

**Keynote Address by the Minister of Finance & Development Planning at the Symposium
on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

August 14, 2017

The Director General for SDGs Center for Africa, fellow Ministers and other officials of the government of Liberia here present, members of civil society, representatives from the academic community and the private sector, members of the fourth estate, distinguished ladies and gentlemen

We express thanks to the Lord, almighty and are grateful to all of you for gathering here today to share ideas and experiences concerning the domestication of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). On behalf of the government of Liberia, we appreciate the presence of Dr. Belay Begashaw, the Director General of the SDGs Center for Africa. Dr. Begashaw visit will allow us to assess our progress and help us gain more knowledge and understanding of how to further improve Liberia's efforts towards achieving the SDGs.

This event comes at an appropriate time for Liberia because our country is in the process of developing the successor framework to the current 5-year national plan, the Agenda for Transformation (AfT), which includes domestication and mainstreaming the SDGs. As we take stock of current progress and challenges in achieving sustainable development, strategize on how to integrate the SDGs at every level of national planning and budgeting, and offer innovative ideas for building partnerships on SDGs among our regional partners as well as partnerships between government and non-government stakeholders, alike.

Since its inception in July 2015, the SDGs Center for Africa continues to play a pivotal role in rallying African leaders to ensure effective collaboration for the achievement of a shared African development vision. Through this initiative and many others, the Center has been in the business of providing technical support and a wide range of other services to various stakeholders involved in the implementation of the SDGs across the continent. Your work has helped to shape the focus of the discourse in terms of how Africa can engage the implementation processes of the SDGs through the application of context specific lenses instead of a 'one-size-fits all' approach.

Meanwhile, to provide an overview of the steps Liberia has taken toward domestication of the SDGs, it is important to start with a brief background of the role the SDGs play in Liberia and Africa, and our recent efforts toward sustainable development. When the SDGs was in its planning phase, prior to the UN General Assembly adoption in September 2015, Africa did not sit and watch from the sidelines as a spectator. The continent played a key role in the formulation process. Governments on the continent worked together to develop the Common African Position or the CAP, which outlined Africa's shared priorities for the Post 2015 Development Agenda. Our President, Her Excellency, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf chaired the High Level Committee that crafted CAP. At the global negotiations on the SDGs, CAP proved to be influential. For example, the inclusion of peace and security as one of the Pillars of CAP provided impetus to creating Goal 16 of the SDGs, which emphasizes peaceful and safe societies. Therefore, when we talk about domesticating SDGs, we are not referring to accommodating ourselves to something that is foreign; we are simply aspiring to achieve what we have believed to be important all along.

Knowing what we need to work towards, does not eliminate the challenges associated with achieving those goals. In 2012, when Liberia embarked on the AfT, the country's GDP was growing at about 8.3%. Peace and security had been maintained, and production of iron ore and rubber and other mining activities revitalized following the 14-year period of civil unrest. The AfT laid out an ambitious plan for sustainable development, which included 5 pillars: (1) Peace, Security, and Rule of Law (2) Economic Transformation (3) Human Development (4) Governance and Public Institutions, and (5) Cross-Cutting Issues, such as gender, youth, and environment. Many of you will recognize that these same issues highlighted in the AfT are part of the SDGs. Even though the country has achieved progress in these areas, there were 2 unexpected shocks that incapacitated our prospects for continued progress and growth: the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak and the decline of global commodity prices. These shocks caused severe devastation to Liberia and the region's economic growth.

The recognition of these challenges to achieving sustained development compels us to gather here today to exchange ideas and experiences. Many of us have common thoughts for sustainable development - economic transformation and poverty reduction, improvements in education and health, development of science and technology, environmental sustainability, peace and security – but unfortunately

resources are limited. We must collaborate to identify innovative and cost-effective solutions to these complex policy challenges. Additionally, it is of great importance to strengthen partnerships with other governments throughout Africa and non-government stakeholders; we must coordinate our work and build synergies to maximize the impact of our collective resources. For example, the Agenda 2063, which outlines a long-term vision for Africa in alignment with the SDGs, includes 12 continental flagship projects that require collaboration of both government and non-government stakeholders. I would encourage us to think strategically about priority areas where multi-stakeholder cooperation can yield fruitful results.

Nonetheless these challenges, Liberia has made some progress towards domesticating the SDGs. In November 2015, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, collaborating with the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) through support from the UNDP, held a dialogue in Buchanan on enhancing capacities and statistical foundations for SDG domestication. Additionally, the dialogue provided participants the opportunity to prioritize goals of the SDGs that would be relevant to the development objectives of the country. The dialogue included representatives from the government of Liberia, local authorities, and members of the media, civil society, and private sector. The deliverables of the dialogue included, but not limited to, a list of SDGs that focused on priority items for the country.

In January 2016, as a continuation of the Buchanan Dialogue, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf officially launched the SDGs in Liberia. This program was graced by several dignitaries, both local and international, including the President of the Sustainable Development Institute, Professor Jeffery Sachs. It should be mentioned that Liberia has agreed to implement a single development plan which would be aligned to the global and continental development frameworks. To this end, the Government of Liberia developed a roadmap for domesticating the SDGs, Agenda 2063 and other frameworks, which were approved by the cabinet. As part of the roadmap activities, the government of Liberia completed a midterm review of the Aft, and conducted a harmonization mapping of the Aft, SDGs, and Agenda 2063 that assessed at the indicator level the extent to which Liberia's current 5-year plan captures continental and global development frameworks. The government has also undertaken a series of stakeholder engagements on the SDGs including a national dialogue with members of religious communities and civil society organizations on Liberia's development priorities.

Additionally, in line with the Mainstreaming, Acceleration, and Policy Support (MAPS) process recommended by UNDP, which seeks to create awareness as a crucial first step to the implementation of the SDGs, Liberia has undertaken a series of awareness outreaches on the SDGs across the country as a way to inform citizens: students, teachers, local leaders, women, and youth.

With support from the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the Government recently completed sector consultations with various institutions across the 11 budget sectors to identify strategic priorities linked to the SDGs and Agenda 2063 for the next medium term. A study to gather baseline information on key indicators in the AFT, SDGs, and Agenda 2063 has been concluded by the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning.

Currently, there are efforts to draft the successor framework to the AFT, which brings together sectoral priorities into a holistic national strategy. It also further elaborates on the arrangements for planning, coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating SDGs implementation. The successor framework will help guide the next government after this year presidential and legislative elections to continue to develop and work to achieve the new medium-term plan.

Once again, it is my singular honor to say thank you all for gathering here today. We can use this forum as an opportunity to find innovative ways to strengthen our continued collaboration and to combat challenges to Liberia's sustainable development.