

REMARKS BY

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

ON THE OCCASION OF THE JOINT VISIT TO THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA OF
THE CHAIR & MEMBERS OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION (PBC),

THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL & HEAD OF THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE
FOR WEST AFRICA THE SAHEL (SRSG UNOWAS) AND

THE UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR PEACE-BUILDING SUPPORT OFFICE (ASG
PBSO)

His Excellency Ambassador Guillermo Fernandez de Soto,
Chair of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Colombia to
the United Nations,

His Excellency Ambassador Mohamed Fathi Ahmed Edrees,
Vice Chair of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Egypt to
the United Nations,

His Excellency Ambassador Olof Skoog,
Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission Liberia Configuration and Permanent Representative of Sweden
to the United Nations,

His Excellency Ambassador Marc-Andre Blanchard,
Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission Sierra Leone Configuration and Permanent Representative of
Canada to the United Nations and Members of the Peacebuilding Commission,

Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas,
Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of United Nations Office for West Africa and
the Sahel (UNOWAS);

Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco,
Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO);

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to welcome all of you to Liberia; particularly on your visit to the three (3) Mano River Union countries – Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire. Liberia is grateful to have you; especially at this very critical period in our ongoing effort to strengthen and sustain our peace, security and democracy; as well as to discuss measures to improve the Liberian economy.

Your Excellency Ambassador Guillermo Fernandez de Soto, we are happy that the Peacebuilding Commission continues to be a reliable partner to Liberia for almost a decade. The Peace-building Commission has always endeavored to ensure that Liberia receives the necessary attention and support aimed at sustaining its peace, security and democracy; thus, encouraging economic growth and development.

To our satisfaction, the Commission was instrumental in the submission of Liberia's Peacebuilding Plan in 2017, as mandated by the United Nations Security Council in 2016; titled "Sustaining Peace and Securing Development".

In 2018, we launched our flagship national development plan – the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD). This development agenda is a comprehensive framework for inclusion, more equitable distribution of our national resources, and a rights-based approach to national development.

The PAPD endeavors to address poverty in Liberia and improve the economic status of those vulnerable; especially, women and youth. I am aware that this plan was presented to the Peace-building Commission in January 2019.

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, I have heard about your good work at the United Nations. Thank you for your steadfast support to Liberia. We are glad that the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) strongly supports the work of the Peacebuilding Commission; including the Liberia Configuration of the Commission.

The PBF has contributed funding for many projects in Liberia; and I am told that further support is pending for land and decentralization; including Phase II of the cross-border project with Cote d'Ivoire. We note that the areas you support are very critical in helping to strengthen our peace; including your support to national reconciliation, justice and security hubs, land dispute resolution, elections processes; women empowerment; and the rule of law, among others.

The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) did not only assist in the creation of the Government's Peacebuilding Office, it also created and launched the Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund as the centralized Trust Fund for both peacebuilding and development priorities as are jointly agreed by the Government of Liberia and the United Nations, on the basis of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development. To date, the PBF has been the only donor to the Trust Fund; which we appreciate, but we would now like to encourage all our partners to consider doing same.

Your Excellency Ambassador Skoog, we are also particularly grateful; and through you, we want to say thanks to the Government and People of Sweden for your efforts aimed at peace consolidation in Liberia. I am not sure we could have had a better Chair than Sweden for the Liberia Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

You were here last March to hold talks with my Government, the United Nations system, donors, and the civil society. I recall that during that particular visit, you underscored the Peacebuilding Commission's support to peacebuilding priorities in Liberia; as well as discussed modalities for future engagement. You also joined us in the ceremony marking the closure of UNMIL and the High - Level meeting on the theme: "Liberia Moment".

We want to applaud you and your team at the Swedish Mission in New York for your own role in all these initiatives.

As you are aware, Sweden and Liberia have enjoyed exceptional bilateral relations for decades, and continue to do so. I can firmly state that the Swedish Mission here, headed by Her Excellency Ambassador Ingrid Wetterqvist, is very engaging, and remains an active proponent, along with the Government of Liberia, for the advancement of strong social, political, economic and cultural ties between our two (2) countries.

To Dr. Chambas, let me say that I am glad to meet you again, as always. You have been engaged with Liberia for a protracted period; as a result of which you are well abreast with developments in this country. I recall that you were here in May of this year, to lend your support to ensure peaceful dialogue between the Government of Liberia and the organizers of street protests. We are grateful for your continuous support to the well-being of our country.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I am impressed with the purpose, scope, and objectives of your mission. The Mano River Union countries share a lot in common, such as tribal groups, culture, and religion. Cross-border activities are also prevalent. As a result of these commonalities, whatever affects one country, directly or indirectly impacts the other. For example, the case of the shared experience of civil conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast; as well as the devastating Ebola Pandemic which affected all three countries.

