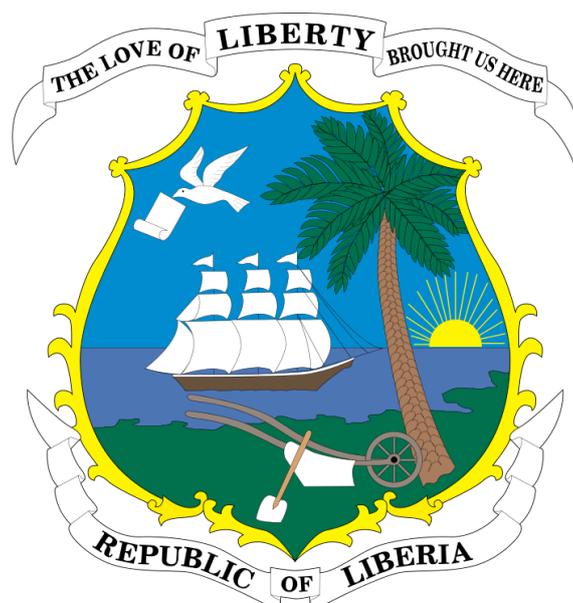

WTO Global Aid For Trade Review 2017

Promoting Trade, Inclusiveness and Connectivity for Sustainable Development



Keynote Address

“Aid for Trade Matter, Because Lives Matter”

H.E. Axel M. Addy

Minister

Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Republic of Liberia

WTO Headquarters
Geneva, Switzerland

Thursday, 13 July 2017
11:00 AM – 13:00 PM



Your Excellency, Madam Aja Fatoumatta Jallow Tambajang, Vice President and Minister of Women Affairs of the democratic Republic of the Gambia

Your Excellency Director General, Roberto Azevedo

Chair of the World Trade Organization Committee on Trade and Development,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Colleagues,

Development Partners and Champions of Aid for Trade,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

1. I bring you warm greetings on behalf of Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia and the people of Liberia.
2. I am delighted to be back in Geneva to participate in this year's Aid for Trade Global Review, "Promoting Trade, Inclusiveness and Connectivity for Sustainable Development." Over the last couple of days we have participated in various sessions that showcased how Aid for Trade can help advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with much emphasis rightly placed on women's economic empowerment.



3. I am particularly honoured to be back in Geneva to speak at this year's event, but this time, as the 163rd Member of this important body. Tomorrow, June 14th will mark our one-year anniversary as a member.
4. Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, We have always seen and valued our membership to this body because the process of accession has served as a blueprint, a roadmap, a foundation to build on for full transformation of our economy.
5. We believe our commitment to this process, sometimes quite challenging, will ensure that we fully integrate into the multilateral trading system by implementing a reforms agenda that improves our business climate by ensuring greater transparency and predictability in the way we do business.
6. We believe our commitment to this sometimes-painful process, that reveals the hard truths of the ills, the many barriers that get in the way of the growth of our forever innovating private sector, is a necessary bitter pill that we must take, because it is about our communities, it is about our people, it is about our lives that matter to an ever-transforming Liberia.
7. This road to accession was a long one traveled for over eight years. Many of you in this room, the champions of Aid for Trade, the WTO, UNCTAD, ACWL, World Bank, EIF, King and Spalding, the Governments of Sweden and SIDA/NBT, Canada



Internal Senior Lawyers Program, our major trading partners the US, China, EU, Japan, UK, Germany, Belgium – many of you championed our march to the finish line because you believe in aid for trade and the power to transform.

8. Imagine, 25 years from now, you will one day see another Minister of Commerce and Industry stand in this very same room and tell you the story of how Liberia is one of the largest exporter of oil palm products, rubber products, and a destination for great tourism. The records will show your colleagues that you were here today, you stood up, and you were one of the champions for aid for trade that turned our ambition into reality.
9. Distinguished colleagues, distinguished champions of trade; Today trade matters more than ever in the history of our world, healthy competitive, predictable and transparent trade ensures everyone has an opportunity to showcase their innovation. For us it matters because too many of our innovators operate in an invisible economy.
10. They have no desire to come from the shadows of informality, and tap into the many opportunities that can take their production to scale. With some 80% of most business transactions in the informal sector, it makes it difficult for us to truly tap into the power of our innovators, our true entrepreneurs.



