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STATEMENT

By

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to the 52th Session of the CSW

“Financing for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women”

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Madam Chairperson;

Excellencies, members of the NGO community and distinguished delegates:

Firstly, I bring you warm greetings from Her Excellency, Madame Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia and the people of Liberia.

Two years ago, at this very forum – we laid out the challenges that our nascent democracy, under the capable leadership of Africa's first female President, Madam. Ellen Johnson Sir-Leaf-faced in terms of women's participation in political processes as well as in reconstruction efforts. Today, I stand before you with much pride at our achievements in two very short years.

In the area of women's participation in the various arenas of inclusion and leadership, we have about 361 women officers out of 3664 officers in our Liberian National Police – that is about 10% in active duty and more are currently being trained. 23 top positions in LNP are occupied by women – including the Inspector General of police. We have established a women and children protection division within LNP to specifically deal with protection of women and children. We have 28 women out of 148 officers in correction, 14 out 94 members of the parliament are women, 5 out of 15 County superintendents and 2 out of 5 members Supreme Court judges are women. Women also head key ministries in Liberia – including Ministry of Finance, Commerce and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sports as well as Ministry of Gender and Development.

These might not be impressive statistics when compared to other countries but in two short years we were instrumental in strengthening women's participation in political and reform process and are in the right direction to ensuring more qualified women occupy public offices and are more than optimistic that over the next couple of years we will be able to reach the minimum benchmark of 33% women's real representation in political as well as public positions.

With regards to reform measures, Liberia has also undertaken critical legal reforms for protection and empowerment of women – including the **Rape Law** (December 2005), which criminalizes gang rape – and the **Inheritance Law**. The Government has also ensured that the Ministry of Gender has been actively engaged in the land reform process as well as other reforms processes by working closely with the Governance Reform Commission.

We have also conducted key assessments and studies that give us a clear picture of the issues that need to be addressed to promote gender equality and fill in the gaps in current reconstruction and development efforts. Over the last two years Liberia has produced, with the assistance of key partners including, UN, Donor Community and NGOs

- **National Gender Profile**
- **Survey of Market Women (to assess the needs of women marketers and transforming them from small businesses to medium businesses)**
- National Gender Policy Framework. We are currently in the process of finalizing the National Gender Policy through wide consultations and validation exercise. Once finalized, we are certain that the implementation of this policy would lead to further empowerment of women and achievement of true gender equality and justice.

As you all are well aware, Rape is one of the most widely reported crimes in Liberia and Gender Based Violence is prevalent as the consequence of two decades of conflict. Women in post-war Liberia not only continue to bear the brunt of war years – the continued prevalence of gender based violence is debilitating women and girls physical and psychological well being. To eradicate this scourge that causes so much suffering not only to survivors, but their families, communities and the country at large, we have developed the **National Plan of Action for the Prevention and Management of Gender Based Violence in Liberia**'.

This Plan of Action aims to reduce the high incidence of Gender Based Violence as well as provide quality care to survivors using a multi-sectoral and inter-agency approach. This comprehensive plan addresses GBV holistically through focusing on five thematic areas – psychological care, economic empowerment, health, legal/justice, protection and coordination. Through a coordinated implementation of this plan we sincerely hope to transform attitudes and behaviors that contribute to high incidence of GBV as well as strengthen mechanisms to prosecute perpetrators of GBV and provide necessary care and support to the survivors.

We have also taken tremendous strides in mainstreaming gender in all policies and development processes underway in the country. The National health policy affirms gender equality as a core principle that guides access to and provision of national health services. Liberia has developed the '**National Reproductive Health Commodity Security Strategy and Operational Plan (2008-2012)**' through which quality contraceptives and other reproductive health commodities can be accessed by every person. We are currently engaged in developing a **Gender Sensitive Social Welfare Policy**.

The two decades of conflict and civil unrest has severely affected Liberia's social infrastructure and capacity. The education sector faces immense challenges in terms of rehabilitating schools and retraining qualified teachers. Girls and young women still miss out in primary and secondary education due to various reasons – including due to sexual harassment. Liberia has developed **Girls Education Policy** whose primary goal is to improve access of and retention levels of girls and young women to quality primary and secondary education. Emphasis is also laid on providing accelerated learning to young women to make up for years of lack of facilities and opportunities for education and be able to benefit from targeted schemes to improve women's role in public sector – including in the police.

