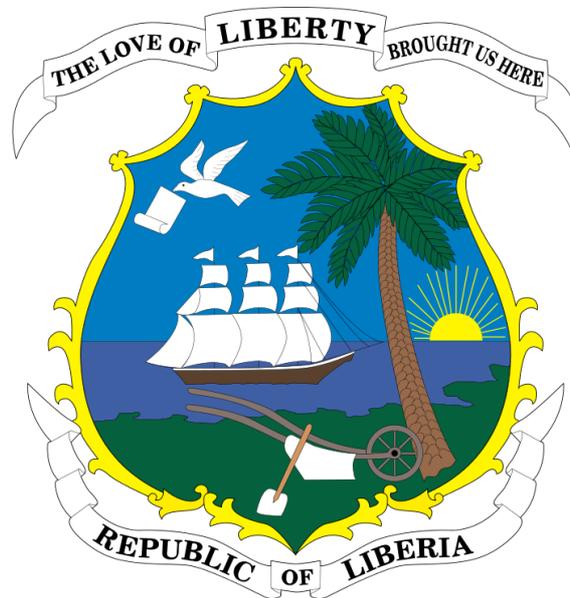

2017 International Customs Day



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMS DAY

Data Analysis for Effective Border Management

Hon. Axel M. Addy

MINISTER

Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Republic of Liberia

MONROVIA CITY HALL

10:30 AM, JANUARY 26th, 2017



Salutations

Honorable Elfrieda Stewart Tamba, Commissioner General, Liberia Revenue Authority...

Distinguished Colleagues from the three branches of government, here present, including

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Our Development Partners; EU, AFDB, USAID, UNDP, among others

Members of the Private Sector;

Members of the Press;

Fellow Liberians;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good morning and Welcome.



1. Today, I am humbled to stand before you as a keynote speaker on International Customs Day. I want to thank the organizing committee of this event for selecting me to serve in this capacity on this all important occasion. **Today I will do my best to highlight the importance of data analysis for effective border management and why the roles we all play in our various capacities is critical in fostering a modernization process that will impact the performance of our economy.**
2. **But first, today, Thursday, January 26, 2017, is International Customs Day** and as such, I want all our customs related personnel to please stand. We say thank you for the work you do, day in, day out, to control the millions and millions of trade transactions and people that come and go across our borders each year. This is not an easy task. Today we want to celebrate you, your work, your patriotic commitment to an ever-transforming Liberia for a better tomorrow for our children. You count because you make a difference each day, each action, each transaction. Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen please join me in applauding all of our border and customs personnel in this room and those who are not here today.

Thank you, thank you. Thank you.

International Customs Day (ICD)

3. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, International Customs Day or commonly ICD, today, January 26, 2017, is a special day of reflection and celebration among the 179 members of the World Customs Organization. It is on this day in 1953 when the inaugural session



of the Customs Cooperation Council (CCC) was held in Brussels, Belgium giving birth to the Council which was later renamed the World Customs Organization (the WCO).

4. This is also a remarkable achievement as we make every effort to put in the building blocks of a modernized economy. This achievement is a critical component for data analysis for effective border management.

Liberia in Transformation

5. My fellow Liberians, over the last 11 years, I have had the privilege to witness and be a part of our nation's transformation. Today, from the rubbles of destruction we see trade flows increase dramatically and we see a nation in transformation one block at a time, one mile at a time, one megawatt at time, one Liberian at a time. We are a nation in transformation. Today you and I can drive from here to the border at Ganta on paved roads, we can turn on the light and have consistent power that is getting cheaper and cheaper each year. These trade facilitation investments were critical pillars of our development agenda, the Agenda for Transformation. We also in the process have been working on the soft infrastructure to improve the business climate. You and I play a critical role in matching the hard infrastructure investments made over the years.
6. As a transforming nation building a vibrant private sector is critical if we are to continue to create opportunities for our people to pursue their dreams and fulfil their fullest potential. Information, access to information and the utilization of information is critical to informing policies and business decisions. As we celebrate today's theme "Data Analysis for Effective Border Management," I would like us to reflect on our role in contributing to modernizing our customs program as customs related personnel.



Customs and Trade Across Borders

7. Distinguished colleagues, today, documented trade within our region is less than 10 per cent officially. Today, the movement of goods and services and people within ECOWAS is inadequately documented. You and I know there is a lot more trade taking place across our borders. However, because of out-dated systems, inadequate support to build the capacity of customs officers, and limited customs infrastructure at our borders, we are losing millions in potential lawful revenue earnings. These limitations also impact dramatically the cost of trade of our entrepreneurs trading across our borders and therefore impact the price of commodities on our markets particularly in valuation. These challenges can be very harmful to SMEs, particularly women trading across our borders who operate on very small margins.
8. You and I have a role to play in improving the business environment that encourages our traders to use our formal ports of entry for trade rather than all the associated risk of using informal ports of entries that put their lives, and property at risk.
9. A modernized system that is efficient with a customs authority fully empowered can lead to greater formal trade that allows us to value and document such trade and develop adequate policies to improve our systems and procedures while being able to provide adequate trade statistics for our private sector operators and investors exploring new opportunities in our country and the region.

