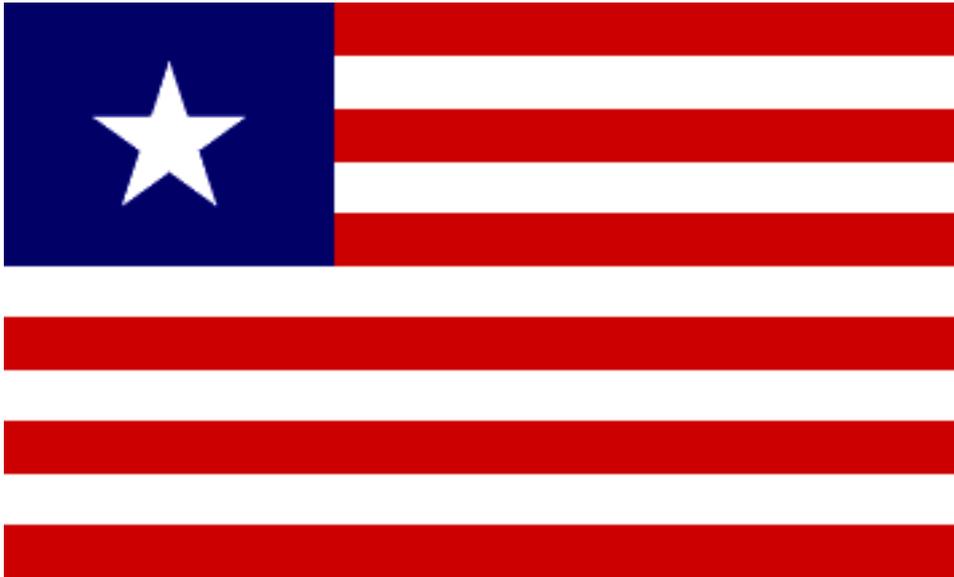

ROAD TO ACCESSION

Accession of Liberia to the World Trade Organization



Opening Statement

Second Working Party Meeting

H.E. Axel M. Addy

Minister/Chief Negotiator

Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Republic of Liberia

May 7th 2015, 15:00 – 17:00

World Trade Organization

Geneva, Switzerland



Salutations

1. Mr. Joakim Reiter, Chairman of the Working Party,
2. Representatives of the WTO Secretariat,
3. Excellencies, the Ambassadors, and Heads of Mission accredited to the World Trade Organization (WTO),
4. Colleagues, friends, distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

The Opening Recognition

5. On behalf of the Government and the people of Liberia, I am pleased to reaffirm Liberia's strong commitment to free trade based on WTO principles and rules.
6. Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, colleagues, friends, today marks a remarkable moment in our ambitious journey to MC10 in Nairobi in December. On behalf of Her Excellency, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the Government and people of Liberia, my delegation wish to express our utmost gratitude to all of you in this room today for your steadfast commitment and support to our accession process.
7. We would also like to express our thanks and appreciation to Director General Azevedo for heeding to our President's call to action and rendering the necessary support from such a dynamic team in the Secretariat lead by Director Cheidu Osakwe with outstanding support by our two secretaries, Ms. Juneyoung Lee and Anna Varyanik to help us fast track this process to get us here today. It continues to be a bonding experience for all of us. We are grateful.
8. Mr. Chairman, we are quite fortunate to have you as our dynamic chair because under your leadership we know that this journey is only impossible until its possible in Nairobi at MC10. We are grateful.
9. Excellencies, colleagues, friends – our achievement thus far and our desire to accede at MC10 will not be possible without the level of support from all of you in this room. We remain particularly grateful for the technical support extended us from many of you including the US, the EU, Sweden in particular, China and various organizations including UNCTAD, ITC, the Swedish National Board of Trade/SIDA, the World Bank, and the Enhance Integrated Framework. You have monitored and supported our progress and have challenged us in ways that has impacted the quality and depth of our commitments to accede. We are grateful.



