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Liberian Government Officials Hold Townhall Meeting in New York

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New York- Barely a week after a successful participation in the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, and having held a series of bilateral and multilateral meetings, a team led by the Information Minister Hon. Lewis Brown II, has embarked on outreach programs intended to inform Liberians in the Diaspora particularly those residing within the United States of America about the progress and challenges of the post-war reconstruction efforts. According to a dispatch from the Permanent Mission of Liberia to the United Nations, the outreach team which comprises the high-level Government delegation who attended the just ended UN General Assembly came from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, State and Information. Over the weekend, the team had a lengthy engagement with a cross section of the Liberian community in New York. According to the release, during the interactions, several issues related to Liberia's development agenda including progress as well as challenges were discussed. Liberia's Foreign Minister Hon. Augustine Kpehe



Ngafuan, who graced the occasion, informed the audience that Liberia was on an irreversible path of progress, and that democracy was assuming its rightful place in Liberia as exemplified by the holding of two successful elections. The Liberian diplomat said what is needed is the continuous resilience on the part of Liberians to keep the process going. He clarified that there are lots of misconceptions about progress in Liberia which, according to him do not represent the realities. He then urged members of the Liberian community in the Diaspora to overcome cynicisms which he attributed to "the erosion of our value system during the long period of the civil war." Minister Ngafuan cautioned against any resentment that will destabilize the peace process in Liberia. He said it was important to engage in positive dialogues that will bring all stakeholders in Liberian politics together to discuss issues of common concerns and find the way forward. "We can have disagreements on various aspects of our socio-political life, but we cannot afford to disagree on the maintenance of our peace, stability and newly-established democratic values", he added. For his part, Information Minister Hon. Lewis Brown II, urged the Liberian Diaspora to engage constructively in the development processes of Liberia. He explained that the Government and the people of Liberia appreciate the enormous contributions of the Diaspora communities to the socio-economic development of Liberia, and that such contributions are measured not only in monetary terms, but also through their participation in various discussions and other agenda-setting processes of our country. In this regard, the Government spokesman observed, "it is always important to check our facts before coming up with conclusions." He explained that most recent comments about corruption in Liberia were being driven either by the lack of adequate knowledge about the issue or by deliberately ignoring the existing efforts by the

Government to tackle the menace. Minister Brown described the ongoing efforts of the government as being backed by various international statistics on corruption. He pointed to the 2012 Global Corruption Index of Transparency International in which Liberia is referred to as the second least corrupt country in West Africa, a subregion of sixteen countries. He also reminded the audience that Liberia has successfully passed the difficulty scrutiny of the Millennium Challenge Corporation of the United States which lists passing the fight against corruption as the singular most important as its failure will automatically disqualify the country from participating in its grant award for sustainable development initiatives. Liberia is amongst a few countries in the world which recently qualified for MCC Compact. The Information boss reassured his audience that while the government is aware that the fight will remain a continuous effort, through institutional capacity building, adaption of best practices and procedures, prosecution, and the creation of various watchdog and integrity institutions, the Government is making steady and recognizable progress in the fight against corruption. He distributed a detailed analysis of the corruption index report by the Transparency International (TI), and with a combination of humour and simple Liberian English, recounted Liberia's rise to 75th place from 138th between 2008 and 2012.

According to the Minister, "this does not mean that Liberia has succeeded in eliminating corruption, but it confirms that we have made remarkable progress." He listed similar progress in all other sectors including infrastructures and health care delivery. "Liberia, recording an annual rate of decrease of 5.4%, the highest on the continent, is among only eight countries in Africa to achieve MDG #4, Reduction in Under 5 Mortality", he averred. Presidential Press Secretary Mr. Jerolimek Piah who also spoke at the event, named the restoration of Liberia's image, rebuilding of bilateral and multilateral relationships at the global level, debt relief, as well as infrastructural developments taking place in the country as signs of progress by the Administration of President Sirleaf. In closing remarks, Ambassador Jeremiah Sulunteh, Liberia's Envoy accredited to the United States and Canada, admonished Liberians in the Diaspora to work together for the common good of the nation. He said that the way forward is through positive engagements, and expressed gratitude to the Liberian community for granting them audience. He promised that the Liberian Government will continue to engage the Diaspora communities in positive discussions aimed at enhancing the post-war development agenda.

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