WTO and Post Accession Plan

10. *Ladies and Gentlemen*, in 2016, Liberia became the 163rd member of the World Trade Organization. This challenging accomplishment would not have been possible without the



dynamic leadership of the LRA team, and I would particularly like to highlight among many technicians, two professionals that deeply impressed negotiators across many member countries. Hon. Decontee-King-Sackee, Deputy Commissioner General and Hon. William Buku, Acting Customs Commissioner. These two individuals were truly the anchors of our tariff negotiations under the supervision of Commissioner General Elfrieda Stewart Tamba. I truly appreciate them for their professionalism, their command of the subject matter and their patriotism in ensuring that Liberia's interest first and foremost was protected every step of the way. Ladies and Gentleman, please join me in a round of applause for these two remarkable Liberians. In my book, they are **Truly Positively Liberian**.

11. *Ladies and gentlemen*, today an ever-transforming nation we have embarked on the journey of now implementing the WTO Post Accession Plan which includes the modernization of our soft infrastructure – our systems to improve the way we trade while reducing trade cost in our country. Our migration to an automated platform will elevate us to the rest of the modernized ports in the region and reduce the time it takes to process and clear goods coming to or leaving our ports. Such an automated process will reduce tariff application errors that can be very costly for traders and lead to a more efficient process. Data collected in a more efficient system will inform customs procedure and impact policies to improve the business climate. Greater access to trade data will inform investment decisions that will impact government and private sector investment.

12. Today for example, we see based on the trade data we collect that we import over \$30 Million dollars of poultry products in our country. Imagine being able to also capture the value and volume of trade of groundpeas, vegetables that come across our borders. Such



information can inform us on where to direct public and private sector investments for domestic production. We as a nation, are a net importer of various commodities including critical commodities. As we work to implement the Liberia Agriculture Transformation Agenda, trade intelligence across borders is critical to informing LATA implementation. 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 your growth, you can continue to play a pivotal role in our transformation.

13. *So ladies and gentlemen*, while we endeavour to implement the WTO Post Accession Plan and have commenced implementation of various aspect of the plan, I want to encourage us to do all we can to support the growth and modernization process for our customs authority. An empowered officer, and inspired officer, with the right training, sensitive to the plight of the private sector operators and the right system is a true partner to the growth of the private sector.

Liberia at a Cross Road – Trying Times

14. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, fellow colleagues; today we find ourselves yet again at a crossroad. Today the average Liberian purchasing power is in what seems to be a free fall. Today, many private operators struggle with excess inventory and no working capital to keep those important jobs we need so dearly. Today we are preparing for a convergence of ideas and opinions on the Liberia we have, the Liberia we want and the Liberia we want for our children. As we march to that horizon I want you and I to remember that this is our Liberia. It is our Liberia in what we do today, tomorrow and each tomorrow thereafter.



15. As we are faced with tremendous challenges in our economy today it is easy to lose focus on the Liberia We have forgetting what that Liberia was not too long ago and how far we have come to the Liberia we have. Today, ladies and gentlemen for the Liberia we want and the Liberia we want for our children will have to be a Liberia built on continued peace, not only at peace with ourselves but with our neighbours. A Liberia where we all, you and I will work in union-for the Liberia we want.

16. Today, in our action, we will collectively contribute to a new Liberia, ever transforming for a better tomorrow for our children. As we face this tremendous economic feat yet again, our ability to finance our development will be based on our ability to mobilize resources domestically. As such, the legal collection of lawful revenue and the flexibility in that process to foster private sector growth must be a balance we aspire to given our current context. We must therefore see the private sector as our true partners, do our best to protect the existing jobs they provide and exercise a sensitivity to the realities of our current context in the spirit of true partnership for a transforming Liberia.

17. As officers of government, we must do our best to focus on the work at hand and execute our duties keeping in mind that every penny collected counts, and every job protected counts.

18. As we all march to a horizon to witness the transition of power, however difficult that journey, we must be mature and remember that a nation, to paraphrase the late Martin Luther King Jr., “The ultimate measure of [our nation’s maturity] is no where [we] stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where [we] stand at times of challenges and controversy.” In union strong success assured.



19. Let me conclude here with a paraphrase of my favourite poems by Dr. Kent M. Keith called the Paradoxical Commandments

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.

Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.

Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds.

Think big anyway.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.



Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.

Help people anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you have anyway.



20. And to all of our customs and border personnel who stand in the heat day in and day out and deal with the challenges they encounter every day. I say thank you.
21. To all our traders venturing to trade across our borders under very difficult circumstances, I say thank you, we are getting there and we will get there.
22. To all of us, especially in these trying times, people will say you are doing nothing. Continue to give it your all, give it your best in your capacity. Do it for Liberia Anyway.
23. Thank God for you and what you do. May God continue to guide you and protect you as we march toward the Liberia we want and want for our children.
24. Thank you and May God continue to Bless Our ever-transforming Republic.
25. Thank you.