

Implementing the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile

**Remarks by Hon. Amara M. Konneh
Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs
Republic of Liberia**

The creation of the g7+ was a watershed event in the long-running saga of aid effectiveness. Never before has a group of fragile countries come together to speak with one voice and one agenda. Although still an emerging bloc, g7+'s unity and steadfastness has played a critical role in ensuring that the New Deal addresses the root causes of the problems facing fragile states. Through the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, we have seized the opportunity to repeatedly meet, engage one another as well as to work with partners in order to ensure that the New Deal is realistic and inclusive of the challenges facing fragile states and our development partners.

Liberia fully endorses the New Deal and commits to its implementation at the country level. Particularly, we subscribe to the belief that national ownership of the development agenda is critical to the development process. Partners must align their interventions to national priorities. This has been and will continue to be a hallmark of the success Liberia has achieved during the administration of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. We have set our own priorities and have convinced our partners to align their interventions to self-identified needs.

Notwithstanding our successes, there is considerable room for growth due to inadequate government capacity. Although we have had the strong will to deliver on our development agenda, we have been hampered by a lack of capacity in the areas of ICT Leadership, Procurement Expertise, Budgeting Expertise, and Project/Program Development and Management expertise. The New Deal proposes specific commitments to address not only the needs for capacity development, but also to stop the harmful practices that do not contribute to development. We are already implementing some of these commitments. For example, in order to address capacity deficiencies in some of our public institutions, we have requested that United States Agency for International Development (USAID), via the Governance and Economic Management Support (GEMS) program that it will soon launch in Liberia, to provide support in each of these critical areas to all Government ministries and agencies, with strong emphasis on knowledge transfer.

Instead of providing technical assistance in the form of expatriates, we have requested that support be given to our Senior Executive Service (SES) program, which will recruit qualified Liberians at competitive

yet sustainable salaries. These eighty (80) SES officers will then fill the role traditionally played by expatriate professionals, with the added benefit of them being more likely to stay in Liberia and continue to contribute to their nation's development long after their contracts expire. We believe this element of the GEMS program is essential to building local capacity and ensuring that the country reverses the brain drain created by 14 years of civil war.

Throughout the Dialogue process, we have repeatedly cited lack of capacity as the binding constraint to sustainable development. Whether in the area of planning processes, aid instruments, or political dialogue, we have stated that capacity is needed in order to be successful. If we intend to successfully implement the peacebuilding and statebuilding goals and ensure that an increasing number of countries transition out of fragility, as outlined in the New Deal, we must improve the planning, budgeting, and procuring capacity in fragile states and improve the way international partners support these critical areas. Upon the commencement of the GEMS program, Liberia commits to sharing its capacity building successes and failures with partners through a retooled International Dialogue that better aligns with the post-Busan aid ecosystem.

I just mentioned the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals. Liberia, with our partners from the g7+ and the International Dialogue, will work actively next year to ensure that these goals become part of a development architecture that is better suited to the situations of conflict and fragility, including through their adoption by the United Nations General Assembly.

We also commit to remaining an active member of the g7+ and ensuring that it speaks with one voice within the Dialogue as well as in other forums. Long-term, we view both the Dialogue and the g7+ as important settings for sharing and learning. They afford us the ability not only to learn from the experiences of other fragile states but also to learn about the challenges our partners face. Given the weak institutions and systems inherent in fragile states, it can be difficult for partners to trust their systems and invest in them. Through the International Dialogue, partners and fragile states have the opportunity to candidly engage on such issues, which strengthens both sides' ability to cooperate on the national level due to enhanced mutual understanding.

In the future, the Dialogue will also play an important role in the implementation of the New Deal. After the development and implementation of the fragility spectrum and other tools and mechanisms that reduce fragility, we can use the Dialogue as a space to engage one another and ensure alignment to the peacebuilding and statebuilding goals in the New Deal. Let me be clear that the Dialogue cannot

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become a monitoring body fragile states report to. Instead, it should remain trusted space there participants can let down their guard and share their development successes and challenges as well as forge new approaches and solutions to the age-old problem of ineffective aid. This is the greatest value of the International Dialogue and it must be preserved.

Thank you.