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**Reviewing and Appraising the Beijing Platform for Action:  
"The Liberian scenario- Lifting Liberia"  
A presentation  
at the  
54<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**

**BY:**

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Madam Chairperson:

Excellencies, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, United Nations Representatives in attendance, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning.

It is an honor to be here today presenting Liberia's report on the status of Women in Liberia. I would like to seize this moment to first of all extend compliments from our President, Madame Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and all of the people of Liberia.

Today, fifteen years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, I am pleased to report to you that Liberia has made significant strides in the promotion of gender equality and women's political participation. As a Government, we recognize that discrimination against women persists in our society. It is for this reason that Liberia has prioritized gender mainstreaming in its development and is making concerted efforts to create space for increased participation of women in all areas of national endeavour, from the economy, the health and education sectors to the rule of law and security.

Liberia has joined the global and regional sojourn in efforts to attain gender equality and women's empowerment. In the context of these efforts, Liberia has integrated the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Platform of Action into its National Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) under the four pillars, namely: National Security, Economic Revitalization, Governance & Rule of Law and Infrastructure & Basic Services which is the core implementing plan in the country's development agenda. Bearing this in mind, specific interventions in the areas of gender equality and women's empowerment are closely aligned with the PRS deliverables and MDG3 commitments which are all geared towards the achievement of equality, development and sustainable peace nationwide.

**Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,**

Permit me to highlight some of the milestones that Liberia has been able to accomplish since the presentation of Liberia in 2008 at this forum in 2008.:

Firstly and most notably, Liberia was the proud host of the first *International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development and International Security* in March 2009, co-convened by President .E. Tarja Halonen of Finland and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. The four-day event brought together women leaders and advocates from around the world to share experiences and best practices on economic empowerment, climate change and sustainable development. Over 2,000 women from Liberia and other parts of the world, including Heads of Government were able to participate in the discussions and events and over 1,000 more gathered for a women's trade fair held in conjunction with the international event.

### **In the area of Liberia's Peace Building and National Security:**

#### ***Women and Security: Implementation of 1325 National Action Plan***

My Government remains committed to the full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. In testimony of this unwavering commitment, Liberia developed its National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 (the first of its kind in Africa) and launched it at the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development and International Security in March 2009.

A National Steering Committee has been established that is Co-chaired by the Minister of Gender and Development and the Minister of Justice; with members from key government ministries and agencies; CSOs, UN agencies, etc. Its principal task is to guide the implementation of, and provide oversight and accountability for, the National Action Plan. In addition, the 1325 Secretariat has been established and a National Program Coordinator recruited.

#### ***Community Policing Forums***

In an effort to prevent and reduce the high rate of GBV in the various communities across the country and also foster women's greater participation in community security, the Government has established Community Policing Forum in communities throughout the country. The Community Policing Forum works closely with the women networks set

up by the Ministry of Gender and Development and Women's groups to ensure that the rights of women and girls are not violated and to report all violations to the police. The community policing is a partnership between the police and the community that recognizes the interdependence and shared responsibility of the police and the community in ensuring a safe and secure environment for all the people of the country.

### ***Gender-sensitive Security Sector***

In 2009, a Gender Training Module was introduced to the training curriculum of Liberia's eleven security agencies and was endorsed by Liberia's National Security Pillar. All eleven security agencies received training on the proper utilization of the manual.

Liberia has drafted a strategy for realizing its goal of 20% women's participation in the military and various security agencies. As a first step, efforts were made in 2009 to advocate for the inclusion of more girls in the Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC). Currently, Liberia's Immigration and Naturalization Officers are over 20% women and the Liberian National Police are graduating higher percentages of women with every new graduating class – putting them well on track to reach the goal of 20% participation by 2011.

**Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,**

**Among our efforts to increase opportunities for women within Liberia's economy and economically empower women, the Government of Liberia has launched the MDG3 Programme:**

### ***MDG3 and Women's Economic Empowerment***

In furtherance of our economic revitalization efforts and reiterating our commitment to the attainment of the MDG3, the Government began in 2008 the implementation of three Joint Programs with the United Nations focused on the following clusters: Gender and Women's Economic Empowerment, Food Security and Nutrition, and Youth Economic Empowerment. Others initiatives geared toward the empowerment of

Liberian women include: the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women Program (in cooperation with Nike and the World Bank); the establishment of Adult Literacy programs specifically targeting women to become functional literates; the training of women in agro- processing, and convening of National Rural Women's Conferences in 2008 and 2009.

Most notably, the Government has convened a National Steering Committee on the Attainment of Millennium Development Goal Three and concluded an important 20 million US Dollar program with the Government of Denmark to assist the efforts of this Steering Committee. Work plans have been developed, in line with the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy, that seek to enhance women's economic empowerment and the achievement of gender equality.

For our rural women, the program has already started with the distribution of farming implements, seeds, and agro processing machines. Approximately 12,000 rural women farmers received these farming inputs from Government and its partners. Under the Joint Program for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment, thousands of women are receiving access to microfinance services, literacy classes, and business training.

Within the Food Security and Nutrition Program, nearly 8,000 women farmers benefitted in 2009 with access to seeds and farming inputs, training, processing machines and simple machinery.

In the programs to achieve MDG3, Special attention is focused on the Youth with a UN / Government of Liberia Joint Program on Youth Empowerment and Employment. This program places a heavy emphasis on access to reproductive health services and contraceptives, education for young men and women in the area of rights and responsibilities, and economic / vocational skills training. There are requirements that all these programs recruit at least 75% women and educate the entire youth population

on gender issues and the human rights conventions that deem all citizens, women and men, as equal.

### ***Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women Project***

The Government, through the Ministry of Gender and Development and with support from the Nike Foundation, World Bank, and the Danish Government, is in the process of implementing the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls project. Service providers have been contracted, the operational manual completed and 2500 out of school girls between ages 16-24 have been recruited from nine communities in Montserrado and Margibi Counties to benefit from business development and job skills training. This is one way that our Government is putting direct action to our spoken concerns about women's role in our economy. Through this program, a new generation of young women will be nurtured, with greater opportunities for income generation and employment.

### ***Other Economic Empowerment Interventions***

After the successful hosting of the International Women's Colloquium in Liberia, the Government, through the Ministry of Gender and Development, developed and is currently implementing a Post-Colloquium program dubbed 'Building Women's Entrepreneurship Program'. This program is another attempt by the Government to ensure that women, particularly rural women, are economically empowered and their financial capacities strengthened. Under this program, a total of 300 women groups representing 22,000 women have benefited. In addition, 25 women groups, trained in weaving, are now earning income from the sales of their products.

We recognize the different and critical needs and constraints of the rural women in Liberia and are actively working to build and revitalize rural women's structures across every county, district, and clan in Liberia. Through this National Rural Women's Program, launched in December of 2008, a new and powerful voice for rural women has

been created at the community, local and national levels. Leaders from every district in Liberia have gathered for an annual conference in December for the past two years – contributing their own ideas to Liberia’s development agenda and reporting on the efforts and initiatives within their own districts and counties.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,**

**In order to improve Governance and promote the Rule of Law:**

***Liberia’s National Gender Policy***

Perhaps the most significant achievement of our government since 2008 was the completion and adoption of Liberia’s National Gender Policy. This policy, which demonstrates our government’s highest commitment to an enhanced role for women, is to guide our country toward achieving gender equality and equity, building and utilizing the potential of women and men, boys and girls in pursuing and benefitting from our national development goals. The Policy was officially launched at the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Rural Women’s Conference in December, 2009 by Her Excellency Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia. An Abridged Version of the policy has been developed along with a five-year Strategic Implementation Results Framework.

***Legal Framework: National Policies and Legislations***

My Government believes that access to land is one of the major ingredients for women’s economic empowerment in Liberia. In this connection, the Government introduced an Act creating a Land Reform Commission that will, among other reform related tasks, review the modalities of look at land ownership in Liberia, particularly with a view to removing all barriers to women’s ownership of land. This Act has been passed into law and the Commission has been established with Commissioners (two females from a total of five) appointed by the President and confirmed by the Liberian Senate.

