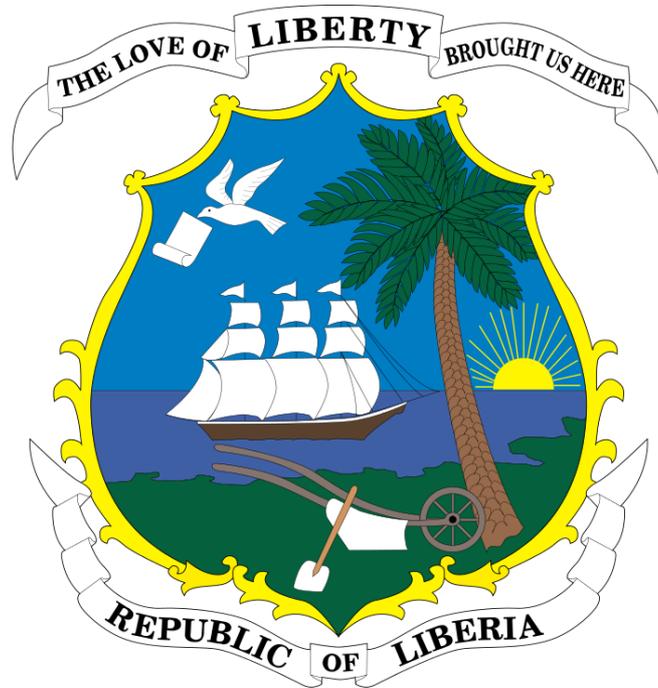

West Africa Monetary Zone (WAMZ)



8th Trade Minister's Forum

Opportunities for Development Through Regional Trade Integration

Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Republic of Liberia

Welcome Remarks

H.E Axel M. Addy

Minister

Friday, February 4th, 2016

Boulevard Palace Hotel

Monrovia, Liberia



Honourable Colleagues;

Representative of the President of the ECOWAS Commission;

Representative of the President of the Afreximbank;

President of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, Dr. F.S.U. Jacobs;

Director General of the West African Monetary Institute, Abwaku Englama;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. On behalf of the President, The Government, the People of The Republic of Liberia and on my own behalf, I warmly welcome you all to the 8th Edition of the WAMZ Trade Ministers' Forum.
2. Let me take this opportunity to thank the out-going Chairman, Hon. Abdoulie Jobe, Minister of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment of The Gambia, for his able leadership over the past year.
3. I also wish to commend the Director-General of the West African Monetary Institute (WAMI) as well as the Institute's development partners, including the World Bank, Afreximbank and the ECOWAS Commission for the concerted efforts in organizing this Forum and the high quality papers presented.
4. I am encouraged by the significant role WAMI continues to play in promoting intra-regional trade and contributing to the improvement of the trade governance environment in the Zone. I cannot over-emphasise the efforts of WAMI in assisting The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia for the payment system development project which has been successfully completed and functioning satisfactorily in all the beneficiary Member States.
5. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. The Theme for this year's Forum, "Opportunities for Development Through Regional Trade Integration" represents Liberia's overarching objective of trade-led economic growth and development by following an industrial policy of the 21st century focussed on agri-processing and manufacturing.
6. Liberia's overarching focus remains to promote policies and programmes that strengthen the process of economic cooperation and integration. In this context, I am proud to report that Liberia acceded to the WTO earlier this year, and has recently passed the Bill on the ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET) and ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) to facilitate regional trade integration as part of Liberia's National Trade Policy.



By enabling private sector players to operate in more and larger markets, trade openness allows them to realize the benefits of economies of scale, facilitating further cost reductions and promoting private sector development not only in Liberia, but regionally. We are also making every effort necessary to make our business environment competitive so as to harness trade for sustainable growth and development.

