

**STATEMENT TO THE LIBERIAN PARTNERS' FORUM
DELIVERED ON BEHALF OF GENDER SYMPOSIUM DELEGATES**

FEBRUARY 14, 2007

THE WORLD BANK

It is my pleasure to be speaking to you on behalf of the women of Liberia – the majority of the country's population.

I speak to you following deliberations at a gender symposium of a powerful group of women leaders from government and civil society held to prepare for the Partners' Forum with the support of the World Bank, UNIFEM and the Initiative for Inclusive Security; those involved in the conversation represent over a million Liberian citizens. I would like to ask all of them to stand and be recognized.

We would like to give you our thoughts.

Women were critical in bringing peace to Liberia. They protested, cajoled, and negotiated with all the parties. They sat in the rain, marched, chanted and sang. During the conflict, they maintained their families and their communities. Organizations such as the Mano River Women's Peace Network and the Women's Peace Building Network led the call for peace. In the end, their strong, non-violent message prevailed.

As we rebuild, women must continue to be full partners and their needs must be met. The women at the Gender Symposium reflected on the interim poverty reduction strategy; their written thoughts are being distributed.

First, on behalf of Liberia's women, we would like to recognize and congratulate the Government and the donor community for all of the progress that has been achieved. The lights, the water, and the economic growth are a testament to a great deal of hard work and investment.

As we plot the path forward let me give you some key thoughts on moving ahead:

1. Human security matters. For peace to endure, efforts to maintain social order and protect Liberia's borders must be coupled with programs to rebuild the social fabric in communities, eliminate violence against women, and address root causes of conflict like competing land tenure claims. We must not starve economic and social programs to provide solely for national security. We shouldn't underestimate the need for local trauma healing and reconciliation in the rush to rebuild infrastructure.

2. We have to make sure programs are executed well. We will only serve all Liberians if efforts are designed with everyone's needs in mind.
 - When we renovate prisons, we must remember that there will be male and female prisoners as well as youthful offenders and design space to serve all.
 - When we sort out land tenure, we must remember the need to protect the rights of women, particularly female-headed households, so that they are not doomed to poverty.
 - When training men and women for the security forces, we need to remember that they will have lingering biases and anger as a result of war; for them to treat all citizens equally we will need to provide trauma counseling in addition to basic training.
 - When we seek to eliminate corruption, we must combat requests for sex as well as money in exchange for favors and services.

3. We must ensure that women are engaged. Women bring different perspectives, skills and expertise; those skills are needed for success. Women need to be equally educated, trained, contracted, and empowered. We must guarantee that policies around defense, security, job creation, and the civil service are developed with women and serve women. In particular, the women of Liberia are ready to help with local reconciliation, trauma healing, and reaching out to youth; let's involve and engage them in those efforts.

We have an opportunity to show the world that Liberia can be a model for inclusive reconstruction. Let's make sure we allocate the financial and human resources needed for us to deliver on President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's promise and vision to bring prosperity and peace to all Liberians.

Delivered by Julia Duncan-Cassell, Superintendent of Grand Bassa County.

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