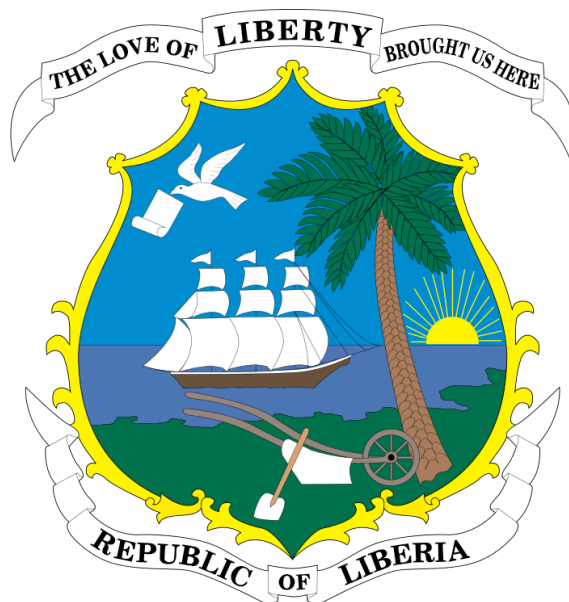

The 14th United Nations Conference on Trade and Development



**Post-Accession Forum: Maximizing the Benefits of WTO Membership
WTO Membership of Afghanistan and Liberia**

H.E. Axel M. Addy

Minister

Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Republic of Liberia

Nairobi, Kenya

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8:00 – 9:00

Kenyatta International Convention Center



1. Mr Deputy Director General of the WTO, _____
2. Mr. Deputy Director General of UNCTAD, _____
3. Madam Executive Director of ITC, _____
4. Excellencies,
5. Distinguished Colleagues,
6. Ladies and Gentlemen
7. Good morning.

8. Let me first of all extend warm greetings to all of you on behalf of Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia.

9. Being back in Nairobi to speak on the WTO Post-Accession brings back fond memories: On June 14th, 2016, Liberia deposited its Instrument of Acceptance of the Accession Package to the WTO, thus meeting the final requirements for WTO Membership. We are pleased to note that Liberia is the 163rd member of the WTO.

10. This remarkable achievement is a direct result of eight years of intensive technical work and multilateral trade negotiations led by the Liberian negotiating team and technicians based in Liberia from various ministries and agencies – let me once again use this opportunity to congratulate our civil servants for this collective achievement. Without you, we would not be here today.

11. I would also like to again recognize several partners whose support made this possible. They include the US, EU, China, Sweden, the WTO Secretariat, *SIDA/NBT, ITC, UNCTAD, ACWL, World Bank, EIF, and King and Spalding Law Firm, and ISLP*. Particularly, I would like to thank the WTO Secretariat for having recently organized a timely National Workshop on Post-Accession under the sponsorship of the China Programme.

Liberia's Accession Process

12. *Ladies and Gentlemen*, WTO Membership lays the foundation for the establishment of a system that promotes inclusive economic growth, attracts foreign investment, and creates an environment focused on increasing international trade. Today we are proud to be an official member of the WTO and subscribe to its rules and values.

13. Our eight years journey to become a full-fledged WTO member has not been an easy one, but today we are proud that despite the many challenges, we succeeded in gaining our rightful place in the multilateral trading system. As we all know, Liberia indicated its interest in WTO membership for the first time in 2007. The following years until formal approval at WTO Tenth Ministerial Conference in December 2015 in Nairobi, Kenya, were spent with technical assistance for the accession process, building capacity for the Liberian negotiating team, conducting stakeholder's awareness, and drafting the actual negotiation inputs. The work did not stop there. The team made several trips to Geneva participating in several pulse checks and technical missions which led to the achievement of critical accession milestones: *Goods Offer, Services Offer, Legislative Action Plan, and the Working Party Report*.



Insight on Post-Accession Implementation

14. For us, the WTO accession was never an isolated process, but instead tied in with Liberia's national development plan, the *Agenda for Transformation*. Hence, our accession is seen as a critical component of our domestic reforms agenda targeted at diversifying our economy, promoting international trade, and encouraging local and foreign investments beyond the traditional extractive industries.
15. To smoothly transition from accession negotiations to post-accession implementation, basic institutional and legal mechanisms based on key priorities were identified and encapsulated in to a Plan, *The Liberia Post Accession Plan (LPAP)*. The Plan accounts for targeted priorities manifested in our National Exports Strategies, the Diagnostic Trade Integration Study (DTIS), as well as our National Trade Policy.
16. It is closely linked to Liberia's commitments in its Working Party Report. Objectives are broadly anchored on both the policy and technical levels with structures specifically designed to ensure implementation. Most importantly, H.E. Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signed Executive Order No. 74 which mandates all stakeholders to support the post-accession program. The program aims to improve trade facilitation, enhance our quality infrastructure, and facilitate the diversification of our economy beyond the extractive industries while building our capacity to render more efficient and effective service to the public through the use of information communication technology.