The Health Crisis

10. Excellencies, colleagues, friends, in the first quarter of last year we commenced a period of introspection to tackle the impact of falling commodity prices on our economy. We realized very quickly that falling prices of rubber and iron ore, two primary export commodities that were key drivers in our economy were going to impact major investments in those sectors and thus impact revenue substantially. Our ability to finance our budget would prove challenging and we began to see elements of this impact on the stability of our currency. That was early first quarter of last year.
11. Ladies and Gentlemen, on March 22 2014, Liberia experienced an invisible foreign invasion that thrived on human kindness. It thrived on our irresistible nature to care for our love ones, for one another, to carry out our traditions in respect of the sanctity of birth and death – we as Liberians could not touch each other. Before we could grasp a full understanding of the enemy and its maneuvers we were losing our health workers, our loved one and experienced a slowing down of our major investment operations and a mass exodus with international stigma. As you all know, our economy took a nosedive; GDP growth, which was estimated to be around 5 to 6 percent, plummeted to less than 1.
12. Excellencies, colleagues, friends, today human kindness that served as a super highway for the spread of the disease has proven to be the very same cure of the disease. Our President in her leadership, made a global call for help and a local call for unity to tackle this menace that threaten the very existence of our fragile democracy. Today, because of many of you in this room and the unity and resilience of our people we have begun our countdown to rid our shores of this disease. May 9th is our magic date. Thanks to you. Your acts of human kindness made this possible. We are grateful.

Why the WTO?

13. Mr. Chairman, these circumstances have taught us a tough lesson that we cannot survive in isolation of the Global Community, that we cannot achieve transformation without economic diversification, and that we cannot pave a brighter future of equal opportunities for our people and the growth and development of our nation without the private sector. As we go through a period of reflection and develop our economic recovery plan, we know, we believe and we are committed to this process because despite the challenges of getting to the finish line, it matters to us, it matters to all of you who have invested in this process since 2007 to get us where we are today and it matters now. 2015 is important to us, because we have the political will, we have the commitment and we have momentum. It must happen now. As a post conflict, and post health crisis LDC, the investment required to make this a possibility is a sacrifice, one that is rarely made under such conditions. But where there is a will, there is always a way. We have the will, and with your support, your guidance, we will collectively lead the way to MC10.



Liberia's Efforts to Accede to the WTO

14. Excellencies, colleagues, friends, about eight years ago when we applied for membership to the WTO, on June 13, 2007, I can say that we may not have appreciated the magnitude of the work that is required to join the world's multilateral trading system, at the time, but today we are committed because we believe in the values and principles of the multilateral trading system which all of you have contributed to build and sustain. As we have moved forward and learned more, we have come to appreciate that accession to the WTO is a long and difficult path. It requires substantial time, effort, technical capacity, and financial resources, all of which are in short supply in Liberia, an LDC recovering from a history of civil – and now health - crises. However, thanks to many of you we continue to make tremendous strides.
15. In 2012, at our First Working Party meeting, we updated Members on the reforms completed since the transmittal of the Memorandum of Foreign Trade Regime in 2010. Today, I am even more pleased to state that additional reforms have been initiated, advanced and concluded which you will hear when we examine the draft report of the working party and we review legislative development.
16. Excellencies, colleagues, friends, there is a will. We are continuing the process of analyzing the requirements of the WTO and the relationship of our laws to WTO obligations. My delegation is certainly aware of some of the issues and challenges, which we have done our best to respond to in the draft working party report and will respond further today.
17. Becoming a Member of the WTO is part of our overall development and recovery plans. It is a healing process because we believe trade for development can be a critical tool for poverty reduction in our world. As an LDC, we believe, with your steadfast continued support, we can collectively rewrite history on the power of trade through WTO led economic transformation. Liberia is ready and committed to play a leading role in setting the debate on the definition of trade and development as a mechanism for poverty reduction. For us trade matters, because our citizens matter.
18. Excellencies, colleagues, friends, today the average Liberian is under 25 years of age; the average Liberian is a youth with the desire, dreams and wishes like any other youth in the world. Many of our youth, sad to say today, live in abject poverty, plying the streets as beggars, peddlers, protestors, we see them everyday as we commute to work. Their only crime is the timing and place of their birth. It is estimated that 10 million of these youth will come into the job market in Africa with the audacity of hope to live in self dignity with the human rights to equal opportunities and to live a fulfilled life. We all have a role to play for our failure to do so, will pave the way for extremist tendencies that will render us slaves of fear.



19. Excellencies, colleagues, friends, we value the multilateral trading system because of the principles and rules it stands for and we believe that at the table, we can all contribute to ensure that Africa is a better and equal trading partner with the rest of world. The world will be a better place when Africa is a better, equal and respected trading partner. The WTO will be a better organization when Africa is a better trading partner. The WTO will take one more step in that direction when Liberia joins at MC10 in December in Nairobi.

20. Thank you Mr. Chairman.