7. It is through trade and development that we can create meaningful impact on raising the living standard of the peoples of our Zone. Through the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme, we will not only eliminate customs duties for originating products and spur trade between our member states, but also increase economic efficiency, leading to a reduction in trade diversion. Our Free Trade Area will help strengthen our industrial sectors and prepare them to compete at the international level. Hand in hand with a strong tax reform, we will witness an increase in our production and processing capacity, the development of more value chains across the region, and therewith an increase of exports and employment opportunities for our people.
8. However, there remains some challenges we need to tackle in order to facilitate our Free Trade Area. Most notably, cross-boarder trade continues to be informal and leads us to understated balance of payments, trade flows and national accounts. To resolve this critical issue and be in line with the United Nations framework of compiling international merchandise trade statistics, the technical committee recommended a survey of the Informal Cross Border Trade (ICBT) . We will draw on the experience of other African countries, such as Rwanda, Uganda and Sierra Leone, that have implemented ICBT surveys in the past. Together, we will set out a framework that will provide comparable and complete informal cross-border trade statistics. In doing so we come closer to our long-term aim of a robust institutionalised capacity framework that provides comprehensive and reliable external trade data, which will facilitate trade-related policy analysis and allow our private sector players to take advantages of regional integration results.
9. Trade is a fundamental driver of economic development. However, inclusive economic development is about more than simply access – it must also be about promoting private sector growth, and that is only possible if we manage to accelerate financing for SMEs to support their growth. Financing availability is essential for the creation of a healthy trading system – up to 80% of trade is supported by some form of financing or credit insurance. Yesterday, we saw the trade financing opportunities presented by the Afreximbank. We need to continue to draw on such collaboration and forge deeper partnerships with institutions that continue to improve the trade policy environment.
10. Honorable Colleagues, Distinguished Delegates. Today in our zone, the movement of our people, products and services is a major challenge. While we are making every effort to improve our major infrastructure deficit, let me challenge us all that such investment must also drive investments along those corridors for job creation. In many of our countries, our rural communities celebrate the arrival of the yellow machines that commence the construction of new roads to reduce the hardship of access to public services. However, in many instances, we all join them in celebrating the new roads and leave them there in



many instances, in the same conditions the yellow machines met there when they first arrived. Our push for reducing our infrastructure deficit in energy, roads and ports must keep in mind that it must fast track industry for sustainable inclusive employment for our majority youth populations. Without greater prioritization of trade and industry in the zone, without the full commitment to utilize technology to modernize our soft infrastructure to improve service delivery and governance we run the risk of the continuous marginalization of the talents of our youth and their ability as innovators to achieve their full potential as productive citizens in our zone.

11. This is why in Liberia, we have commenced the implementation of our agriculture and agribusiness transformation agenda and prioritized micro small and medium sized enterprises with the passing of the Small Business Empowerment Act. We believe investing in these areas will help to fasttrack growth to match our large infrastructure investments.

12. As such, let me challenge all of us to commit to the following:

- Support for regional industrial zones
- Support for a regional coastal transport for free movement of goods, and people across zone
- Support for full implementation of a uniform national identification card similar to our ECOWAS Passport based on a uniform standard that is cheaper but allows our people to move freely
- Youth exchange programs so our young people get to know each other better, because friends are likely to do business and trade better than strangers – we should link our entrepreneurs – they truly can transform the zone.
- Support for regional trade by committing ourselves to buy regionally whenever possible.

13. Dear Friends, when I drive around our country, I see the struggle of our people, I see the potential of our people, I see the natural endowments we are blessed with and yet it is as though we remain blind to the opportunities buried under so many challenges. I worry most about our young people, the youth of our country and often am burdened with what is it we can do more. I see talent and youth optimism hindered by a business environment stuck in 19th century innovation.

14. Today, young people are using technology to see the world. There are more than 140 million, mostly young people on Facebook today, already communicating without borders and customs and all the barriers that keep us from getting to know each other better. It tells me that borders don't have to be barriers and that trade integration is possible, that our populations along our borders are already integrated in some form, but that we are complicating their movements and hence the opportunities for exchanges that could lead to innovations that can transform our zone. We can do better, and I am calling on all of us to strengthen our advocacy on the full implementation of the ETLs and the CET.



15. Honorable colleagues, it is my hope that the deliberations over the past two days presented a thorough understanding of trade policy within the WAMZ and ECOWAS regions and has re-energized our effort to support WAMI in the implementation of our collective commitment to improving intra-regional trade in the zone which is at a dismal 1.2% and around 10% in ECOWAS.
16. As we leave here today, let me challenge WAMZ in developing a monitoring tool to measure the outcome of the commitments made here today at the Forum.
17. Finally, on behalf of the Government of Liberia, I am pleased to serve as your host and wish us all fruitful deliberations at today's ministerial.
18. I thank you all for your kind attention.