Maximizing the Benefits of WTO Membership

Trade Facilitation Agreement

17. Today, with support from Sweden an assessment of the country's trade regime was done with regards to the Trade Facilitation Agreement in late 2015 and the World Bank conducted a full trade facilitation assessment mission in March of this year. We also had further technical assistance from UNCTAD for the establishment of the Trade Facilitation Committee.
18. In May of this year, the IFC also conducted a Single Window assessment mission for the trade community. We have begun the process of putting in place a National Single Window that will lead to the automation of trade processes and procedures and contribute to the reduction in trade cost in Liberia.

Quality Infrastructure

19. Today, as we strive to improve the quality of goods entering our markets as such have advanced plans to put in place a Verification of Conformity program to address the challenge of sub-standard and counterfeit goods.



20. With support from Swedish National Board of Trade we have commenced the necessary work Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) assessments.

Liberia's Gradual Transformation

21. Ladies and gentlemen, we have made significant progress since 2005, after emerging from a war that depleted our resources and destroyed our infrastructure:
- a. Since then, we have rebuilt around 700 km of roads.
 - b. By 2017 we will be generating 126 MW up from 0 MW of electricity through the public utility corporation, reaching households throughout Liberia.
 - c. We have begun working on our investment climate with success: it now takes only 4.5 days to register a business compared to 27 days in Sub-Saharan Africa.
 - d. We have recognized that SMEs are critical in our pursuit of our inclusive growth agenda and as such enacted into law, the Small Business Empowerment Act a powerful legislation which mandates that we, as a government must now spend 25% of all public procurement of goods and services on SMEs, with 5% on women owned businesses.
22. We have finalized our Migration Plan, required to adopt the ECOWAS Common External Tariff, and have adopted the Liberia Agricultural Transformation Agenda, which – under the strategic guidance of H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf – focusses on the development of value chains in which we have comparative advantage.
23. Friends and colleagues, despite much progress, the last two years have been one of many challenges. As a commodity dependent economy, the dramatic drop in global commodity prices for iron ore and rubber paired with the health crisis of 2014 severely crippled our economy and threaten all of our gains over the years. Today as a nation, we find ourselves in a difficult position as our ability to finance our development agenda comes with so many challenges. To rebuild our devastated economy we have embarked on a domestic reform agenda and a program of action as prescribed in our WTO Post Accession Plan. To the core of this plan is a focus on economic diversification with emphasis on services, agriculture value chains and value addition through the promotion of light manufacturing anchored around the promotion of full private sector participation, particularly SMEs.
24. To continue on this path of development, we continue to rely on the support of our partners during the implementation process of the WTO Liberia Post-Accession Plan, which has already identified a number of critical trade facilitation reform projects.
25. These include the adoption of the ECOWAS CET, a single window for trade transactions, a trade information portal, pre-arrival processing, improved risk management by our ASYCUDA system, improved cross border management, simplification of customs procedures, electronic business registration, automation of tax procedures, visas on arrival, a streamlined work permit system, the establishment of a sanitary and phytosanitary framework and the planned accreditation of our National Standards Laboratory.



26. Recognizing the challenges of sourcing scarce resources from aid for trade programs, we have developed a plan that requires more technical assistance to develop the necessary framework for private sector partnership for solutions prescribed in the plan. Simple assistance in developing tender documents for private operators to bid on e-solutions around Single Window, Electronic Tax processing and payments, Visa on Arrival, E-Government is what is critically needed to fast track the implementation of the Plan. We believe with such solutions, we can begin to transform the business climate while creating improved opportunities for domestic resource mobilization through the collection of lawful revenues to finance our development agenda.

Conclusion

27. Ladies and gentlemen, colleague and friends, as a nation we have come a long way under the leadership of H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. We are retelling Liberia's story as one of resilience, transformation, and growth despite the challenges.

28. Today with the support of partners such as the World Bank, WTO, UNCTAD, the EIF, and ITC, we are strengthening trade facilitation and the regulatory frameworks by implementing domestic reforms as prescribed by our WTO post-accession package. However, as a least developed country, we recognize that we will need much support as we strive to implement our commitments enshrined in our accession package.

29. Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends, today I stand before you proud and yet humbled by this remarkable achievement where what seemed impossible became possible over a nine months period based on the collective efforts of many of you in this room. This remarkable achievement, Liberia's accession, is a clear testament that in our collective efforts, a commitment to the principles of multilateralism at a time of great threat to this system, is one example that while we may not travel fast on our quest for global transformation for all, I remain confident, we can collectively travel far in achieving equal access and sustainable prosperity for all.

30. With these few words, let me extend my congratulations to the organizers of UNCTAD 14, and the WTO team for this event. And to all of you, I look forward to continuing our discussions and one day inviting all of you to visit an ever-transforming Liberia to see the impact of your support.

31. I thank you.