

STATEMENT
BY
H.E. MR. AUGUSTINE KPEHE NGAFUAN
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA
AT THE
69TH REGULAR SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2014
UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS,
NEW YORK



Mr. President;

Mr. Secretary General;

Excellencies;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

I bring you greetings from H.E. Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia who should have been here today to address this august

assembly but chose to remain on the frontlines in Liberia to lead our fight against the deadly Ebola Virus Disease.

Mr. President, Liberia congratulates you on your ascendancy to the high office of President of the UN General Assembly, and acknowledges the astute statesmanship and wisdom you bring to this important assignment, which inspire confidence for a successful 69th Regular Session. We assure you of Liberia's full cooperation and support. In the same spirit, we commend your predecessor, Ambassador John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda for his meaningful contributions to setting the stage for negotiations on the new global development agenda

We pay a special tribute to Secretary-General BAN Ki-moon for his able and visionary stewardship of the affairs of this global institution.

Post-2015 Development Agenda,

Mr. President,

With just one year to the expiration date of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the theme of this 69th Regular Session: ***“Delivering on and Implementing a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda,”*** could not have been more appropriate. Liberia was put on the pedestal of global honor by the selection of President Sirleaf as one of three co-chairs of a twenty- seven-member High-Level Panel (HLP) formed by the Secretary General in 2012 to advise him on the contours of an ambitious but realistic post-2015 global development agenda, and to define the critical steps required to reinvigorate and sustain global partnership. The Panel's report contained a clarion call to “leave no one behind”, which has been embraced as a motivational theme by many.

At the continental level, our President chairs a ten-member High-Level Committee (HLC) of African Heads of State, under whose leadership a Common African Position (CAP) was developed and endorsed by the membership of the African Union. The CAP is anchored on six pillars, namely: Structural Economic Transformation and Inclusive Growth; Science, Technology and Innovation; People-centered Development; Environmental Sustainability, Natural Resources and Natural Disaster Management; Peace and Security; and Finance and Partnership. These pillars represent Africa's vision of the pre-requisites for the eradication of poverty on the continent and for its future growth and development.

We are encouraged that the concepts and strategies defined under each of the pillars have been significantly incorporated in the 17 sustainable development goals and 179 targets formally adopted by the General Assembly as the outcome of the negotiations conducted by the Open Working Group in fulfillment of decisions taken last year at the Rio+20 Conference. This gives us optimism that the substance of these pillars will form an integral part of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. As we await the Secretary-General's "Synthesis Report", I can assure you, Mr. President, of Liberia's continued active participation in the negotiations that lie ahead. We are hopeful that recognition of our common humanity and application of the age old practice of compromise will enable the international community to conclude the new agenda by September 2015.

Mr. President,

As we survey the regional and international political landscapes, we are becoming increasingly concerned about the spread of extremist ideologies and terrorist activities in the world, especially in Africa. Whether it is *Al-Shabab* in Somalia and Kenya; *Al Qaeda* in the Mahgreb or *Boko Haram* in Nigeria, the African continent has not been spared the deadly and destructive consequences of extremism. Additionally, over the past year, while peace processes were being consolidated in many countries in Africa, we have sadly witnessed the eruption or exacerbation of conflicts on the continent, notably in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. We laud efforts undertaken by the AU and the UN to resolve these conflicts and join the call for sustained international action to bring about a more secure and peaceful world; for it is only in an environment of peace and security that we can achieve tangible development outcomes.

Climate Change

Liberia commends the Secretary General for convening a high-level "Climate Summit" last week, which elicited concrete commitments from the global community on reducing greenhouse emissions and other measures aimed at achieving sustainable development. As a small country and one that is still endowed with 43% of the remaining Guinea forests, we are proud that we too concluded partnership agreements and made concrete commitments aimed at supporting the goals of sustainable, climate sensitive development. Small countries like Liberia contribute less to greenhouse emissions but suffer disproportionately from the adverse impact of climate change. To right this anomaly, and in the united spirit of saving our one world, all countries, big or small, must make proportionate commitments to save our planet and take concrete actions to actualize such commitments.

The Ebola Crisis

Mr. President,

One year ago, when President Sirleaf addressed this august assembly, it was a more positive message from a President who reported significant achievements in the past and lofty aspirations for the future. President Sirleaf, exuding gratitude, informed the world that Liberia had just celebrated ten years of peace in August 2013; and, in spite of some challenges, was still registering remarkable progress on the path of socio-economic development. The country had transitioned from the emphasis on stabilization to a focus on transformation within the framework of a long-term development agenda christened “*Vision 2030*”. The President also informed the Assembly that the Mano River Basin comprising Liberia, Guinea, Cote D’Ivoire, and Sierra Leone was at peace and was pursuing regional integration through initiatives that would facilitate connectivity in our power and transport systems, thereby enhancing cross-border trade in which our market women are mostly engaged. She even reported on how a small contingent of Liberian peacekeepers, who are today still in Mali, had contributed to the laudable UN peacekeeping effort that created an environment for stability and democratic transition in that country.

