train them, not just in security matters but in being accountable to the people. We must reorganize and strengthen our security agencies and develop a clear national security strategy so that a phased withdrawal of UNMIL troops is both feasible and advisable. We must

fully reintegrate all the IDPs and refugees, and establish fair and transparent mechanisms to settle these disputes that undermine our reconciliation goals. There is still a disturbing amount of arms in the hands of those who use them to rob and rape. It is imperative that we significantly reduce the number of small arms in the country. UNMIL needs to help us to be more aggressive in response.

The second element of our forward looking agenda relates to our social infrastructure – health and education – the Basic Service Pillar of the LRDC. Education must be put at the center of everything that we do, recognizing that it provides the foundation for progress in all other human development areas. The status quo is that we have lost our stock of qualified teachers at all levels, 75 percent of educational infrastructure was destroyed or damaged during the war; at a net enrollment rate of 46 percent, more than half of our children are out of school.

We must rehabilitate and build new schools through the country. Our children in the streets doing petty trading and on the street playing football need to be put back in school. Our youth now idle, unemployed and amassed in the capital city, vulnerable to participate in crimes such as armed robbery, need to be put in high schools or vocational training. This will require the rehabilitation of the several multilateral vocational training institutes including the important Maryland William V.S. Tubman Technical College that are located in rural areas.

No nation can develop under conditions of a 95 percent illiteracy rate; here we must introduce literacy programs in communities through out the country with our resilient market women as key targets.

Our institutions of higher learning also need an overhaul to enhance the quality in capacity and competitiveness of graduates. Our longer term aim is to decentralize the University of Liberia

into select professional colleges in several rural counties. This will enable high school graduates to remain in their counties of residence, reverse the migratory flow to the Capital City, and provide an economic stimulus to rural areas.

As in the case of education, the soon to be released Human Development Report will show that 95 percent of the 325 health facilities that operated before the war have been partially or fully destroyed. The 400 trained doctors that served our country in the late 1980s have been reduced to 34. The same applies to physician assistants, nurses, midwives and environmental health workers.

A similar situation applies to other social infrastructure such as water and sanitation facilities. As a result only 10 percent of our population has access to health care. This must increase to at least 50 percent within the medium term. Through the support of several of you partners, progress has started in this regard but we must do more to repair some 954 secondary and vocational schools, two teacher training institutions, 82 health facilities including six hospitals and construct 20,000 wells and latrines.

Third is economic infrastructure. I don't have comparable statistics but we know that roads, bridges, power, communities throughout the country are in an alarming state of deterioration.

Our road system require major attention – primary and secondary as well as the city streets, even here in Monrovia the Capital City. In the short run we need to address those areas where the population has been totally cut off as the result of the heavy rains and the lack of bridges.

Operational, reliable electricity throughout our major urban areas and in rural areas on the basis of the options that will be provided through the power sector survey that is being undertaken. We expect the private sector to play a key role in this regard.

To achieve all this, we must strengthen and expand our community development programs, both those funded by donors and our new 100 Districts and Country Development Initiatives; we need to provide people at the village level with the resources they need to get themselves back on their feet. We need incentives to get teachers into the schools and health care workers into the clinics, especially in the rural areas. We need to look at new and imaginative ways to deliver these services, including moving towards more local control over resources and key ones that have the largest economic and security benefits and that connect farms to markets, and in such a way that we think ahead about maintenance and repair costs. And we need to establish a nationwide public works program that will create temporary jobs for thousands of Liberians to build roads, sink wells, and clear fields.

The fourth element is governance. Liberians need confidence in our government institutions and in the rule of law. No country can fully eliminate corruption, but we will not tolerate it and we will fight it wherever we see it. We are determined to significantly reduce the reach of corruption; A leaner, more professional, and better paid civil service, and a judicial system that begins to engender the confidence of the Liberian people will move us toward the achievement of these goods. We will revisit our constitution to ensure that fundamental human rights are provided as the bedrock foundation for treating people equally and fairly under the law. And we look forward to a much healthier balance between three vibrant, honest, and transparent branches of government not of one branch and two rubber stamps, nor of one branch and two adversaries.

