



**MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**LIBERIA AND THE UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMME OF ACTION  
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS**

By  
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**On the Occasion of the UN Conference to Review the Progress Made in the Implementation of the  
Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light  
Weapons in all its Aspects**  
**UN Headquarters, New York, June 27, 2006**

Mr. President,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I wish to join colleagues before me in congratulating His Excellency Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam who has been elected to steer the deliberations at this very important Conference to Review the Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects. I feel deeply honored to lead my country's delegation to address this Conference which, by being held in itself, is a triumph if we consider from whence we have come five years and more ago. I am sure that colleagues present at that first Conference in 2001, who, like me had nightmares over whether a concensus would ever emerge, must be feeling a sense of achievement, even if our hats have changed from civil society leaders then, to government representatives today.

**Objects of statement**

Speaking on behalf of the Government and people of Liberia, my delegation and I would like to simply do three things:

First we wish to reaffirm to you the people of the world that Liberia is now at peace, having ended fourteen years and more of a devastating war in which small arms and light weapons were the main instruments of activities and to thank you for the immense contributions the United Nations and the entire international community have made and are still making to that end and peace consolidation.

Secondly, we are here to express in no uncertain terms our strong support for this Conference which we believe is critical to ensuring that indeed what was agreed five years ago as a Programme of Action will keep on the track of serious and concrete action, incrementally building on the immense achievements made towards making our world a safer place.

And thirdly, to bear testimony and give encouragement to why the world can not but work together in preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects through the concrete experiences of Liberia.

### **Testimony of Liberia**

I am sure that many will agree that Liberia is one of the best placed countries to testify that indeed small arms and light weapons are a scourge which kills, harms, breaks up families, makes orphans, denies children their childhood, promotes HIV/AIDS and other principal killer diseases such as malaria, Tuberculosis, diarrhea, dysentery, etc, creates unemployment, and facilitates the perpetration of all manner of heinous crimes including rapes, robberies, and domestic violence especially against women. Yes, indeed, we can testify that small arms and light weapons are the principal tools used to force millions into refugee camps with several millions more displaced in their own countries, destabilize peace, collapse states or make them fail and simply create unquantifiable, indescribable, unexplainable human suffering, pain and anguish.

Mr. President, if you insist that I make the Liberian testimony more concrete for the consciences of the doubting Thomases, I will just mention a few indicators of the general impact of the war and armed violence to wit:

- About 10% of Liberia's 3 million population died from gun wounds or other means facilitated by the presence of arms;
- About 40% of the population became refugees with a higher percentage having been internally displaced at some point;
- About 5% bore arms one time or the other for violent purposes;
- The entire Liberian state experienced intermittent collapse with military, police and other security structures being personalized by rival warlords;

- Social economic services and infrastructure were destroyed, manifested by:
  - the absence of central electricity supply everywhere including the capital city;
  - non-existent central pipe borne water anywhere in the country;
  - the destruction of educational facilities from pre-school to higher educational institutions;
  - the destruction of health facilities;
- Unemployment rate is about 85%;
- National debt stands at US\$3.6billion, US\$3.3billion of which is external and is 568% of GDP;
- Real GDP (even with the slight recovery from the peace dividend) in 2005 amounted to an estimated US\$191.5 representing only about 15% of the US\$1269 level in 1980.
- About 76% of the population is living below the poverty line ( that is less than US\$1 per person a day), with 52% in the extreme cases of less than US\$0.50;
- Armed violence, arms and destabilizing armed elements were exported to neighboring countries;
- The rapid decline in life expectancy now standing as low as 48 years due to many poverty induced factors including the increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS currently estimated at about 8.2 to 10% of the population and the spread of malaria, Tuberculosis and curable and preventable child-killer diseases; and,
- The expending of scarce sub-regional, regional and international resources which could have gone for development on efforts to end the war and provide humanitarian assistance. A great deal is still being expended on peacekeeping and peace maintenance operations in the country today.

In brief, I can say that the grisly picture that these statistics paint of Liberia may pale in the face of the real suffering, pain and mental anguish that Liberians and the people of the sub-region have endured as a result of the armed conflicts. These experiences and the fact that most of those who bore the brunt of the armed violence are youth qualify our country to perhaps be the most severely war affected in the world.

### **The POA and where Liberia stands**

Against the backdrop of our experience with armed violence, my country commits itself to pursuing nationally, sub-regionally, sub-regionally and internationally, the principal positions outlined in the POA and the improvements contained in the President's submission evolving from the broad consultations which are continuing. We are particularly pleased with those provisions that aim at encouraging and ensuring responsibility and accountability on the part of states who manufacture, trade in, transfer, and provide support in arms, and whose citizens trade in or serve as arms brokers or from whose jurisdiction arms flow to zones of conflict or potential conflict. Progress made on brokering, marking and tracing, information sharing, and other fronts must be improved, broadened, respected and hailed for the common good.

Liberia is manifesting this responsibility and accountability by the processes and policies the new administration of Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is adopting. Not only are we reorganizing and restructuring our security services, we have been fully respecting the UN Security Council Arms Embargo on our country which has been in place for over a decade. Our new army and other security services when reconstituted will be issued arms only after clear evidence of their responsibility and accountability. Liberia is working with other West African Countries by the recent signing of the landmark ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. We are also undertaking a number of novel programs such as the "Arms for Development" being implemented by the United Nations Development Program with the support of friendly governments like Japan and others all aimed at using balanced development initiatives to promote and consolidate peace in local communities.

### ***Benefits the New Liberian Government expects***

Liberia believes, from experience, that our newly won peace can only be consolidated and peace dividends gained when we do what we are doing including the promotion and implementation of the UNPOA. Among what we expect to gain and for which we solicit international support and cooperation are:

1. The creation of jobs and more jobs for our restless young population among whom is the unacceptably high rate of unemployment which provides a ready source of followers of charlatans or demagogues

who could once again exploit legitimate grievances to pursue selfish aims through war. The Government is therefore calling for multiform support to the country's reconstruction program.

2. Creation of easy access to adequate educational opportunities: From pre-school to higher education, Liberia is in dire need of buildings, facilities, teachers, professors and equipment.
3. The building of other socio-economic facilities and programs including support to the ongoing efforts by the new Government to provide functioning central reliable public electricity, water and sewer systems and roads as well as encourage agricultural programs. The investment climate is now better than never before.
4. The lifting of the unbearably heavy debt burden considering that with all the best of intentions to pay its creditors, the country just cannot pay. We therefore appeal for the cancellation of our debts using the now available mechanisms for debt waivers, the conditions for which the new Government is ready and able.

### **Tributes**

Mr. President, permit me to end with a tribute to those governments and people from many parts of the world who stood by Liberia in our search for peace during the very difficult past and are still with us as we pursue development. I must mention in this regard, the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations, the United States of America, People's Republic of China, Japan and the many others of you present who time can not permit me to name. On the struggle for the POA and arms control, we express deep thanks to civil society/non-governmental organizations especially the International Action Network on Small Arms and its partners. Lastly, but not the least, we must pay tribute to the women of the world who have led and are leading the time honored struggle for a world free of armed violence. Liberia, as you know, manifested this appreciation by electing one of them, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, as President over a field of 20 men, thus making her the first woman to be so elected in Africa. She sends you all warm greetings.

May God bless us all.