One year later, as I stand to address this august body, I have become the purveyor of a different kind of story – a sad story. Over the past six months, a dark cloud has been hanging over the Liberian landscape such that instead of reporting on economic growth, we are constrained to report economic decline. Implementation of virtually all pillars of our *Agenda for Transformation(AfT)* has been placed on hold, and gains are perhaps already being reversed. Instead of devoting attention to regional integration through facilitation of power and transport projects, we are now talking about regional cooperation to deal with a deadly enemy. The “market woman” who traded goods and services across borders a year ago is now constrained to remain within the borders of her country and suffer the consequences of economic inactivity.

Mr. President,

The deadly enemy that has visited so much harm and misery on my country, a small country of only 4 million people, and our neighbors, Sierra Leone and Guinea, is the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), which began wreaking havoc in Liberia in March of this year. Since the Ebola outbreak, the Government of Liberia has taken a host of measures – we declared a state of emergency; suspended schools; and with the constructive involvement of all stakeholders including pastors,

imams, chiefs, elders, youths, government officials and opposition politicians, have stepped up awareness and prevention campaigns to address the crystallized denial and deeply rooted traditional and cultural practices that create a fertile ground for the spread of the disease. We have also committed and will continue to commit significant portions of our own paltry resources to the fight.

In spite of these efforts, buttressed by (our partners) those from the World Health Organization (WHO), the US Centers for Disease Control, Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF), the Samaritans Purse and a legion of bilateral and multilateral partners, Ebola has confounded all of us and has sprinted faster than our collective efforts, snuffing out the life candle of more than 1,800 of our compatriots with a total of nearly 3,500 infected. Cumulatively, women, constituting a majority of our health workforce and being the main care givers in our deeply traditional society, have been disproportionately affected. Sadly, as Ebola widens its deadly circumference, it is creating a trail of traumatized orphans across the country, which includes that ten-year old kid from Barkedu, Lofa County, who is the “last person standing” in a family of twelve. Our already limited pool of health workers has further reduced because 89 of them have fallen victim to the virus, out of a total of 182 infected..

The resultant panic that arises from health workers seeing their colleagues die from Ebola has precipitated the closure of many health facilities across the country. As we and our many international partners struggle to douse the wildfire caused by Ebola, we have been left with inadequate resources, time and personnel to attend to other routine illnesses like malaria, typhoid fever and measles, thereby causing many more tangential deaths. An increasing number of pregnant women are dying in the process of bringing forth life. In short, our public health system, which totally collapsed during years of conflict and was being gradually rebuilt, has relapsed under the weight of the deadly virus.

Mr. President,

Ebola is not just a health crisis. It is a total crisis- it is an economic crisis, a social crisis, and a potential political and security crisis. Indeed its deleterious impact has been very wide and very deep.

On the economic front, it has occasioned a 3.4% downward slide in economic growth, from a high of 5.9% to a low of 2.5% in 2014; and some experts have predicted that, if not contained quickly, Ebola could cause a 12% decline in our economy in 2015. Domestic food production, mining, transport services, the construction and hospitality industries, trade and many other productive

components of our economy have all registered significant reversals. Concessionaires have scaled down their operations, causing a large contingent of expatriates to leave the country. As a result of the slowdown in economic activities, our revenue generation capacity has been seriously undermined resulting in a nearly 20% downward revision of our budget for Fiscal Year 2014/2015. In spite of this depressing domestic revenue outlook, our country has been dedicating a hefty portion of its scarce resources to the fight. Consequently, our ability to provide for basic social services and continue to fund key development projects is significantly diminished.

The suspension of flights as well as the travel and other restrictions/sanctions imposed on Liberia and other affected countries, contrary to expert advice from WHO and others, did not only undermine the humanitarian efforts aimed at quickly containing the disease, but also aggravated the adverse economic effects of the Ebola crisis.

Mr. President,

As destructive as the Liberian Civil War was, at least our people knew the warring factions and the frontlines. With Ebola, the enemy is more insidious and there are no clear-cut frontlines because someone's child, someone's husband, someone's workmate could actually be the enemy and the frontline at the same time. This difficult feature of the disease, coupled with a host of other challenges, occasioned its rapid spread. We are heartened that, through separate and joint appeals of the Heads of State of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone to the UN Secretary-General and leaders of friendly countries and institutions, the international community is showing a better understanding and deeper appreciation of the unprecedented scope and magnitude of the Ebola outbreak in our countries. There is a chorus of leaders advocating and committing to support more robust, scaled up and urgent assistance to the affected countries.

