

Distinguished Guests,

I am pleased to make a few closing remarks on behalf of the President H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who could not be with us today.

First, I would like to thank our dear friends at the ILO, Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative, as well as my colleagues at the Ministry of Labor. We have rarely had the opportunity to have so many committed guests attend an international workshop in Liberia, and are glad that you have come to Liberia regarding such an important topic.

This has been a unique and important meeting. I am not alone in having learned a lot about the concept of Decent Work during these two days. In fact, while we have always appreciated the programs of the ILO here in Liberia, I think that the Decent Work concept, and the way the convenors of this event have suggested a multi-Ministry, multi-stakeholder approach to Decent Work programs, will take us to a new level of collaboration and impact.

As was said on the first day, *Lifting Liberia* is our conception (?) of our Poverty Reduction Strategy. And we realize that it will require the hard work and strong commitment of a range of stakeholders for Liberia to lift itself out of poverty, and to secure the kind of lasting peace that our citizens yearn for. As Jordan Ryan said yesterday, a job is the necessary alternative to a gun here, and a job is the generator of the peace dividend.

We appreciate the UN system's strategy for working with us on employment: stabilize income generation through emergency employment, focus on local employment, and build the frameworks and institutions for to create sustainable and long-term decent work opportunities.

Many speakers recognized that at least 80% of jobs in Liberia are in the informal sector. Let's open our eyes more to not just the challenges, but also the opportunities, for women and men to earn better incomes and have improved conditions of work in the informal sector. We heard about the need for greater capacity in government at the local level to support this, which is very much in line with our Government's focus on bringing development to the grassroots.

We heard throughout these two days about the special efforts that must be made to empower working women. They, even more than men, need better access to finance; equality of opportunities; and education and training.

We heard concrete experiences and recommendations from the private sector. Some of the companies here are leading the way in terms of human rights policies, and commitment to monitoring these policies. We hope to attract companies like them to Liberia, and to help us raise the bar on how foreign investment supports decent work efforts.

At the same time, we recognize that the government has the major role to play in building capacity among its formal and informal workforce to take advantage of their employment opportunities, as well as to ensure the human rights of its workers are respected. These are ambitious goals, but they are not out of reach if we prioritize decent work, and work together across ministries to achieve it.

We heard a valuable lesson from Mozambique that is very relevant to Liberia – concentrating on creating jobs at the small farm level, and increasing the domestic supply of food, are effective remedies for a country shattered by conflict, and can lead toward broad-based and equitable growth. Liberia has the right combination of resources – arable land, water, and labor. But we must encourage our ministries, our domestic and international private sector, our workers, and our civil society organizations to collaborate more effectively to achieve this.

This workshop has built on the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the concept papers prepared previously by the Ministry of Labor with the support of the ILO and others. We have, in this workshop, elicited further ideas on a decent work program that will involve a wide range of partners and local organizations. The Ministry of Labor later this week will go one step further to determine a more concrete outline for the program ahead.

The President, and my Ministry, are personally committed to supporting such programs to succeed. Mary Robinson in her opening remarks suggested that we will take this agenda to the UN General Assembly in New York, and thereby strengthen the employment focus within the MDGs. Liberia is committed to working on that, and my Ministry will work with Realizing Rights and the ILO on their planning for New York.

Finally, many of you know that gender equality is an issue that is very important to me. I also have a commitment to bringing a Decent Work theme into the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security in Liberia next March. The focus on gender in our panels and our breakout sessions in these two days has provided a good starting point for that work.

Once again, thank you for joining this important event in Liberia. And with that please

allow me to close the meeting.