Sustained efforts were also made to **mainstream gender in the Poverty Reduction Strategy**, due out in March 2008. We are very happy to inform this august body that most of our priority strategies proposed through **Gender Equity Working Group** (composed of Line Ministries, NGOs, UN and the Donor Community) have made it into the first draft of the PRS. We have facilitated and encouraged grass-root women's participation through women's only consultations as well as in general consultations and validations of priority strategies defined.

Together, we were able to identify the real issues affecting women and men across the country and propose innovative and far reaching strategies to mainstream gender into all the four pillar focus areas of the Liberian PRS – National Security, Economic Revitalization, Governance and Rule of Law, and Infrastructure and Basic Services.

We are also proposing the establishment of gender officers in all public institutions and line ministries whose main role would be to build the capacity of the institutions to create more conducive working environment for women as well as

mainstream gender in all policy, plan and programme development. We also hope to ensure that all public institutions and ministries set the standard by adopting code of conduct, sexual harassment policy and gender sensitive human resources policy. These steps, we are sure, would enable women to participate fully in public offices. We are also proposing special vocational training for girls and young women as well as provide opportunities for women to fully participate in non-traditional areas of employment, including mining and increase their share in formal sector.

All these policies would be of no relevance if appropriate finances are not allocated for their implementation. This brings us to the priority focus theme of this 52nd annual forum of the Commission on the Status of Women – **Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**. Allocation of finances would require a thorough gender analysis on how provision of funds for specific activities would result in promoting gender equality and achieving women's empowerment. Resources should be made available for gender specific research on analyzing impact of various measures. For example, studies have shown that female and male farmers access and utilize seeds differently – where as male farmer tend to access commercial seed varieties, female farmer on the other hand, use part of the crop produced as seeds for future crops due to differential priorities, in terms of preserving seeds for future crops. Therefore, any measures to improve farm yields should take into consideration these differences and proposes strategies that would benefit both men and women.

Further, institutional mechanisms need to be reformed to facilitate equitable participation of women, particularly in political process. For instance, any decentralization policy or mechanisms should ensure structures and mechanisms are established after a careful gender analysis to promote women's participation. Measures to involve women should not be an add on to the reform process but should be

mainstreamed. Mainstreaming should be based on comprehensive gender analysis for which appropriate resources should be allocated.

We also recognize that this simple change in priority allocation of funds to understanding access patterns and priority needs of men and women – would require substantial change in the fiscal thinking and appropriate reforms in all our countries. Post conflict Liberia is an unique position to actually engage in real reform processes as our war wary nation takes steps to address structural causes of marginalization and exclusion that led to conflict. We have taken this opportunity by horn to ensure that all reform process including administrative and political reform processes mainstream gender.

Liberia has recognized that gender responsive budgeting and financing should be incorporated into all its fiscal policies. The Ministry of Gender and Development has taken steps to ensure that executive, the legislature and bureau of budget as well as NGOs and County administrative structures understand the meaning and importance of mainstreaming gender and the need for allocation of specific targeted funds that would ensure promotion of gender equality.

We have already started providing basic training to the legislature as well as county administrative structures on gender mainstreaming and are currently preparing for initial basic training for the executive and the legislature in gender budgeting. We do recognize that it is a process and have initiated the necessary steps in the right direction in order to ensure that the commitment to gender equality that we have professed in all the policies that I have mentioned above are translated into real action and results.

Resources and results should be followed with **accountability**. Individual governments should be held accountable to fulfill their obligation to allocate resources to achieve gender equality. International forums like this should provide the

opportunity to hold governments accountable on their promises

On that note, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this forum for prioritizing this particular theme which is of extreme relevance not only to Liberia but to all the women across the world – who are impatient to see all the promises made in the past 50 years fulfilled or at the least right steps are taken in the right direction to realize our dream of equality and empowerment.

I, personally, am very keen to learn lessons from those countries which have taken steps towards gender responsive budgeting and hope to carry away innovative strategies that I can use to convince my colleagues at various ministries to adopt. I look forward to a lively discussion over the next two weeks.

I thank you, Madam Chairperson, for according my Country such courtesy as well as affording me this great privilege to share with this CSW Session the Liberian achievements.