Our aim is to review the size of the civil service and its pay scale, and then follow through by reducing its size, and finding professional, qualified people to fill critical positions. We must implement the tough measures in our new anti-corruption strategy, and make it clear that those who abuse their positions of power will be brought to justice. We need to get our judges and magistrates back in place across the country, and we need to give them the facilities and resources they need to do their job. We need to hold ourselves accountable and welcome opportunities to be held accountable by others, by concluding the process of the establishment of an independent human rights commission and we need to do even more in transparency in our financial accounts, appointments, decrees, and actions will be made available to the public and debated through strong democratic channels.

We will ensure a much stronger budget, both in terms of the amount of revenue available, and in terms of how we allocate funds and ensure their proper use. We aim to have fewer state-owned enterprises, as those that are unnecessary are closed or sold, and with those that remain open operating profitably with transparent and public financial accounts and clear objectives.

Fourth, as our economy gathers momentum, I believe we have the potential to see rapid growth in agriculture, both in food crops-especially rice-and in cocoa, coffee, and other cash crops. We will work for a rapid rebound in our forestry, mining, and other natural resource-based industries particularly our traditional rubber industry which requires re-investing in replanting and for the longer term downstream processing. The lifting of sanctions in timber under conditions of a new, well-functioning chain of custody, fair concession contracts, and create the environment for new private investment in downstream processing

We will continue an open trading system with low tariffs and well-functioning ports and customs systems. I believe that we can create an investment climate that will encourage investments in activities in which Liberia can compete internationally and that will create many jobs for our citizens. There is scope to produce products such as basic furniture, wood products, processed food, beverages, toys, tools, and other basic products for the country and ultimately for the region, Europe, the United States and elsewhere. More sophisticated ones will come later, but I am confident that we can create jobs in these areas with the combination of stability, good schools, decent infrastructure, low business costs, and few barriers to trade.

To achieve our trade objectives, we will continue our strong start on strengthening the budget by further increasing revenues and streamlining expenditures with appropriate oversight. We will rationalize our tax rates and expand our tax base, allowing us to be less dependent on tariff revenues. We must work with our creditors towards elimination of the vast majority of our external debt. The reality of a 800 percent debt stock to GDP and 3000 percent to export earnings says there is no way we can pay this debt. Support will be needed by our partners to resolve this as we follow the steps taken to secure an SMP that will lead us to HIPC. We must take all the steps necessary to have all sanctions lifted on our natural resource products.

We need to reduce and rationalize our tariffs, and take strong steps to continue to improve our operations at customs. We will have a new investment code that welcomes all investors and makes it easy for them to do business here. We must clean up our outdated business regulations, and do it soon to eliminate unnecessary red tape that only adds to costs, facilitate corruption, and undermines investment. We must get more seeds and tools and fertilizer to our farmers in time for the next planting season, and then re-establish marketing systems so farmers can buy these supplies in the future when they need them and sell their products when they are ready. We must

re-establish our extension services and build an appropriate research system well-suited for Liberian agriculture.

This is an ambitious agenda. I know that. We could aim low and cheer ourselves when we reach easier goals. But we aren't going to do that. We are going to aim high and do whatever we can to get Liberia back on its feet and give the Liberian people every chance to earn a decent living, get decent education and health services, and care for their families in a peaceful and stable environment.

Liberia at war brought misery and crimes against humanity to itself and to its neighbors—a toll that is beyond calculation. It was a haven for crime, violence, and plunder. A peaceful and prosperous Liberia will be good for Liberians, and will contribute to democracy, stability and development in West Africa and beyond. We are determined to fully recover, give Liberians the chance to live the lives they deserve, and to re-integrate as a nation in good standing in the international community. The key ingredients will be democracy, transparency, accountability, hard work, and encouragement and support of our partners. I hope that you share this vision with us and that you'll champion our cause and assist us as much as you can in our drive to build a new, vibrant, peaceful, and secure Liberia.

Thank you.