

Remarks by Dr. Florence A. Chenoweth, Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Liberia at the World Summit on Food Security

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Chairperson
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I bring you warm greetings from the President of the Republic of Liberia, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. She would have wished to participate personally in this World Summit on Food Security but could not make it due to other prior official Government commitments. She has asked me to convey her apologies to the organizers of the summit, especially to the FAO Director General Jacques Diouf.

Liberia shares the view of the FAO and His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI that hunger is a poverty problem; that it is the cruelest and most visible sign of poverty. Hunger is usually prevalent where there is persistent poverty. Eradication of hunger and poverty therefore requires combined national, regional and global efforts. The increasing level of world hunger (currently estimated to be over 1 billion people) is the litmus test of the degree of commitment by world leaders to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goal #1: Halving of hunger and extremely poverty by 2015. Liberia shares your views, Director General Diouf, that this is a tragic achievement in these modern days when our technology allows us to travel to the moon and to space stations and yet we can not feed the hungry on earth that has enough food even now to feed every man, woman and child.

Mr. Director General, we have taken time to view the FAO video spot on world hunger and to browse the dedicated website appeal for hunger strike. We wish to assure you that Liberia, under the leadership of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, is committed to taking every opportunity to increase the awareness of public opinion at home and across the globe on the fate of the one billion hungry people in the world and the unnecessary tragic death of a child every six seconds from hunger.

Agriculture is, and will remain for the foreseeable future, the main source of growth and poverty reduction in many African countries. In Liberia, the main growth and development strategy – the “Poverty Reduction Strategy – PRS” clearly recognizes the role of agriculture as the engine of overall economic recovery, growth and development.

Building on the objectives embodied in the Government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Liberia Agriculture Sector Investment Program (LASIP) – which has a series of clearly defined bankable programs - was developed and validated in October 2009. It seeks to transform Liberian agriculture within the framework of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP). LASIP provides a framework for progressively increasing

Government's annual budgetary allocation to the agriculture sector to a minimum of 10% to ensure sustainable annual 6% growth in compliance with the Maputo Declaration of 2003.

The Global Financial Crisis and Increasing Commodity and Food Prices

As we all know now, the persistent increases in global financial and food prices over the past two years had severe impact on the poorer populations of the world, with most of them in sub-Saharan Africa. We know also from recent studies that 82% of the 22 developing countries that are especially vulnerable due to a combination of *high levels of chronic hunger, high dependence on imports of petroleum products*, and in many cases, *dependence on imports of major grains* such as rice, wheat and maize for domestic consumption are found in sub-Saharan Africa. Liberia is in the group of the 22 highly vulnerable developing countries, and there are clear examples of the impact of the global financial and food crisis to show. For example, the average price for 50kg bag of rice (the staple food in Liberia) increased from US\$28.00 in 2007 to US\$45.00 in 2008. The price as at September 2009 was returning to 2007 level.

As a response to the global financial and food crisis in 2008, the Government of Liberia, in collaboration with its development partners, initiated a number of programs to deal with the impact of the crisis, including:

- Suspension of import tax on imports of imported staple food (rice).
- Suspension of tariffs on agricultural equipment, materials and supplies.
- Market access for farmers through a joint P4P (Purchase for Progress) program involving the Ministry of Agriculture, WFP and FAO. As part of its food assistance program, WFP agreed to purchase locally produced food commodities from smallholder farmers in Liberia through contracting with farmers cooperatives.
- Establishment of a Rice Stabilization Fund to purchase and distribute local seed rice to farmers and to buy paddy rice to be milled for sale.
- Launch of a joint UN/Government of Liberia program for: (1) enhancing *food availability* by addressing production, processing, marketing constraints of small farmers and maintaining predictable and suitable imports, (2) *improving access to food*, through enhancing opportunities for employment and increased incomes and improving infrastructure so that Liberians have better physical access to food, and (3) *promoting better utilization and improving nutritional status*, through better prevention and monitoring of malnutrition, as well as supplementary and therapeutic feeding actions aimed at young children and pregnant and lactating mothers.