11. However, aid for trade initiatives for over a decade now have brought to light some of the many innovations often the informal sector. Today we see these innovations and the impact they are having on creating sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable populations our women and our youth. Aid for trade matters because it is about people and the lives they can live in dignity.

12. My fellow champions of trade, today we live in a world where some of the biggest champions of trade are rethinking their positions in the world, whether to look within for strength or continue to look outward. Fundamentally, with the advancement of technology, with so many innovations, all of us in our homes as policy makers, find ourselves asking the questions – what are we doing to ensure our people live in dignity, how are we creating and protecting the jobs of our people.

13. While many of us in this room are working to tear down those barriers because we believe integration across our borders, across the globe is necessary for the growth and survival of our people, others are rethinking that perhaps isolation and protection is better for their growth and survival. This is a real tension that translates into actions that can impact others positively or negatively.

14. It is a real challenge to this body to promote an agenda that says no matter the direction we take in our programs, compromises must pass a litmus test, it must foster the transformation of our people no matter where they call home. In



Rotary, our 4 way tests ask the questions: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned? The quality of trade matters more now than ever, as it can be a vehicle that ensures no person is left behind. Aid for trade can ensure countries like mine catch up in our readiness to compete globally.

15. Excellencies, distinguished champions of trade. Today we live in a world divided only by borders as technology has brought us even closer than ever. Our connectivity has allowed innovators to leapfrog their operations into multinational corporations creating wealth for many, we see Google, Apple, Samsung, Alibaba.

16. Today when I drive around Liberia, I see many of those same innovators struggling to make that breakthrough. Over the last three days we have seen the videos and heard the testimonials, and met some of these dynamic entrepreneurs in countries like mine, and to paraphrase my boss, who dared to dream scary big dreams in very difficult business climate. With your permission, I kindly ask our entrepreneurs here today, to please stand.

17. Colleagues, champions of aid for trade; I am pleased to introduce the future, the hope of countries like mine, the champions of aid for trade; the reason why aid for trade matters. When we implement the SPS agreement, the trade facilitation agreement – these are the innovators that we gave a boost to grow beyond our wildest imagination.



18. In Liberia we see our innovators. Today, despite our outdated systems and many barriers that get in the way of trade, we have Mahmud Johnson, a young entrepreneur successfully selling what used to be simple waste, palm kernel shells to Portugal for biofuel, we have Martha Henries successfully exporting spices and coconut oil, and teas to niche markets in the US. These are the champions of aid of trade that are impacting lives. Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me in a round of applause for our innovators. Thank you for blazing the trail to empower and inspire others for the growth and transformation of the private sector in our countries.

19. Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Colleagues, with your permission, kindly permit me to conclude by using this opportunity to extend my deepest gratitude to His Excellency Roberto Azevedo, whom I met for the first time as a young deputy minister at MC9, in Bali. But we actually had our first official conversation on May 5, 2014 when I delivered a letter from my boss as a recently appointed Minister of Commerce and Industry.

20. For some 502 days, Mr. DG, true to your words that day, Madam President can rest assure that you will do all you can to honor her request for Liberia accession by MC10. True to your words, Your Excellency, you were there with us every step of the way ensuring your office was kept abreast of our progress, with our periodic meetings to update you. Your leadership and support made our scary big dream possible at MC10.



21. As our administration comes to a closure this year, as we transition to a new democratically elected president for the first time in over 40 years, we remain committed to this process, and truly grateful for your leadership and support to our transformation. It has truly been an honor to work with you all and your teams. As I transition out of my current capacity, I am inspired and honored to have worked with people like you Mr. Director General. Ladies and gentlemen, kindly stand up and join me in a round of applause for the His Excellency Roberto Azevedo, a true champion of aid for trade, not in words but deeds. Thank you.

22. To all of you, let me say a big thank you for being here. Thank you for organizing this event, for committing to Aid for Trade. Thank you for indulging in a fruitful dialogue and thank you for creating new friendships, partnerships, and opportunities. I know I leave here energized, motivated and inspired to continue to fight for the role that trade can play in making poverty a thing of the past. Thanks to all of you for being champions of aid for trade. Aid for trade matters because lives matter.

23. With these few words, I thank you for giving me the floor, Mr. Chair.