With gratitude to the Secretary-General and other world leaders, the last few weeks have witnessed a host of positive developments that constitute a major heightening of focus and scaling-up of the international response. These developments include:

1. The announcement by the President of the United States of his government's decision to scale up assistance to the region, including the deployment of 3000 military and medical specialist personnel to build treatment centers, train health personnel and provide other types of much needed support to Liberia and other affected countries. These personnel have already begun to arrive in Liberia.

2. The Security Council meeting on September 18, 2014, under the leadership and Presidency of the United States and the adoption of resolution 2177, cosponsored by a record-breaking 134 countries, which recognized the Ebola crisis as a threat to international peace and security, necessitating strong and concerted international response through firm commitments of support; and called on member states to lift travel and other restrictions imposed on affected countries.
3. The announcement by the Secretary-General on 18 September of his intention to establish the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), which was formally endorsed by Resolution 69/1, tabled by the President of the General Assembly and adopted by the Assembly on 19 September. As I speak, the Head of UNMEER is in the region and will be discussing the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) for activating the mission.
4. The start of deployment by the African Union (AU) contingents of medical and relevant personnel drawn from across Africa to Liberia and other worst-affected countries.
5. The convening by the Secretary-General on 25 September of a High-Level meeting on the Ebola epidemic which witnessed the announcements of substantial commitments of assistance by many countries including France, China, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, Timor Leste and multilateral institutions including the World Bank and regional organizations such as the European Union.
6. The relaxation of travel restrictions by some Member States and the announcement of the resumption of flights to Liberia and Sierra Leone by Air Cote D'Ivoire within a week, and of Kenya Airways hopefully sometime in October.
7. The announcement of contributions and the airlift of critically needed protective equipment and supplies to Liberia and other affected countries by many governments, international NGOs, corporations, and philanthropists. The expressions of solidarity have taken many forms and we are deeply grateful for all of them.

These efforts and those earlier provided by many other governments and institutions like the African Development Bank (AfDB) should not lead us toward complacency because we definitely have not yet achieved the twenty-fold increase

in response recommended by the experts to contain the disease. Additionally, while we struggle with the first war of actually disrupting the transmission of Ebola, we, along with our bilateral and multilateral partners, must begin to prepare for the second war of tackling the longer-term socio-economic impacts of the Ebola crisis – building and capacitating a new public health system that can robustly deal with any future health challenge, catering for the increasing numbers of orphans and other traumatized and impoverished family members, and quickly raising resources to address a legion of socio-economic, political, security and other challenges made more acute by the presence of Ebola.

Mr. President,

We acknowledge, with high appreciation, the steadfast and unwavering assistance provided by the entire UN country team to Liberia, including the refocus and reallocation of resources to assist in the fight against Ebola. We also take cognizance of the positive contributions the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has made to the peace and security we have enjoyed in Liberia over the past years. UNMIL’s presence in Liberia, especially at a time when we were experiencing isolation, helped to reassure our people and create a security climate conducive to tackling some of the multi-faceted challenges of the Ebola crisis. Therefore, UNMIL’s continued engagement in Liberia will be critical to enabling Liberia to transition smoothly from the Ebola Crisis and resume implementation of strategies for the achievement of our long-term development agenda.

Mr. President,

Ebola is a difficult enemy that has frustrated and conquered our collective efforts in the past; causing some experts to project that in a worst case scenario about 1.4 million precious lives could be lost in our countries by January 2015. In spite of the gloom of today and as Liberians ponder the question, “Will I, or my wife, my husband, my child, my friend, or my workmate, be one of those to populate the 1.4 million doomsday statistics?”, we do not sink into defeatism. Instead, President Sirleaf and the resilient people of Liberia feel that the Ebola epidemic has presented us with a one-option, multiple-choice test; and that option is to fight back! And we are fighting back.

As President Sirleaf aptly put it, “I believe in the Liberian people. I believe that we are stronger than the greatest threat with which we are currently faced. And I believe we will prevail. The war did not defeat us, a completely destroyed economy – the greatest collapse since World War II – did not defeat us. Ebola will not defeat us.”

Mr. President,

We know that the road ahead may be long, curvy, and hilly. But with bigger, bolder, timely and sustained efforts on our part, buttressed by the international community, we are sure that dawn will soon break on this long, dark, night occasioned by the Ebola Virus Disease.

THANK YOU.