Opportunities in the Midst of the Global Food Crisis

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the global food crisis has not only posed many serious challenges for African countries, but it has also presented some opportunities for the agriculture sector in particular and the economy as a whole. Some of the opportunities include the following:

1. ***Renewed spotlight on the importance of agriculture as the engine of socio-economic growth*** in the short, medium and long term. Two quick examples include: (1) The 2008 World Development Report was devoted to the agriculture sector with specific call for more investment in smallholder farmers and their productivity; and (2) This World Summit on Food Security that is calling world leaders to commit themselves to investing in smallholder farmers, with emphasis on investing in the following areas:
 - Infrastructure and basic services – roads, small scale irrigation and water management, market structure, storage facilities, health and sanitation facilities, education for youth.
 - Market information to advert market instability.
 - Research and extension services which are farmer-driven.
 - Post production services – processing, value addition and marketing.
 - Appropriate mechanization to reduce the drudgery associated with subsistence agriculture which makes it unattractive to the youth.
 - Urban and peri-urban agriculture to cater for the sprawling population with huge vulnerable unemployed youth, women and the aged. These huge vulnerable urban population poses both food security and global security risks, especially for post-conflict fragile country such as Liberia.
 - Women roles in the agricultural value chain – acknowledging that agricultural development programs should place special emphasis on women’s equitable access to resources and opportunities. This requires mainstreaming of gender issues into agriculture programs to ensure sustainable development.
2. ***The global food crisis has also created a high demand for agricultural produce.*** In Liberia, for example, the annual demand for rice is about 400,000 metric tons while production is 175,000. In 2008, Liberia imported rice at a cost of \$200 million. This implies that if cost-effective production is stepped up there will be ready market for farmers’ produce.
3. ***There is increasing emphasis on food and nutrition security,*** especially strengthening on-going productive safety net programs aimed at uplifting the very poor and vulnerable groups, especially for those groups that are food insecure (i.e. pregnant and lactating mothers, children, widows, physically challenged and the aged).

4. ***Greater attention to institutional and human capacity building***, including rebuilding and revitalizing agricultural research and extension, renewing agricultural education and training and improving coordination and management.

The Way Forward

On September 26, 2009, Liberia was one of the 130 countries that participated in a “Partnering for Food Security” event co-hosted by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and the USA Secretary of State Her Excellency Hillary Rodham Clinton in New York where participants expressed broad support for the principles to end global hunger through country-led food security strategies agreed to by more than 25 countries and organizations at the G8 Summit in LAquila, Italy in July 2009. These principles include: (1) support for country-led processes; (2) a comprehensive approach to global hunger and food security; (3) strategic coordination of assistance; (4) support for a strong role for multilateral institutions; and (5) a sustained and accountable commitment of financial resources, including US\$20 billion in resources pledged at the G8 Summit.

The participants at New York “Partnering for Food Security” event proposed the following steps to move these principles forward:

- Intensify support for ongoing efforts to advance effective country-led and regional strategies; develop country-led investment plans and programs to achieve the goals of these strategies; ensure mutual accountability through public benchmarks, indicators, and a peer review framework to measure progress; and, to develop a flexible financing architecture that includes well-coordinated bilateral and multilateral mechanisms to support these integrated country-led strategies and investment plans.
- Support and expand Nor-South, South-South and Trilateral cooperation for the development and implementation of country-led, comprehensive plans.
- Work with regional economic communities, associations, organizations and agencies to strengthen their mechanisms for financial and technical cooperation with donors and other stakeholders to support country-led strategies and investment plans and to facilitate regional economic integration.
- Support the ongoing reform processes aimed at improved efficiency and effectiveness of existing international organizations and agencies, including the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and FAO.
- Strengthen international coordination on financing and joint actions in global processes, including through the framework of the UN High Level Task Force.
- Adhere to the commitment of US\$20 billion over three years through a coordinated, comprehensive strategy focused on sustainable agriculture development, while keeping a strong commitment to ensure adequate emergency food aid assistance, in accord with the LAquila Statement.

