



WORLD TRADE
ORGANIZATION



International
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LAUNCH OF STUDY: "LIBERIA: A RETROSPECTIVE ON FIVE YEARS OF WTO MEMBERSHIP"

MONDAY, 4 OCTOBER, 13:00-14:30 CEST (HYBRID FORMAT: ZOOM / ROOM E)

*Commentary by Hon. Axel M Addy, former Minister of Commerce and Industry and Chief
Negotiator of Liberia's Accession to the WTO*

Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the WTO,

Honourable Mawine G. Diggs, Minister of Commerce and Industry of Liberia

Ms Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director of ITC,

Ambassador Joakim Reiter, former Chairperson of the Working Party on the WTO Accession of Liberia,

Dr Patrick Low, former WTO Chief Economist,

Representatives of WTO delegations and development partners,

Trade for Peace and Development Champions,

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen,

Greetings to all of you, who continue to champion trade as facilitators of peace and prosperity for all. It warms my heart to join all of you today in the Launch of the Study on Liberia: A Retrospective on Five Years of WTO Membership.

First, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, the first African and Woman to head this august body, I say congratulations to you, for your leadership which bears the prayers and aspirations of a global majority living in least-developed and often fragile economies whose only desire is to celebrate a life in dignity in a global prosperity for all. Madam DG, you can rest assured that Liberia and all of us stand by you and will continue to work to support your vision that delivers a reformed multilateral trading system that is more inclusive, more transparent and more relevant to the issues faced in today's reality. In this manner, I want to personally thank you for championing the rallying call for vaccine equity, for pushing the difficult conversations on fisheries and on a topic dear to my heart, your support for Trade for Peace. Can you imagine, I was even convinced to become a podcaster, to showcase global champions of trade for peace, the true ambassadors of the multilateral trading

system, reminding us all that trade can be a force for good. The Trade for Peace Podcast is a continuous learning process but fulfilling because it gives a voice to those stakeholders on the frontline of trade policy implementation, often operating in difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances. I took on this endeavor because it is a clear reminder that trade is essential to lasting peace. I pray I will have the honor to welcome you as our special guest on the Podcast.

Second, I want to use this opportunity to extend my thanks and appreciation to the Government of Liberia and particularly Minister Mawine Diggs for her leadership. Madam Diggs and I share a common commitment, anything that moves Liberia forward we stand ready to support. I want to commend her leadership in supporting the work that led to this study. The Minister and I often communicated on a regular basis to move the process forward. As an old African proverb states “if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together.” Liberia’s post-accession has come this far because of many of you in this room, and the continued commitment and will of the Government of Liberia in spite of its challenges. I also want to use this opportunity to thank once again the Government of Sweden and our former Working Party Chair, Ambassador Joakim Reiter, and former Head of ITC, Arancha Gonzalez who together with the late Dr Chiedu Osakwe were the tour de force of Liberia’s accession in the trade community. They were the friends of Liberia that led the international engagement for the successful conclusion of the accession.

Fellow trade champions, how far Liberia’s has come and will go is also a testament to the collective efforts and will of local and international civil servants, all committed to a simple principle – trade is not only about delivering prosperity to the global few, but about lives, and the passport to delivering dignity to the bottom billion living mostly in least developed countries, many in a state of fragility. Today, I once again want to applaud their efforts in the roles they play in their respective organizations at home and abroad. Thank you for your service.

Third, I want to echo the sentiments of the other speakers in extending sincere gratitude to all of the partners supporting countries like Liberia and the many advisors whose work continue to remind us all, that whilst we have come thus far, there is still more work to be done. The work of the WTO Secretariat, ITC, UNCTAD, the World Bank and WTO Members continue to support Liberia’s effort in implementing its commitments and reforms necessary for its growth of inclusion. Your support is moving Liberia forward, in spite of the challenges.

