

Senate Confirmation Hearing
Minister
Ministry of Commerce and Industry,
Government of Liberia
Delivered to Senate Committee on Commerce and Industry
Remarks by
Honorable Axel M. Addy
Minister Designate
12:30PM, April 10, 2013,
Capitol Hill, Monrovia, Liberia

Honorable Chair, Senator Abel Massalley,
Honorable Co-Chair, Senator Geraldine Doe-Sherif,
Honorable Members of Committee,
Other Honorable Members of the Legislature here present,
My fellow colleagues, Members of the Cabinet
Members of the Judiciary,
Distinguished Members of the Fourth Estate,
Other Distinguished Guests,
Family and Friends,
Ladies & Gentlemen.

Good afternoon and thank you for your presence here today.

I am humbled to be in the presence of this honorable body, called here to present my vision for the position of Minister at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. In her infinite wisdom, our President, Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has called on me to serve my country. I am grateful for this opportunity to join all of you in your dynamic leadership to carve a brighter future for a Liberia our children can be proud to call home.

On August 25, 1987, distinguished elected Liberians, like yourselves, approved an act “to amend the executive law of 1972 with respect to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Transportation” thereby creating the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

In their wisdom, they envisioned the core functions of the Ministry to include the “promotion, development, regulation, control, operation, and expansion of commercial, industrial enterprises and activities in the Republic, with broad powers with respect to protection of the public interest and the achievement of national goals through the establishment and enforcement of standards for commodities and for trade.” It further notes that in the Ministry’s execution of its functions, it shall also:

- a) Establish and regulate commodity and trade standards;
- b) Collect, evaluate, and publish data pertaining to commerce, industry and transportation;
- c) Establish and enforce standards of business practice;
- d) Promote sound development of foreign and domestic commerce
- e) Develop plans for the movements of goods and people within and without the Republic;
- f) And perform such other function as may be assigned from time to time by the President.

Distinguished members, I am honored to have had the opportunity to work under the leadership of Hon. Miatta Beysolow, Minister of Commerce and Industry who has been working tirelessly to promote and stimulate a vibrant and mature private sector. Under her mentorship, I have gained extensive knowledge of the intricacies of the Ministry. I am grateful and honored to have had her as my Minister. I will continue to lean on her and other former Ministers of Commerce and Industry for their wisdom in charting a new direction for the Ministry.

Honorable members, I am a staunch believer that to fast track our recovery, we must work to stimulate the growth and maturity of the private sector, the engine of growth. No country has transformed without the growth and innovation of a vibrant private sector. A vibrant private sector can lead to job creation to employ our very large and energetic youth population. A vibrant private sector can empower our dynamic entrepreneurs to innovate through a free market yielding the emergence and growth of a middle class. A mature, independent and vibrant private sector is the key to continuing our development agenda as development assistance become scarce. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has the mandate to ensure a growing, vibrant and mature private sector while protecting the public interest.

Honorable members, as a senior manager with extensive experience in development, I bring transferable skills of effective and efficient management. With over 10 years of diverse management experience, I envision moving the Ministry in a new direction, towards a more effective and efficient Commerce.

Honorable Chair, In 2004 I joined an organization called Populations Services International (PSI), a US based international health non-governmental organization known for social marketing and behavior change communication. In 2008, after years of lobbying for PSI to start

work in Liberia, I was presented with the unique opportunity of starting the Liberia operations with seed funding of \$700,000. I began operations here working with the support of the Ministry of Health. In that capacity not only did I have the core management responsibility of staffing and building the organization, I also had to develop and manage relationships with government, donors, international and local partners, while also committing to a self imposed fundraising target of \$1million per year.

Thanks to the support of Dr. Walter Gwenigale and the hard working partners in health, in March of last year, I successfully ended my tour with PSI after 4 years of service. I am most proud of my achievements there, as that opportunity allowed me to make a difference in the lives of my people. On my last visit and set of meetings in concluding my tour, I visited Lofa, Nimba and Bong and met with community members and the youth across these counties that were benefitting from the PSI programs. I was happy to see that the PSI programs were having an impact on the lives of so many Liberians. I was also quite happy to turn over a multimillion-dollar organization that had passed several donor audits at the end of my term.

Honorable Chair, distinguished members, colleagues and friends, I bring a wealth of experience to this unique opportunity. As in all of my previous positions, I aim to lead an administration driven by the principle of respect:

1. Respect for the unique opportunity that has been given us to serve our country at this time in our history, where we can contribute to our nation's transformation.
2. Respect for the achievements and aspirations of my predecessors who strived to make an impact on our economy under sometimes very difficult circumstances.
3. Respect for the people that make up the Commerce and Industry family and the wealth of knowledge and experience they bring to the table.
4. Respect for the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead, and the unique opportunity for innovation to tackle those challenges.
5. Respect for the power of a competitive and innovative private sector where integrity, partnership and mutual respect drives the sector growth and solutions to problems are driven by a spirit of mutual cooperation.
6. Respect for the power of research based decision-making as a key strategy to building a successful organization.
7. And most importantly, respect for the ultimate power of the legislature and its ability to transform our economy through transformative legislation that can truly impact our country. I look forward to improving our engagement in the spirit of collaboration in the interest of putting Liberia first.

