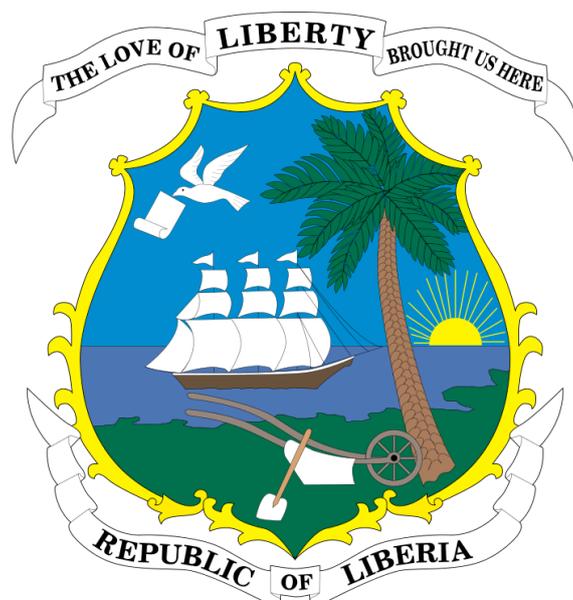

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development



Multi-year Expert Meeting on Transport, Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation

REMARKS

Hon. Stephen Towain Marvie, Jr.

DEPUTY MINISTER FOR COMMERCE

Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Republic of Liberia

Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

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Salutations

My distinguished colleagues;

Our Development Partners;

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen.

Good afternoon.

1. I would like to thank you for inviting me to join you for the Fifth Session of the Multi-Year Expert Meeting on Transport, Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation.
2. This is the first of my country's participation on a panel at this event and we are humbled by your gaze in our direction.
3. I bring you greetings from Liberia, from the Honorable Minister of Commerce & Industry, Axel M. Addy, Chief Negotiator, Liberia's accession to the WTO.
4. Liberia's WTO accession was linked to the overall domestic reforms. Today, we can proudly say that Liberia's WTO commitments and notifications have become an integral part of the trade and investment program of Liberia.
5. In 2010, Liberia signed the Millennium Challenge Corporation Threshold Program – a program which requires improvement of some Economic Freedom indicators. Prior to 2014, Liberia did not pass the trade policy indicator due to significant barriers to trade, inadequate trade capacity, high cost of trade, limited or no standard operating procedures for trade transactions, arbitrary trade administration.
6. With the implementation of the Agenda for Transformation, Liberia's national development plan, the government promoted trade reforms. In partnership with the International Finance Corporation, we revitalized the Trade Across Borders Working Group, an important working group of the Liberia Better Business Forum. Productive meetings were taking place between the government and the trade and business community, as well as international partners. With support from USAID, we established the Trade Facilitation Forum (TFF) in 2013. We put in place a secretariat



to support the Forum which was chaired by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry and co-chaired by the Liberia Chamber of Commerce.

7. The TFF was focused on four core areas: facilitation, regulation, policy and capacity development; and it was basically a three-tier setup: a Steering Committee, a Technical body, and a Secretariat. The TFF successfully advocated the reduction of 19 non-tariff barriers at key trading posts and periodically visited traders at the Bo Waterside (Liberia-Sierra Leone Border) and Ganta (Liberia-Guinea border). These visits brought confidence and strengthened transparency for the trade community, especially cross-border women.
8. These reforms improved our trade competitiveness and compliance efforts through a process of engagement with the private sector and understanding of the broad-based policy actions needed to tackle trade barriers.
9. In 2014, Liberia passed the trade policy indicator under the Millennium Challenge Corporation threshold program. Early reforms, including those in trade facilitation, were yielding results.
10. During the process of accession to the WTO, policy makers stressed the need for accession to be linked to the overall national development plan to ensure coordination among key government ministries and agencies. To this end, Liberia domesticated WTO Agreements across the government. New legislations were drafted and some modified to ensure compliance with WTO principles and rules.
11. We introduced a Foreign Trade Law and a new Intellectual Property Law was passed. With support from UNCTAD and IFC, we drafted a new Customs Code. We reformed the Trade Facilitation Forum and put in place a National Trade Facilitation Committee – expanding on the mandate and membership of the TFF.
12. With support from UNCTAD, some members of the NTFC have begun series of capacity development initiatives aimed at deepening understanding of the Trade Facilitation Agreement. We seem to have got a committed batch of private sector operators still interested in knowing their rights and recently the Chamber has demonstrated that their knowledge gained from the UNCTAD trainings is not wasted.



They have proactively engaged the government whenever a new regulation or procedure is introduced without consultation, stakeholder's participation or at worst, implemented without prior notice. They have demonstrated strength by referencing key multilateral trade agreements the country has signed.

13. We have used the NTFC to foster dialogue and introduce reforms: standard operating procedures at key trading points, establishment of customer service center for trade, training the brokers and private sector operators and introducing mobile business registration to formalize informal businesses.
14. Despite these reforms, the trade environment still faces serious challenges: poor infrastructure, sometimes weak public-private dialogue and donor coordination. We still need some support to address these challenges. We work with our colleagues in the Mano River Union and ECOWAS to advance regional trade which presents challenges, such as transaction cost, lead time, and unregulated practices.
15. In partnership with the IFC, we conducted a TFA Needs Assessment. With support from UNCTAD, we were able to recategorize our measures. We now have got two measures in Category B, that is, detention and common border procedures and uniform documentation requirements; and we have the rest in Category C.
16. One thing we quickly realized is that some ministries and agencies have made progress across some measures but these reforms need to be government-wide. Hence, to ensure compliance across the public sector, it was important to be sensitive to what the private sector experiences across the entire government.
17. As part of Liberia's WTO post accession plan, we have made trade facilitation a core objective of our trade policy. We have begun the process of putting in place a national single window and a services portal. We intend to improve the trade ecosystem and leverage on the support of donors by promoting trade donor working group and bilaterals that promote partnership.
18. In terms of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, trade is linked with many goals but Goal No. 1 – No Poverty; Goal No. 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth; Goal No. 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; Goal 16 –



Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and Goal 17 – Partnership for the Goals, are core to trade.

19. Ultimately however, all of these initiatives to reduce poverty and create decent work for our people require an environment in which trade can flow easily. As a small economy, Liberia particularly depends on a functioning trade environment.
20. To build the resilience of our economy and continue on our path of development, we rely on more Aid for Trade support from our partners to support our economic diversification. With a modernized system at our ports of entry, with the right support to build the capacity of our customs officers, with the right environment for the growth of our MSMEs, we can improve trade facilitation and transport logistics for private sector growth.
21. I would like to thank UNCTAD for the support and we look forward to a strong relationship as Liberians wait to usher in a new government in 2018.
22. Thank you.