

**OPENING REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY AUGUSTINE KPEHE NGAFUAN,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF LIBERIA AT THE FIRST SUBSTANTIVE
MEETING OF THE U.S.-LIBERIA PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE UNITED STATES
INSTITUTE OF PEACE (USIP), WASHINGTON D.C. TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2013**

Ms. Wendy Sherman, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs; and other Members of the US Delegation including Her Excellency Deborah Malac, U.S. Ambassador to Liberia; Mr. Jim Marshall, President & CEO of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) family; my Colleagues and Fellow Members of the Liberian Delegation; Ladies and Gentlemen: Today, the U.S.-Liberia Partnership Dialogue turns a new page in relations between our two nations and people; and by so doing, imbues us with new hopes for the future.

We are happy that substantive deliberations will begin today only some three months after former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signed here in Washington D.C. the Statement of Intent establishing the U.S.-Liberia Partnership Dialogue. At the signing ceremony in January, the Liberian Leader said, “The launching today of the US-Liberia Partnership is an historic achievement – one that will cement the strategic cooperation between our two countries for generations to come, regardless of the occupants of the White House or the Executive Mansion...

The US-Liberia Partnership Dialogue will allow our two countries to look at our relationship strategically, with a view towards the long term, and focus on those areas that encourage broad-based economic growth, including agriculture and food security, energy and power infrastructure, and human development.” Under Secretary Sherman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Liberia is at a crossroads.

Having experienced the excruciating and harrowing experience of nearly fourteen years of brutal conflict that decimated our population, wrecked our economy, and destabilized our sub-region, thanks to the resilience of the Liberian people and support from the international community, especially from the United States that supported us through thick and thin, we ended our brutal war ten years ago; and have since then had two consecutive presidential and general elections, have improved basic social services and infrastructure across the country, have instituted reforms in public financial management and governance, have improved freedom of speech and of the press, have worked with our neighbors to maintain peace and stability within our border and in our sub-region, and have crafted a long term development vision to catapult our country to middle income status by 2030.

While recognizing the progress we have achieved over the last seven years, there is no gainsaying that the challenges we must confront in the present and the future are colossal and daunting. Indeed the distance we have traveled thus far in addressing the teething challenges we inherited as a government pales in magnitude when compared to the distance we still have to travel. For as we begin in earnest substantive discussions in Working Group sessions on two areas that are critical to the growth and development of Liberia – Agriculture and Food Security and Energy and Power Infrastructure, we face the uncomfortable reality that 35% of our people

are still considered food insecure; and that despite our favorable vegetation and climatic endowments, we have not been able to modernize our agriculture sector to the extent where we can produce what we eat and transition a critical mass of or people from the informal to the formal sector.

Today, again thanks to support from partners including the United States, we have expanded power supply in Monrovia, but our installed base is a paltry 23 megawatts as compared to an estimated demand of 100 megawatts excluding demands from the mining and agricultural concessions. Our major hydro-electric facility that provided about 64 MW of power in prewar days was one of the sad casualties of fourteen years of internecine conflict, and we are today grappling with the herculean challenge of restoring that facility and increasing its capacity. As we meet today, the cost of power in Liberia is extremely prohibitive and serves as a major impediment to doing business in Liberia.

Our nascent hydro-carbon sector unleashes enormous opportunities mixed with enormous risks for the future, and we are working with all our partners to put in the right proactive policies and legislations for the effective governance of the sector. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, We do not expect that today's Dialogue will produce the panacea to the many and various challenges that we confront in Liberia; but we are hopeful that it will contribute in no small measure in consolidating our march forward on the long and tortuous path to solution.

The United States has been a strong a reliable partner of Liberia since the founding of Liberia nearly two centuries ago and has assisted immensely in Liberia's transition from war to peace and economic recovery. We note with appreciation an endless list of positive US assistance to Liberia including, but not limited to, the rebuilding of the Liberian army and coast guard, US support to the cancellation of Liberia's huge debt overhang, the consolidation of the culture of democracy, the restoration of social services, the building of infrastructure, the rebuilding of public sector capacity, the improvement of public financial management and a host of significant interventions through the Millennium Challenge Corporation's Threshold Program and the soon to be rolled out Compact Program.

We are also heartened by the investment of two large and credible U.S. companies in our hydrocarbon sector – Chevron and Exxon Mobil - and look forward to attracting additional U.S. investment in other sectors that are critical to our nation's growth and development. We entertain the hope that these Partnership Dialogues will not only bring our two governments closer, but will also lead to stronger bonds of partnerships between our private sectors, which could lead to mutually beneficially trade and investment.

In conclusion, on behalf of President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the government and people of Liberia, I extend thanks to U.S. President Barack Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry, Under Secretary Wendy Sherman and all members of the U.S. Government who have worked assiduously in making us to reach to this day. As we begin our deliberations, I wish for us all a productive and resulting Inaugural Session of the US-Liberia Partnership Dialogue.

Thank You.