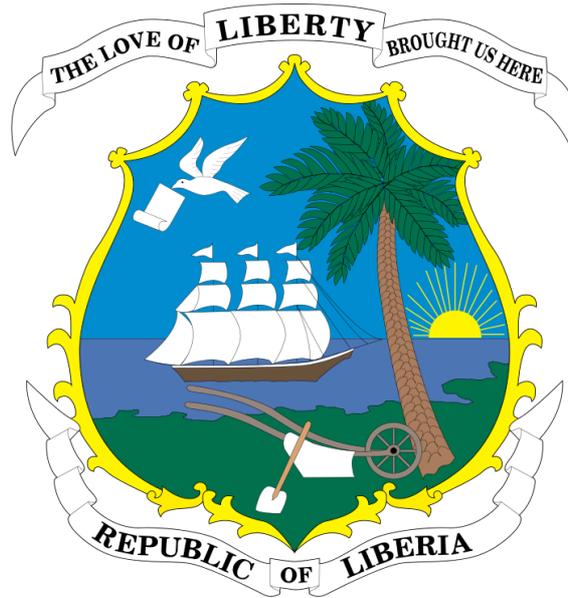

International Trade Centre (ITC)
The Joint Advisory Group (JAG) 51st Session



REMARKS

H.E. Axel M. Addy

Minister

Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Republic of Liberia

World Trade Organization

Room S1

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10:00 AM



Salutations

Director-General Roberto Azevêdo;

Secretary-General Mukhisa Kituyi;

Executive Director Ms. Arancha González;

Outgoing Chair H.E. Mr. Negash Kebret Botora;

Incoming Chair H. E. Ms. Frances Mary Lisson;

Our Development Partners;

Members of civil society present;

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning.

1. I am honoured to attend today's 51st Joint Advisory Group Meeting. I bring you greetings on behalf of Her Excellency, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia and the people of Liberia.
2. Being back in Geneva brings back fond memories: It was only a little over one year ago, on June 14th, 2016, when Liberia deposited its Instrument of the Acceptance of the Accession Package to the WTO, meeting the final requirement for WTO Membership and thus becoming the 163rd member of the WTO. This remarkable milestone would not have been possible without the critical role of ITC and particularly the dynamic leadership of my big sister, ITC talented, innovative, passionate and committed Executive Director, Ms. Arancha Gonzales. Please join me in applauding the ITC family.
3. It was December 2013, when we held our first meeting in Bali and I met Arancha, Joakim and Cheidu to talk about Liberia's accession and that early morning breakfast meeting will set the course for the fastest accession process in the history of this organization.
4. Thanks to the work of ITC, we were able to fast track the stakeholder consultative process to formulate strategies to tackle commitments in our accession package. Simultaneously, ITC played a critical role as I, as a newly appointed minister with a new commitment to transforming SMEs in Liberia, embarked on new Legislation called the Small Business Empowerment Act creating a new Bureau of Small Business Administration in the Ministry of Commerce. We collectively embarked on the development of the Export Strategies targeting critical sectors for economic diversification and I was very proud to welcome Arancha to Liberia as a special guest of



our President to launch the national export strategies during the second annual MSME conference.

5. As one of the key architects behind Liberia's accession, ITC invaluable support has allowed us to lay the foundation for an ever-transforming Liberia. We have laid the foundations for key reforms to ensure a more transparent and predictable business climate that will motivate the transformation of Liberia's invisible economy, our large informal sector dominated by forever innovating SMEs. .
6. In what many may describe as a year of global transitions – in the first year of implementing the SDGs, in a year of increasing backlash on multilateralism and in an environment where donor funding is becoming more constrained – the work of the ITC is more important than ever.
7. In order to develop our economies and put our women and youthful populations to work, we rely on trade and the strengthening of our private sector, as they are the engines for growth. In this context, the ITC has been able to deliver important innovative solutions that taps into production of the invisible economy by bringing to fore the innovations of SMEs and facilitating linkages to local and global value chains.
8. The SME Outlook provides powerful insight on much needed sector intelligence to guide policy makers like myself. ITCs solutions are yield innovative outcomes that are linking people, communities, linking opportunities, linking lives where it matters most, sustainable impact, sustainable livelihoods. Promoting textiles in one country, unlocking the potential of the spices in another, and unveiling Liberia's natural endowments in the tourism sector – all are creating new opportunities that is incentivising the invisible economies to formalize, grow, innovate, and transform in a way that is putting food on the tables of many, ensuring marginalize populations, vulnerable populations, women and youth are living a better day in dignity.
9. This work is important and it counts today in a world where technology is moving at light speed leaving the majority bottom billion behind. ITC work with SMEs and all of you who support ITC work, helps us all correct the equation by tapping into the innovations and identifying the innovators that helps us truly achieve our collective aspirations as prescribed in the sustainable development goals – poverty, a thing of the past.
10. ITC's work brings local to global, the connectivity that reminds us, that even some of the biggest fortune 500 were once SMEs, were simple ideas in back alleys, garages, and backyards that today have transform our world. As many of our people, particularly our youth, are bombarded with technology which often times, interprets for them what it is to live in dignity, they are find themselves with a deep desire to pursue that aspiration regardless of the cost. While not everyone will make it across the Mediterranean or the Atlantic, millions will continue to try at all cost. They often pay the ultimate price in pursuit of the desire to live in the dignity so widely advertised elsewhere.
11. ITC's work brings local to Global by facilitating the linkages that is ensuring that dignity is also local, in communities, with families, at home. ITC's in this area is more important now than ever as we live in a world apart from each other in our challenges while closely connected in our collective opportunities and aspirations. ITC's approach to re-enforce



this connectivity by using majority local expertise is why so much innovation and impact is derived as outcomes of lasting solutions.

12. I truly am thankful to all of you in this room for the support to this organization, as their work with us in Liberia is invaluable.
13. Finally, kindly permit me, as this is likely my last opportunity in my official capacity as Minister of Commerce and Industry of Liberia, to thank the ITC family and all of you who support ITC. I particularly want to thank my friend and sister Arancha – we met in December in Bali, when I was less grey and still a bit nervous about my move to government from development. It was an early morning meeting, but she was a bolt of energy and passion and commitment and was ready to rock and roll on Liberia's WTO. I left there inspired, energized, and motivated. I must say over the last four years, every conversation and encounter with Arancha has been just that consistent. This organization is fortunate to have such a committed, passionate and innovative leader to steer the ship. I have and always will be honored to have worked with Arancha. Thank you for being you.
14. I am deeply thankful for your support in helping Liberia rise up to its economic potential. With your help, Africa's next decade can be one of sustainable and inclusive growth that gives our young population the hope they so desperately need.
15. Thank you.