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All protocol observed

I bring you greetings from the Republic of Liberia and from our dynamic president H.E. Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female president of Africa, and former Chair of ECOWAS. We are happy to mention that ECOWAS is making tremendous progress in the areas of peace and security, common trade and economic integration.

Just after the end of the 51st Summit of ECOWAS Heads of State which took place in Monrovia, Liberia, our illustrious president on 6 June launched the High Level Panel on Migration in Liberia. The launching which emanated from a high level meeting held in Ethiopia, came on the margins when more than 30 men and women, mainly youth died of thirst while enroute to Europe through the Sahara Desert. This is not the first of its kind in Africa, and other parts of the world including the Middle East. There are countless stories and statistics accounting for the number of deaths from people trying to migrate within and without the continent, especially to Europe and other developed countries.

Migration is a complex problem that has existed for more than a century. Why do our people migrate in and out of the continent or even in their own countries? There are several known factors responsible for internal and external migration. First, let us look at the issue of political instability. Since the end of colonialism, there have been more incidences of political instability resulting from intra state to interstate armed conflicts. People caught in the web of political instability are left with limited options; one of which include migrating to a safer environments.

Economic hardship, or increased poverty has also been cited as one of the important reasons people, mainly youth migrate to other parts of the world. They do so based on information on income and wages in different parts of the world. Africa's reliance on the exploitation of natural resources as the basis for economic growth and developments pose serious constraints on its ability to meet most of its domestic
demands. Compounded by this is the decline in the prices of natural resources which is also contributing to the increase rate of poverty, especially among rural poor.

The level of income and economic inequalities in many African countries is a serious recipe for migration. The advent of globalization and technology including social media, TV and the Internet have given youth around the continent a broader idea of the level of inequality to the extent that they find no hope in their own countries. One question that arises out the migration discourse is who are those that are migrating to Europe and other developed countries? The answer is not only just the poor that live on less than a dollar a day, but also those that are slightly or partially better off, and in spite of the hazardous risk, people are still willing to migrate.

Addressing the challenges associated with migration require the right policy approach that focuses on meeting the needs of adolescent youths in Sub-Saharan Africa. Statistically speaking, the youth population of Africa constitutes about 19.5% of the total population between the ages of 15-24. And that number is expected to increased in the coming decades.

*The 3S (Stability, Security and Sustainability) and migration*

The 3S represent the answer to some of the problems of migration. How can the continent ensure security, stability and implement a sustainability mechanism so as to mitigate the growing wave of migration, especially on the part of youth, the most vulnerable group of our society.

At the level of West Africa, the issue of military coup no longer exist. Military adventurism has no place in the political life of the people. Coup makers must find another trade. Consequently, the issue of stability, whether economic or political is still a major problem confronting the continent.

The lack of vital social services, including access to basic education, health care and employment opportunities are all but some of the challenges confronting the continent, and this could create an imbalance in the demographic dividend. The dividend of a growing youth population in Sub-Saharan Africa must be seen in jobs opportunities through improved and quality education and technology.

Without addressing these problems through strong and implementable reforms based on equitable distribution of societal wealth, accountability, transparency and the rule of law, achieving the 3S will be an effort in futility. We as Africans, especially at the leadership level must begin to create a strong relationship between our natural resources use and management and provide for the needs and aspirations of our people. We must do all we can to ensure that the left lane (the youthful generation) in the tunnel is incorporated into our national development planning and processes.

It is in recognition of the very important role migration plays in the continent's transformation that the African Union adopted a resolution on International Migration; mandating the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Union Commission (AUC) to establish a High Level Panel on International Migration in Africa. Migration is now a top policy issue within the framework of the African Union and other regional bodies on the continent.

*Disaggregating Migration to include Environmental Considerations*
This presentation has devoted most of the time to the social and economic aspect of migration and how it can affect the human resource capacity of developing countries. What we are yet to touch on is the environmental implications of migration, especially in West Africa with emphasis on land degradation.

ECOWAS' protocol on the free movement of goods and people within the region, has given rise to the issue of migration. Studies showed that one of the many reasons there is an intensive migration within West Africa is due to the search for fertile land. Other natural resources scarcity such as water is also responsible for ethnic, religious and other conflicts in the region. Land disputes according to the Governance Commission of Liberia represents the highest in terms of court cases.

Almost 65% of the population in West Africa rely on agriculture and other activities for sustainable livelihood. However, given the finite nature of land, and the emerging scarcity which is a direct result of population growth, presents a major problem to its carrying capacity. Coupled with the problem of land scarcity is also the challenge created by climate change and its vulnerability which is posing serious constraint for farmers-a recipe for increased poverty amongst rural poor.

The over utilization of land through shifting cultivation and other forms of flawed farming practices are the major factors leading to land degradation. A degraded land is less likely to produce enough food for the family, and by extension makes the achievement of goal 2 of the SDGs likely unachievable leading to food insecurity, a further recipe for political and social instability within the region.

As land becomes less cultivable, people within the region will migrate to more fertile areas such as the situation between Benin and Nigeria where farmers from the Atacora-Dasari region migrate to Western Benin and Nigeria in search of fertile land. This situation is also common along the borders between Liberia and Ivory Coast, where hired Burkinabe farmers are being short changed by both Liberians and Ivorian citizens under a labor for land agreement. The quest for land through a migratory process can lead to social tension once not addressed on time.

There are still others that believe that access to land rights and security of tenure should be a constitutional issue. That land rights and citizenship should be one and the same. This sort of policy prescription could pose a serious barrier to other ECOWAS's citizens in search of fertile land for agriculture purposes.

As population in West Africa and other parts of the continent increases, demand for fertile land will undermine efforts aimed at protecting biodiversity and ecosystems services. Citizens have already begun to intrude on wetlands, forest and protected areas as well. Land set aside for conservation of biodiversity are under threat, especially those involving trans-border such as the Gola Forest between Liberia and Sierra Leone or the Ta-Grebo Forest between Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire.

**The need for strong policy and actionable dialogue**

With a growing population of more than 300m, internal migration within the region could pose serious challenge on scarce natural resources such as land and water. Furthermore, as food insecurity threatens livelihood in rural parts of the region, life becomes unbearable, and citizens will migrate to the urban communities and settle in nearby slums. An overcrowded slums obviously become vectors of all sorts of life threatening diseases such as diarrhea, cholera, malaria, dysentery etc. So the circle of scarcity and poverty continue.

The High Level Panel on International Migration must not only look at the social and economic implications of migration, but rather seize the moment by understanding the negative relationship between
migration and land degradation and deforestation. As population swears across the region, climate change adaptation strategies such as multi-cropping, climate smart agriculture, lowland farming and integrated pest management may not be a sustainable environmental approach any longer. The right policy approach must focus on improving the livelihood of youth, through the provision of training in basic skill sets for market driven job opportunities.

Additionally, more attention should be placed on youth in rural communities who only rely on farming, illicit mining, pit-sawing and unsustainable logging for sustainable livelihood. All of which are drivers of land degradation, drought and deforestation. Addressing goals one and two of the SDGs, require that we concentrate on the problems associated with intra-state and inter-state migration. But better still, ensuring that Goal 15 of the SDGs is overwhelmingly inclusive in the policy dialogue of youth and migration.

If they must return home, they must return home to their land, but in the absence of fertile land to plow, migrants, in particular rural migrants might as well be global citizens looking for better opportunities to make a living.

I thank you