Honorable members of the committee, I am also aware of the many challenges of the private sector given the many phone calls from various friends and colleagues since the announcement of my nomination. I believe most have been centered on price regulations, the influx of

substandard products on the market, BIVAC inspection procedures, greater Liberian participation and ownership in the economy and job creation.

Honorable committee members, I believe in free enterprise, where the market is free of monopolies and unreasonable restrictions, and is driven by fair practices and healthy competition that always aspire to supply quality goods and services to meet the demands of the market while cognizant of the rights of the public. I believe we must always aspire to export more and import less and to do so we must work hard to be more competitive in the cost of doing business in Liberia while promoting local production in our country.

Honorable Chair, distinguished members, my vision for the Ministry is driven by the experience gained as Deputy Minister for Administration and Deputy Minister for Commerce and Industry. During this period, I began the task of addressing the many concerns raised by people like yourselves. My administration will continue this focus in the following key areas under the theme “Rebranding Commerce and Industry. They include:

1. Capacity Building: We have begun a staff-training program with support from partners to address the major capacity gap. We have also begun the systems automation and upgrade to ensure transparency and predictability in how we work. We have launched our website www.moci.gov.lr. We are in the process of moving towards the automated processing of Import Permit and Export Permit Declarations. We are also concluding on negotiations that will bring in external capacity in strategic areas including trade facilitation, finance, IT, and WTO.
2. Standards: We will continue the upgrade of the National Standards Lab and move towards the creation of the National Standards Board that will regulate standards in our country to tackle the many standards related challenges including substandard goods on the market and international standards of certification of goods for export.
3. Industry Promotion: We will work to reward and protect local production in manufacturing particularly in the agriculture sector. We must protect our infant industries and nurture their growth and transformation into major productions for the domestic and international markets. We must promote value addition as our *modus operandi* if we are to create a prosperous middle class.

We have a trade deficit of over \$300 Million dollars given our very high imports volume. We are spending too much of our foreign exchange on buying commodities we do not produce locally. We must change this direction by targeting some of our revenue in key investments in agriculture, most importantly around food production and agribusiness. Cassava production and processing is just one example of the many a unique opportunities to change this trend.

4. MSME: We will work to drive innovations by investing and holding the hands of our Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises as they represent our greatest potential for job creation. The only way we can change this is by transitioning our businesses in the informal sector to the formal sector to improve their access to government services. This month on the 24th we will launch Liberia's first international conference on MSMEs and a buy Liberia Trade Fair.
5. Legislative Reform and Enforcement: By virtue of our mandate we are required to enforce the law and promote legislative reforms where necessary as our business climate changes. One of such laws is the investment code and the 16 businesses set aside for Liberians. We have created a task force that has begun working on the enforcement of the law. We are in the process of soliciting support to bring in legal counsel that will lead our law reform agenda.
6. Public Relations and Consumer Awareness: The image of our Ministry has come under criticism from the press and civil society and has negatively influence the public perception of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. We hope to change this by being proactive in how we engage the media and the public. We are going to do more to empower the public to serve as monitors of the marketplace in the spirit of consumer protection and awareness. We will work to make Commerce a more proactive partner among stakeholders particularly with our government counterparts.
7. International Engagements: We are engaged in negotiations and implementation of several international arrangements that aim to support our economic transformation. We will continue strive to be an active participant in the various activities of our sector within United Nations, African Union, ECOWAS, and Mano River Union. We will continue down the path to accede to the World Trade Organization and will strive to continue our work with various governments to promote trade between our countries.

Honorable Chair, Honorable members, I believe that we as a people must come to love and celebrate each other's success and dream of a day where we can celebrate many Liberian successful business owners who can boast of their companies' growth and success over time, weathering the organic nature of the market.

I joined government as a technocrat who believe in the President's vision of success, a better and brighter Liberia we can all be proud to call home. A home where there is equity in access to basic services and the rights of all Liberians are protected regardless of tribe, religion, gender, or socio-economic status. It is my hope, with God's hands on me; I too can contribute to the realization of this Liberian dream.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, distinguished Committee Members, I would like to thank you for this great privilege of being considered by this honorable body for this position in this important period in our history. I look forward to working with you all the wonderful staff of the Ministry. Thanks to our President for her vote of confidence in nominating me for this position.

For their steadfast love and support, I would like to say thanks to my family, particularly my parents, J. Wendell Addy and Mai Stevens and my lovely wife, Fatu Addy. I am as always, committed and ready to serve.

Honorable Chair, to paraphrase the great reformer and scholar Mahatma Ghandi of India, I joined government to be apart of the change I dream to see. May God guide us all in the execution of our duties, so the history may judge us well. May God Bless our young Democracy. Thank you.