- Monitor and evaluate partners' contributions to ensure transparency and accountability.

Liberia welcomes and supports these key principles and the proposed steps to move them into action. These principles and steps perfectly match Liberia's own commitment to take decisive actions to rebuild its agriculture sector that was completely destroyed during the prolonged civil conflict. We aim to have a stronger agriculture sector through which we can improve food security and nutrition, and have sustainable agriculture systems at all levels – national, county and district levels.

Whereas a broad support from donors and development partners is good, we should not stop here. Liberia, therefore, calls for urgent actions to be taken to forge and consolidate on-going and new measures to ensure food security. Some of the urgent actions include:

- Promotion of Safety Net and nutrition programs at local levels through participatory means for vulnerable groups;
- Promotion of integrated programs along agricultural value chain of input supply, production, processing and marketing;
- Forging stronger regional and continental linkages on issues related to food security programs, such as (1) the Coalition for Africa Rice Development (CARD) which is being supported by JICA, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), FAO, Africa Rice Center, and Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA); and (2) Purchase for Progress (P4P) that which is being supported by WFP; Establishment of Mano River Food Security Hub with specific emphasis on countries within the Mano River Basin (Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone);
- Instituting targeted agricultural producer support services for African smallholder farmers as means of getting agriculture moving faster and steadily. The approach should build on the experience of Malawi's targeted support for its agricultural producers over the last few years that has enable the country to move from a maize-deficit to maize-exporting country. This approach is consistent with the practice in OECD countries which spent about US\$258 billion in 2008 or 23% of incomes received by their farmers.
- Increase the focus on agriculture and food security in Africa by using continental agricultural development framework such as the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) as a viable platform for accelerating sustainable agricultural development programs. CAADP is African-created, African-owned and African-led under the auspices of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Liberia joins other African nations in calling on donors and development partners to commit themselves to transforming the various past declarations (e.g. The Accra Agenda for Action, The Paris Declaration, The LAquila Joint Statement on Global Food Security, as well as the declaration of this World Summit on Food Security) in support of CAADP and other African agricultural development initiatives into concrete actions; and

- Commitment by African governments to the 2003 Maputo Declaration under which African leaders agreed to allocate a minimum of 10% of their national budgets to the agriculture sector to ensure annual growth of 6%.

Chairperson, Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates, Liberia has participated in all of the major meetings and summits that have been organized to heighten awareness of world hunger including:

- The World Food Conference in 1974 organized by FAO;
- The World Food Summit in 1996 organized by FAO;
- The Millennium Development Summit in 2000 organized by the United Nations that ended with eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of which halving hunger and poverty was Goal #1;
- The World Food Summit Five Years Later” in 2002 organized by FAO to heighten awareness that the eradication of hunger from the 1996 summit were not being met;
- High Level Conference on World Food Security – The Challenges of Climate Change and Higher Energy Cost organized by FAO in 2008; and
- The Current 2009 FAO World Summit on Food Security.

These high level meetings or summits, heretofore, have had minimal impact on changing the plight of the hungry and poor in the world. It is Liberia’s fervent hope that this time world leaders will exercise the political will to end global hunger once and for all. We know that this is all that is needed.

Chairperson, Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates, I wish end my remarks by expressing special thanks and appreciation to the organizers of this World Summit on Food Security, especially the Director General of FAO (Jacques Diouf) as well as the Executive Director of WFP (Josette Sheeran) and the President of IFAD (Kanayo F. Nwanze). I wish to assure you that Liberia is committed to the declaration of this summit to ensure food security for all.

I thank you for your kind attention.