



Public and Private Sector Meetings Deliver Results for Government of Liberia

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The Government of Liberia participated in its first major donor conference since President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's historic election as the first African female Head of State in January 2006. The Liberia Partners Forum brought together representatives from 22 countries, 27 international organizations, and 30 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for Partners Forum hosted by the United States Government, the World Bank Group, the African Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations in Washington, D.C., on February 13-14, 2007.

The Partners Forum was addressed by World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. Secretary Rice used the opportunity to announce the cancellation of Liberia's \$391 million bilateral debt to the United States, which was accumulated over the course of the civil war. The debt was a large burden for the new government to bear and it is hoped that the U.S.'s debt forgiveness will trigger similar actions by other donors such as the World Bank. Liberia has a total outstanding debt of \$3.7 billion and President Johnson Sirleaf has made repeated calls for debt removal in order to free up scarce resources for investment in development of the country, which will ultimately help to bring about lasting peace.

The private sector component of the forum was as important as that of the donors meeting. Secretary Rice raised the profile of the private sector by mentioning the CCA-led Private Sector Investment Forum in her remarks.

To this end, CCA President Stephen Hayes said that Liberia is central to achieving stability in West Africa. He added that President Johnson Sirleaf is a leader who not only has the potential, but also the dedication to make things work in her country. He reiterated that she and the Liberian cabinet cannot achieve success on their own and will need the full support of the private sector. Both the public and private sector are looking to Liberia to be an anchor country in the region.

Growing the Private Sector in Liberia

The sold-out February 15, 2007 Liberia Private Sector Investment Forum was led by the Corporate Council on Africa in cooperation and co-sponsorship with the Government of Liberia, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). The tightly-packed one-day program featured a stellar line-up of speakers including: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf; six cabinet officials from the Government of Liberia; Mr. Robert Mosbacher Jr., President and CEO of OPIC; Mr. Robert L. Johnson, Founder and President of The RJL Companies; Mr. Alex Cummings, President and COO of The Coca-Cola Company, Africa; Mr. Joseph Matthews, CEO, Arcelor Mittal Liberia; and Hon. Ambassador Susan Schwab, United States Trade Representative among numerous others.

The Liberian private sector was on hand to provide a direct account to future investors about the prospects for doing successful business in the new Liberia. Private sector representatives from Liberia included: Dr. Nat Richardson, President of Bong Mines/Geo Services and Amlib United Minerals; Mr. Harry Greaves, Managing Director of the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company; Dr. Fodee Kromah, President and CEO of the National Oil Company of Liberia, Mr. Guy Pas, Founder and Chairman of Mano River Resources; Mr. Julius Dennis, Managing Director of Roberts International Airport; Mr. Francis Dennis, President of the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment; Mr. Charles Harris, Managing Director of the National Housing Authority; Mr. Harry Yuan, Managing Director of the Liberian Electricity Company; and Mr. Sam Mitchell, President of the Liberian Business Association. Equally encouraging were the number of panelists and participants from countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom who are presently doing business in Liberia.

Undoubtedly Liberia's Diaspora, which numbers approximately 400,000 in the United States, will be a major factor in unleashing the country's economic potential. Most of them are educated and own and run successful businesses. The private sector forum helped expose the tip of this tremendous potential. Presentations from businesspersons in the Diaspora who are presently invested in Liberia or who are exploring investment in the country included: Mr. Richelieu Dennis, Chairman and CEO of the Sundial Group of Companies; Mr. Simeon Freeman, CEO of Consolidated Group and Vist Group; Mr. Charles Morrison, President of Scientific Concepts; and Dr. Lawrence Jones, President of the LAUVICOM Group. Many others attended as general participants.

Significant Deals are Announced

The 500 attendees were party to a number of significant announcements geared towards fostering additional private sector support for Liberia. These included:

1.) An Open Skies framework agreement between the governments of the United States and the Republic of Liberia — U.S. Ambassador to Liberia Donald E. Booth and Director General of the Liberia Civil Aviation Authority, Richelieu A. Williams signed the agreement, which was reached after January 2007 talks between a Liberian delegation, led by Liberia Civil Aviation Authority Director General Richelieu Williams, and a U.S. delegation chaired by U.S. State Department's Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs that included officials from the U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Commerce.

2.) A bilateral Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) between the United States and the Republic of Liberia — The TIFA was signed by Hon. Ambassador Susan Schwab, United States Trade Representative and Hon. Olubanke King-Akerele, Minister of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Liberia. Under the TIFA, a Council on Trade and Investment will be formed to address issues such as implementation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, trade capacity building, intellectual property, and labor and environmental issues. The council will also help to increase commercial and investment opportunities by identifying and working to remove impediments to trade and investment flows between the U.S. and Liberia. Liberia became eligible for benefits under the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in January 2007. Ambassador Schwab praised the Government of Liberia for the tremendous amount of work it had done to put in place all the necessary processes, which led to the signing of the TIFA.

3.) The announcement of a \$30 million fund between The RJL Companies and OPIC — Robert L. Johnson, the founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET) and the majority owner of the National Basketball Association's Charlotte Bobcats, announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the RLJ Companies (RLJ), the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), the United States African Development Foundation (USADF) and CHF International (CHF) for the

formation of a \$30 million dollar RLJ Liberia Enterprise Development Fund (LEDF) at the luncheon, where he was a panelist. LEDF will provide capital investment and support to promote private enterprise and job creation critical to rebuilding social, political and economic foundations in Liberia. Mr. Johnson emphasized his commitment to Liberia and the need to foster stronger linkages between the African American community and Liberia.

4.) The United States Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) Grant Announcement for the Mount Coffee Hydro Plant in Liberia —

The grant was signed by USTDA Director, Thelma Askey and was witnessed at the Private Sector Investment Forum by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The agreement will provide Liberia with a grant of \$400,000 to assist in developing the country's power sector. The grant will fund the technical and economic feasibility of the reconstruction and expansion of the Mount Coffee Hydro Plant, which was destroyed during the civil conflict.

What's the Relevance?

The goal of the planning committee of the Liberia Private Sector Investment Forum was to provide a direct account of the new stability engendered by President Johnson Sirleaf and her government, the strengthening business climate in the country, and the opportunity for diverse

investment. The forum succeeded in highlighting each of these vital areas. However, the true test will be in the follow-up and in the ability to keep the doors to trade and investment open between the U.S. and Liberia. One area that could quickly speed-up the prospects for doing business is the establishment of a direct flight between the United States and Monrovia. Some assistance is being facilitated for the development of Roberts International Airport to meet international standards, which could in turn foster the much needed flight.

The Corporate Council on Africa will continue to play a role in keeping the dialogue moving forward. To this end, CCA plans to establish a dedicated country working group for Liberia. CCA will publish all conference presentations as well as links to information pages from key partners such as the IFC and OPIC on its website and will also maintain an active database of companies interested in investing in Liberia. CCA plans to work in close cooperation with the National Investment Commission, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Embassy of the Republic of Liberia in Washington, D.C., as well as its U.S. public and private sector partners.

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