Therefore, there is a lot that we need to do to strengthen our ties, and collaborate on issues that affect us all; including peace and security, terrorism, piracy, cross-border crimes, and trade, among many others.

Regarding peace and security, we are very much concerned about the situation in the Sahel. Development in the Sahel poses serious threats to all of us in the MRU and ECOWAS regions.

We will therefore need to coordinate our efforts; as well as mobilize the needed resources, to ensure that the Sahel is free of conflict and avoid being used for the wrong reasons. We remain open to UNOWAS in order to discuss how Liberia can be of further assistance in this regard.

With specific regard to Mali, I can reassure you that we are committed to the continuous service of the Liberian contingent of the Armed Forces of Liberia to ensure peace and stability in that country; as evidenced by the recent Memorandum of Understanding signed between my Government and the United Nations for the contribution of resources to the United Nations Multi-Dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

As we contemplate finding lasting solutions in Mali and the Sahel, I hope we will be able to count on the support of the ECOWAS Member States; particularly drawing from the experience of ECOMOG. Liberia is a testimony of ECOMOG's effectiveness.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Let me now take this opportunity to share with you some of the challenges we face as a country and people:

1. The economy is under stress; and the prices for our major export commodities are still not encouraging on the global market; and
2. We continue to experience threats of protest, aimed at undermining the peace, security and democracy we are currently enjoying.

In a considered attempt to address the current economic situation in Liberia, and to stimulate a broad-based conversation among all stakeholders within the Liberian economy, we recently held a National Economic Dialogue. I used the Dialogue to encourage all Liberians to join us in devising and supporting new measures which could successfully address the structural defects and imbalances in the economy.

It was at the same Dialogue that stakeholders recommended the establishment of a War and Economic Crimes Court in the country. In response to this request, I have written the legislature to advise and provide guidance on all legislative and other necessary measures that would be required for the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report; including the establishment of the Economic and War Crimes Court.

We have also taken further steps in dealing with the economic challenges. For example, in response to a call by the IMF for the Government to reduce its annual wage bill, we have embarked upon a program of salary reduction of Government officials of and harmonization of salaries of civil servants. Let me point out that upon assuming office on January 22, 2018; I announced the reduction of my salary by twenty-five (25%) percent; long before the call by the IMF.

In the coming months, my administration intends to place particular emphasis on the agriculture, education and health sectors. To this end, we will be looking to forge close collaboration with relevant agencies of the UN in accelerating growth and development in Liberia.

Many of these challenges we face can be properly and successfully addressed, provided we mobilize and receive assistance for the following:

1. The Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development

As you are aware; to implement our Development Agenda, Liberia needs enormous financial and material resources. This is a huge challenge to our Government and country, and we need the collective support of all of our partners in this endeavor.

We know, for example, that the Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund is critical to addressing the remaining root causes of fragility in Liberia; and we will be relying on their support of our efforts to sustain peace, security and democracy; and implement the 2030 Agenda, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. Mano River Union Sustainable Development Goals Center

We are pleased that Liberia is hosting the Mano River Sub-regional Center of the Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa here in Monrovia. Following the signing of a Host Country Agreement between the Liberian Government and the Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa (SDGC/A) in January 2018, as Host country, Liberia has been expected to provide facilities and services required for the Sub-regional Center that will support the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2030. In

this light, we will need to mobilize support to ensure the effective and efficient functioning of the Sub-regional center.

3. THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR WEST AFRICA (UNOWAS)

UNOWAS is a very important new agency of the United Nations to be established in our Region. We want to encourage the International Community to continue to place a focus on the work of UNOWAS, particularly as it pertains to issues of the Sahel that are critical to the stability of our region.

Liberia is often regarded and even sometimes branded as “A UN Peacekeeping Success Story”. While this is fair comment, I believe that it is time to transcend that label and become known for post-conflict peace, development, growth, and stability. In order to achieve this, we will need tremendous assistance and guidance to deliver on these lofty goals and expectations.

We cannot achieve this without the collective help of the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS, the Mano River Union and all of our International and National partners; particularly in the midst of budgetary constraints. We can neither disappoint nor fail our people; we have come too far and cannot turn back; which would certainly portray a waste of all the resources previously deployed in Liberia for the attainment of peace, security and democracy. We will continue to rely on your support in our endeavor to bring growth and prosperity to our people in an atmosphere of peace and stability.

Let me now express thanks on behalf of the Government and People of Liberia for this very important visit, and affirm our appreciation for the pledge by the United Nations of its continuous commitment to funding programs in Liberia in support of our development agenda.

We can assure you that my Government has the political will to protect and sustain peace, security and democracy in Liberia, and will do so by all means, particularly counting on your unflinching support.

I thank you.