I am pleased to inform you that On 11 June 2009, the President, by Executive Order, officially established the Law Reform Commission of Liberia. This Commission is mandated to supervise all of the law reform processes of the country. It is hoped that discriminatory laws, including those pertaining to women, that have not been repealed would be dealt with during the law reform process

In addition, the Government has also established a Constitutional Reform Task Force. The Government expects that the work of both the Constitutional Reform Task Force and the Law Reform Commission will be complementary. My Government, with support from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), has also conducted an analysis of Liberian national laws to determine laws that are biased or discriminatory against women. This analysis will serve as a basis for advocacy for a change of the laws or strengthening of the laws during the law reform process.

***Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of  
Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)***

In June 2009, Liberia presented its initial to sixth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

In an effort to implement the CEDAW, an Implementation Task Force has been established to oversee the implementation of the Convention and the CEDAW Committee Recommendations. To create public awareness and sensitize the public on provisions/articles of the CEDAW, the Government, through the Ministry of Gender and Development, has embarked on a massive public awareness campaign. The Convention has been simplified and mini-dramas have been produced. These mini-dramas based on the simplified version of the Convention are currently being aired on local radio stations in Liberia. As part of the "CEDAW Outreach"; these dramas are also being performed at street corners and in various communities in Monrovia. There are plans to extend the street performances to other communities outside Monrovia, particularly in rural areas.



## ***Preventing and Responding to Sexual and Gender Based Violence***

The Liberian Government is highly committed to preventing and responding to all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Considering the challenges for survivors to access justice for these crimes, Liberia's Ministry of Justice has established the Sexual Based Crimes Unit to handle all sexual crimes cases. In addition, Liberia has opened Criminal Court E – a criminal court room dedicated solely to the prosecution of sexual crimes.

The National Gender Based Violence Interagency Task Force, led by the Ministry of Gender and Development, was established to support the coordination of GBV activities in the country. During the period of 2008 – 2009 the Task Force succeeded in: A.) finalizing the national Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) for GBV prevention and response, establishing clear procedures, roles and responsibilities for each actor involved in GBV prevention and response; B). finalizing safe home guidelines for use by safe home operators across the country; and C). accelerating implementation of Liberia's National Gender Based Violence Plan of Action.

### **Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,**

#### **Addressing women's access to basic social services and infrastructure:**

##### ***Education***

My Government has prioritized closing the enrolment gap between boys and girls, while at the same time reducing the school-drop-out rate of girls. In this regard, the Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Education, has formulated several plans including the construction of 'girls-friendly' schools in targeted areas, community-managed child care centers, awareness and outreach campaigns, mentoring programs for girls, teacher training that emphasizes female teacher training, and school canteens. These programs are intended to boost the enrolment and retention rates of girls, on one

hand, and also provide incentives for the recruitment and training of more female teachers.

### ***Social Protection***

The Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Gender and Development and with support from the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), is currently implementing a project geared toward improving the wellbeing and protection of women in Liberia. The project is being implemented in 5 counties.

The project, which runs for 2 years, will construct, equip and staff five Safe homes for survivors of violence in the targeted counties (Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Grand Bassa, and River Gee); provide micro-credit to 3,000 vulnerable women and GBV survivors, and equip five existing women centers. As I speak to you, one of these Safe homes has been completed, furnished and staffed while four are under construction. Continuing these efforts is critical to ensuring that the women of Liberia are protected.

### **· Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,**

The Liberia scenario has several dimensions; policies, reforms, and institutional mechanisms. We have made great progress, but we still have a long journey ahead of us. Some of the challenges which we are endeavouring to overcome include effective enforcement of laws protecting women; continued subordination of and discrimination against women; competing priorities and inadequate resources in a post-conflict environment as well as the weak character of state institutions responsible for mainstreaming gender in national policies.

Indulge me then to ask these questions:

Have we made significant strides since 1995? Yes we have.

Are we complacent with these achievements? No we are not.

Will we reaffirm our commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action? Yes we will.

I Thank you!