



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM SIDE EVENT

TRADE FOR PEACE: ADDRESSING FRAGILITY THROUGH ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND SHARED PROSPERITY

THE CASE OF WTO MEMBERSHIP FOR LIBERIA AND AFGHANISTAN

STATEMENT BY HON. MAWINE G. DIGGS, MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY OF LIBERIA

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Sulaiman Bin Shah, Deputy Minister of Industry and Commerce of Afghanistan,

Mr. Xiangchen Zhang, WTO Deputy Director-General,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

I am honoured to join you today for this side event to the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2021 on ***Trade for Peace: Addressing Fragility Through Economic Integration and Shared Prosperity: The Case of WTO Membership for Liberia and Afghanistan.***

In the spirit of collaboration, the Trade for Peace Programme acts a bridge between the trade, peace and humanitarian communities and advocates for truly interdisciplinary approaches to peacebuilding.

For Liberia, as a founding member of the g7+ WTO Accessions Group, and personally, as a speaker in the first edition of the Trade for Peace Week this past December, it has been a pleasure witnessing first-hand how the Programme has evolved since its creation in 2017.

ACCESSION EXPERIENCE OF LIBERIA

Today, I would like to share with you some insights on the accession journey of Liberia in the hopes that our experiences can serve as a stark reminder of the applicability of WTO accession to countries in the process of transitioning from fragility to stability.

On 25 June 2007, Liberia submitted a formal request to join the WTO. From the outset, we viewed WTO membership as a key step in integrating into and benefitting from the rules based multilateral trading system.

However, progress was slow as our economy faced twin shocks from a sharp drop in commodity prices from 2012-2015 and the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in 2014. The shocks revealed weaknesses in our institutions, economy and infrastructure and stalled our WTO accession for over 6 years and 10 months.

Despite socio-economic and health challenges, the Liberian government seized WTO membership as an opportunity to carry out extensive reforms to address domestic insecurity and re-start and rebuild the economy for inclusive growth.



In December 2013, Liberia re-initiated its accession process under the leadership of my predecessor Mr. Axel M Addy. With the support of WTO members, we pursued a fast-tracked accession, which was enabled by several elements:

- The high-level political commitment from the President
- The appointment of a Chief Negotiator at the ministerial level
- The establishment of an inter-ministerial taskforce on WTO accession
- The adoption of an accession roadmap and a negotiating strategy by the Cabinet

- The active engagement to mobilize technical assistance and donor support

This fast-track process is now commonly referred to as the Liberian Accession Model.

On 14 July 2016, Liberia became the 163rd Member of the WTO. Nevertheless, the process of reform continued as we carried out the Liberian WTO Post-Accession Plan (LPAP) to deliver the commitments made during the accession process.

Following the successful completion of our WTO accession, it has become evident that membership to the Organisation was a critical instrument to allow Liberia to re-brand following the economic and health crisis by strengthening our domestic institutions, promoting inclusive economic growth, supporting micro, small and medium enterprises and restoring the confidence of investors in the stability and transparency of our business climate.

Although Liberia's WTO accession process was unique, it demonstrated that WTO membership is not only attainable for countries undergoing periods of fragility but can also be harnessed to bring about stability.

PEACEBUILDING EFFORTS AND SDG IMPLEMENTATION

Building on our accession-related reforms, the government of Liberia has institutionalised our belief that economic growth, stability, and peace can be mutually supported through international cooperation.

With the support of the United Nations in Liberia, we have developed the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development 2018-2023, a five-year strategy centred around four interconnected pillars:¹

1. **Pillar One:** "Power to the People" is built on the idea that the foundation of human development is health and education supported by programmes that reduce vulnerability, particularly among women, children and youth.
2. **Pillar Two:** "Economy and Jobs", which focuses on raising the productivity and income of every Liberian worker by creating an appropriate policy setting, enhancing competitiveness, and extending and upgrading the nation's infrastructure.
3. **Pillar Three:** "Sustaining the peace", which addresses the root causes of conflict and fragility by ensuring that the human rights of all Liberians are protected by the rule of law and broad-based access to justice.
4. **Pillar Four:** "Governance and Accountability", which highlights the capacity of the state to honestly, competently, and efficiently fulfil its responsibilities to all Liberians.

¹ United Nations Liberia, *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2020-2024) (Liberia)*.



We have further articulated our 2020-2030 peacebuilding agenda in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Liberia, which will support our Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PADR) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals.² Our priorities under this Framework include: human development and essential social services; sustainable economic development; sustainable peace, security, and rule of law; and governance and transparency.

Through these agendas, the government of Liberia is taking huge strides to meet our economic targets while also supporting peace, reaffirming our strong commitment to multidisciplinary and inclusive approaches to peacebuilding.

CONCLUSION

In a period of increased vulnerability for fragile and conflict affected states,

the experiences of Liberia before, during and beyond WTO accession represent the clear benefits of integration into the multilateral trading system.

I look forward to further exploring the accession journey of Liberia and the trade-peace nexus in fragile and conflict affected countries with you all throughout our discussion today.

Thank you.

² United Nations Liberia, *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2020-2024) (Liberia)*.