Finally, I want to thank the Government of Liberia and the leadership of Minister Diggs, the ITC under the leadership of our friend and sister Ms Pamela Coke-Hamilton and the WTO Accession Division under the leadership of our friend and sister Ms Maika Oshikawa for this study. And, of course the man behind the study, Dr. Patrick Low. Patrick and I consulted on the study which maps out where we are in our WTO post accession journey, five years later as a country. Thank you, Patrick.

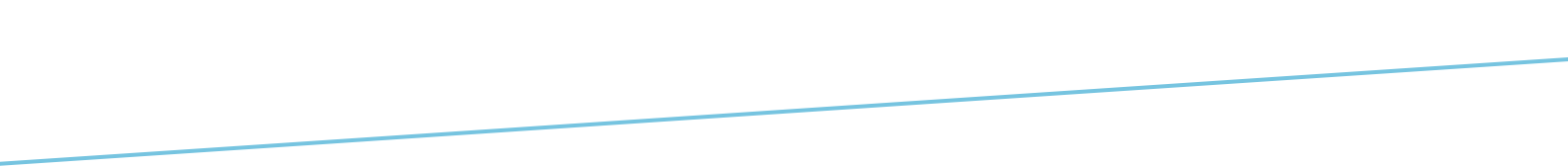
Distinguished friends of Liberia, the study highlights the milestones achieved and the challenges of Liberia’s post-accession journey. As such, allow me to make the following comments:

1. The study conveys that the work of the multilateral trade system is still critical for countries like Liberia in their pursuit of reforms that deliver sustainable and inclusive economic growth. It reminds us all that while countries like Liberia may possess the political will to move their post accession process forward and implement the necessary reforms, they lack the capacity, and therefore will require continued support in their post WTO accession efforts if they are to experience a sustainable growth of inclusion. On the 29th of April of this year, Liberia ratified the TFA, a testament to the will of the leadership under his excellency President George Manneh Weah. But the answers on impactful implementation evades policymakers, when citizens ask “and so what?” In this context, I would plea that Liberia needs a robustly strengthened mission in Geneva that would fully operationalize its rights and obligations as an active member of the WTO.
2. The Liberian story is a true trade for peace story. A nation that suffered a protracted and devastating civil conflict, elected Africa’s first female President Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who spent over a decade protecting the fragile peace while reactivating Liberia’s productive sector for exports growing revenue from under 100 million to half a billion dollars while securing investment commitments to the tune of 16 billion dollars. I witnessed first-hand, children going back to school; I witnessed first hand, families resettling in their communities, and I experience the joy of witnessing first hand, ex-combatants becoming surfers on the beaches in Robertsports, apart of a new and growing tourism reality.

Fellow trade for peace champions, in 2018, I also had the privilege to witness the peaceful transition of power with the election of His Excellency George Manneh Weah. But most interestingly, election contenders competing for legislative seats rushed to the courts to adjudicate election disputes, rather than to the bushes to take up arms. In today’s Liberia, young people for once have grown in an environment of peace. All significantly due to economic growth driven by trade of Liberia’s primary commodities, iron ore, rubber, and now oil palm. The Liberia story is a clear example of the value of the multilateral trading system, when trade can work for good and sustainable peace. And it continues to serve to inspire those who aspire to join the WTO.

I say all of this to say that the challenges highlighted in the study pose a fundamental question. How are ongoing reforms talks within the WTO and its extensions better move Liberia’s needed reforms forward in a measurable and tangible way that delivers impact to the lives that matter most, particularly when there is political will?

3. And finally, the WTO Accession process can be a journey in frustration in a drive for members consensus. Madam Minister, you are in your second home. A trade community that will actively engage those who are actively engaged. Given some of the challenges highlighted in the study I pray that this visit is the first of many visits and re-energizes this trade community to support your efforts in driving a robust reforms agenda to address Liberia’s accession commitments and Liberia’s progress on its ratification of the AfCFTA.



In closing, let me once again thank all of you for your commitment to the Liberian story and championing the cause that trade is a force for good. I remain committed to contributing to the transformation that delivers dignity in shared prosperity for all and I hold true, that trade is also about the global majority whose lives matter and as such, remains an essential ingredient for sustainable development and lasting peace. I thank you.
