

**STATEMENT BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY DR. GEORGE MANNEH WEAH**

**PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA**

**AT THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON HIV AND AIDS**

**HELD VIRTUALLY ON JUNE 8, 2021**

Distinguished Heads of State and Government;

His Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir,

President of the United Nations General Assembly;

His Excellency Mr. António Guterres,

Secretary-General of the United Nations;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to participate in this High-Level Virtual Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on HIV and AIDS to review progress made since 2016, which was the last time that this august body met to discuss the global impact of these two diseases.

While we are currently pre-occupied with the current global pandemic of Covid-19, we must also continue to remain focused on these two existing diseases which have lingered for many years now, and which require our continuous and collective resolve to find lasting solutions to save mankind from these scourges.

I therefore would like to applaud the leadership of the United Nations which has convened this important meeting that will provide us the opportunity to review the progress we have made thus far, and to deliberate on the further measures that we must take to effectively curtail the ravages of this long-lasting pandemic.

**EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:**

In this regard, I wish to inform you that Liberia aligns itself with the Common Africa Position on HIV / AIDS, which was developed in consultation with all member states of the African Union. This position takes into consideration concrete and practical measures to address the problem and embodies sufficient political will.

Since the first case of AIDS was discovered some forty (40) years ago, the world has rallied together and mobilized countries, governments, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders to tackle this disease, with my country, Liberia, being no exception.

Liberia has been able to respond to this disease through effective government policies that have been developed and implemented over the years with important assistance and guidance from key international stakeholders, and with a strong focus on community mobilization.

However, although we have made incremental progress in our HIV/AIDS response, where the disease has been stable over the last two decades, with fewer people becoming infected, we are still challenged by our inability to effectively eradicate the disease.

Our Government has provided improved HIV testing services in the last two years, thus doubling the number of people who know their HIV status. Also, pregnant women are required to undergo HIV testing, and couples intending to formalize their civil unions are required to undergo HIV testing before marriage licenses and certificates are issued to them. Those who test positive for HIV are immediately counseled and placed on a course of HIV treatment.

Needless to say, the Covid-19 (coronavirus) has placed enormous additional pressure on our various economies, and certainly on our health systems, and has consequently affected our HIV response mechanisms. It has threatened to overwhelm the already fragile health systems in our region, thus threatening to erase the gains and progress that have been made in previous years.

Even with all the efforts that have been deployed, and the strong political will on the part of its leaders, Africa remains the most affected continent, and is off-track in its goal to “End AIDS by 2030”. Stigma and discrimination, gender inequalities and gender-based violence remain key barriers to access quality services.

We are optimistic that this High-Level Meeting will provide an opportunity to reshape and redouble our efforts to “End AIDS by 2030”. For its part, Liberia hereby recommits to strengthening its health care system, and we join the call to reinforce local production capacities of pharmaceuticals, diagnostics and vaccines in Africa.

EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Let us conclude these talks with a Political Declaration that commits to bold strategies which will aim to end the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030. This must be the springboard for a decade of action to reduce inequalities and root out socio-economic and cultural barriers that fuel the spread of HIV. And it is important and imperative that we match our words with practical actions.

I thank you.