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Liberia Outlines Challenges, Optimism In Ebola Battle At UN General Assembly

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Monrovia, October 1, 2014: Liberia has delivered its address to the United Nations General Assembly as Foreign Minister Augustine Kpehe Ngafuan outlined to the 69th Session of the global Assembly the country's huge economic challenge occasioned by the outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus while also offering the country's hope in overcoming the virus.

Foreign Minister Ngafuan delivered the address on Monday, September 29 on behalf of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who he said chose to remain on the frontlines in Liberia to lead the country's fight against the virus. A Foreign Ministry release quotes the Foreign Minister as saying that Ebola has slowed the country's economy, creating a 3.4% downward slide in economic growth, from a high of 5.9% to a low of 2.5% in 2014. "And some experts have predicted that, if not contained quickly, Ebola could cause a 12% decline in our economy in 2015", he added, stating that Liberia's ability to provide for basic social services and efforts to fund key development projects are being significantly diminished. He said that as a result of the slowdown in economic activities, Liberia's revenue generation capacity has been seriously undermined resulting in a nearly 20% downward revision of Liberia's budget for Fiscal Year 2014/2015. Citing the sad tale of a ten-year old kid from Barkedu, Lofa County, who he said is the "last person standing" in a family of twelve, the Foreign Minister told the UN General Assembly that Ebola has widened its deadly circumference and is creating a trail of traumatized orphans across the country. Comparing the destructive Liberian Civil War to the devastating Ebola virus, Minister Ngafuan noted that unlike the war years during which time Liberians knew the warring factions and the frontlines, Ebola is an enemy he described as 'more insidious' which has no clear-cut frontlines because someone's child, someone's husband, someone's workmate could actually be the enemy and the frontline at the same time. He then, however, outlined series of steps the Liberian Government has taken since the Ebola outbreak, including the declaration of a state of emergency, suspension of schools, the constructive involvement of all stakeholders including pastors, imams, chiefs, elders, youths, government officials and opposition politicians, the stepping-up of awareness and prevention campaigns to address the crystallized denial and deeply rooted traditional and cultural practices that create a fertile ground for the spread of the disease, and committing to significant portions of the country's own paltry resources to the fight. The release adds that the Foreign Minister used the occasion to express the country's gratitude to the international community including the UN Secretary-General and leaders of friendly countries and institutions he said through separate and joint appeals of the Heads of State of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone have been showing a better understanding and deeper appreciation of the unprecedented scope and magnitude of the Ebola outbreak in the three most affected countries. He said,



"There is a chorus of leaders advocating and committing to support more robust, scaled up and urgent assistance to the affected countries". He then applauded the US government's decision to scale up assistance to the region, including its deployment of 3,000 military and medical specialist personnel to build treatment centers, train health personnel and provide other types of much needed support to Liberia and other affected countries, the Security Council's adoption of resolution 2177 which was co-sponsored by a record-breaking 134 countries and recognized the Ebola crisis as a threat to international peace and security and the UN Secretary-General's announcement of his intention to establish the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER). He also gave recognition to the African Union (AU)'s deployment of contingents of medical and relevant personnel drawn from across Africa to Liberia and other worst-affected countries, relaxation of travel restrictions by some Member States and the announcement of the resumption of flights to Liberia and Sierra Leone by Air Cote D'Ivoire within a week, and of Kenya Airways hopefully sometime in October and the announcement of contributions and the airlifting of critically needed protective equipment and supplies to Liberia and other affected countries by many governments, international NGOs, corporations, and philanthropists. "The expressions of solidarity have taken many forms and we are deeply grateful for all of them", Minister Ngafuan noted. A hopeful Minister Ngafuan then told the global gathering of the country's optimism to defeat the virus: "Instead, President Sirleaf and the resilient people of Liberia feel that the Ebola epidemic has presented us with a one-option, multiple-choice test; and that option is to fight back! And we are fighting back." Though he acknowledged that the road ahead may be long, curvy, and hilly, but with bigger, bolder, timely and sustained efforts on Liberia's part, buttressed by the international community, "we are sure that dawn will soon break on this long, dark, night occasioned by the Ebola Virus Disease." On global extremist ideologies and terrorist activities, the Foreign Minister, on behalf of the Liberian Government, expressed increasing concern about their spread in the world, especially in Africa. He continued: "Whether it is Al-Shabab in Somalia and Kenya; Al Qaeda in the Maghreb or Boko Haram in Nigeria, the African continent has not been spared the deadly and destructive consequences of extremism. Additionally, over the past year, while peace processes were being consolidated in many countries in Africa, we have sadly witnessed the eruption or exacerbation of conflicts on the continent, notably in South Sudan and the Central African Republic."

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