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Reviewing and Appraising the Building Platform for Action:

“The Liberian scenario- Lifting Liberia”

A presentation

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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 wish the distinguished participants and our President, Madame Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and all of the people of Liberia.

Today, fifteen years after 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 has prioritized gender mainstreaming in its development and implementation efforts to create spaces 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 forums 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 through Platform for Action into its National Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) under the four pillars: Economic Growth & Employment, Education, Revitalization, Governance & Rule of Law and Infrastructure & Basic Services which is the core implementing plan for the country. Government's key development interventions in the areas of gender equality and women's empowerment are closely aligned with the PRS deliverables and MDG commitments which are all geared towards the achievement of equality, development and sustainable peace.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

Permit me to bid you adieu for the time being as Liberia has been able to accomplish since the presentation of Liberia in 2000 at this forum in 2000.

Firstly and most notably, Liberia was the proud host of the **International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership and International Security** in March 2009, co-convened by President F. Tuia Halonen of Finland and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. This 'one day' event brought together women leaders and advocates from all around the world to share experiences and best practices on economic empowerment, human capital 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 International Security:

Women and Security

My Government remains committed to the full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. In testimony to this unwavering commitment, Liberia developed its National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 (the first of its kind in Africa) and has incorporated the tenets of 'Empowerment of 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. Its mandate is to provide strategic guidance 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 CVR in the various communities across the country and also foster women's greater participation in community security, the Government has established Community Policing Forums in communities throughout the country. The Community Policing Forum works closely with the women members of

up by the Ministry of Gender and Development and Women's Empowerment 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 role of the community in ensuring a safe and secure environment for all.

Gender-sensitive Security Sector

In 2009, a Gender Training Manual was introduced to the 11 national security agencies and was endorsed by Liberia's National Security Policy. All 11 security agencies received training on the proper utilization of the manual.

Liberia has drafted a policy of increasing the number of women in the military and various security agencies. As a first step, efforts were made in 2009 to advocate for the inclusion of women in the ROTC Officers Training Camps (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 MDG, the Government of Liberia has entered into three Joint Programs with the United Nations focused on the following pillars: Gender and Women's Economic Empowerment, Food Security, and Nutrition and Gender Economic Empowerment. Other initiatives geared toward the empowerment of

Liberian women include the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women and Young Women Program (in cooperation with Nike and the World Bank), the establishment of Adult Literacy programs specifically targeting women to become influential members, 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 Steering Committee for 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 the Steering Committee. Work plans have been developed during the year for 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 implemented 50 agro-processing machines. Approximately 12,000 rural women farmers received these training inputs from Government and its partners through 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 600 women farmers received simple machinery in 2009 with access to training and technical assistance.

In the programs to achieve MDG 3, special attention is focused on the Youth with AIDs (YWA) Government of Liberia Joint Program on Youth Empowerment and Employment. This program places a heavy emphasis on access to reproductive health services and contraceptive use, gender equality, and women's economic empowerment and responsibilities, and economic / vocational skills training. There are requirements that all these programs recruit at least 75% women and include the youth population.

on gender roles and the need for human rights conventions that treat men and women 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, UN Women and the Danish government, is in the process of implementing the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls project. Service providers have been established in 10 communities with a total of 9500 adolescent 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, that creates opportunities for income, education and employment.

Other Economic Empowerment Interventions

After the successful hosting of the International Women's Call to Action, the Government, through the Ministry of Gender and Development, developed and is currently implementing a Post-Colloquium program called "Strong 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 capabilities 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 sale 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

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, economic and housing 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 1990 was the completion and adoption of the 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 benefiting from our national development goals. The Policy was officially launched at the National Women's Conference in December, 2000 by Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia. An Abridged Version of this 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 key 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 land acquisition 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 Commissionaries (three females from a total of five) appointed by the President and confirmed by the Liberian Senate.

I am pleased to inform you that on 17 June 2009 the President of Liberia 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, will 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 a review of Liberian national laws to determine laws that are biased or discriminatory against women. This analysis will serve as a basis for developing a blueprint for the 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 report to the Committee on 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 Committee Recommendations. To create public awareness and mobilize 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 various communities throughout the country. Plans to extend the street performances to other communities, particularly in rural areas.

Preventing and Responding to Sexual and Gender Based Violence

The Liberian Government is committed to preventing and responding to acts 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 2011, the Criminal Court E – a criminal court room designated solely to the jurisdiction of sexual crimes.

The National Gender Based Violence Task Force, established under the Ministry of Gender and Development, was established to support the coordination of GBV GBV activities in the country. During the period of 2008 – 2009 the Task Force succeeded in: A.) finalizing the national Standard Operational Procedures (SOP) for GBV prevention and response, establishing legal 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 Blueprint of Action.

Excellencies, Distinguished Members

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

Education

My Government has prioritized closing the enrollment 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, providing managed child care centers, awarding stipends to girls, providing pre-natal care for girls, teacher training emphasizes female teacher training, and school streets. These programs are intended to boost the enrollment and retention rates girls in schools.

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

Social Protection

The Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Graduate Development and Skills Training, with support from the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is currently implementing a project geared toward improving the welfare and protection of women in Liberia. The project is being implemented through the following activities:

The project, which runs for 2 years, will construct, equip and provide safe homes for survivors of violence in the targeted counties (Bong, Lofa, Limpa, Grand Kessu and River Gee), provide independent legal and medical services and also equip and provide safe homes for survivors of violence. The project will also equip five existing women centers, as the work to provide safe homes has been completed, furnished and started while four are under construction. Continuing these efforts is critical to ensuring that the women

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 that we are encountering include: effective enforcement of laws protecting women; continued subordination of and discrimination against women; impunity for violence against women; inadequate measures in post-conflict environment as well as the weak character of state institutions responsible for mainstreaming gender in national policies.

Indulge me then to ask the following:

Have we made significant strides since 2003?

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!!!