

Remarks by H. E. Jeremiah C. Sulunteh

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US Capitol, Washington DC

Partnership for Effective Peacekeeping

The UN in West Africa: New Milestones on the Path to Peace

I- Salutations:

- * Congressman David N. Cicilline, Co-Chair of the Congressional Peacekeeping Caucus
- * Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Liberia
- * Fellow Distinguished panelists, Colleagues

II- Greetings:

- * I bring you warm greetings and sincere best wishes on behalf of H. E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the government and people of Liberia and the Liberian Embassy in Washington DC
- * I would like to thank Michael Boyce of the Partnership for Effective Peacekeeping, for the invitation and the opportunity to make remarks at this unique event, that focuses on the final phase of the drawdown of the United Nations Military Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

III- Liberia is a small country in West Africa, about the size of the State of Ohio, with a population of 4.1 million. The country, founded by free American slaves had enjoyed a cordial relations with the United States, since its founding in the 1800.

- * Since its founding, Liberia was at peace, until in April 1979, when citizens staged a protest against a hike in the price of rice, the country's staple food. A year later,

in 1980, noncommissioned officers of the military seized power. This could have been the turning point for Liberia. As, in 1989, the country witnessed one of the bloodiest rebel incursions in Africa.

* The civil war resulted in the death of over 250,000 people, displaced about a million people, and destroyed the socio-economic fabric and the infrastructure of the country

IV- Peacekeeping

* The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with support from the African Region and the international community initiated a process that led to more than a dozen peace accords, and the establishment of an ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG).

* As the conflict escalated, the international community through the United Nations resolved and established the United Nations Military Mission to Liberia (UNMIL) in 2003, with a mandate to support:

-Implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the peace process

-Protect UN staff, facilities and civilians

-Support humanitarian and human rights activities and civilians

-Support security reform

-Support national security reform, including national police training and formation of a new, restructured military

* UNMIL consisted of about 15,000 strong personnel, including UN military personnel; military observers; support staff and UN police officers.

* The UN presence in Liberia restored hope in the citizens, as they began to rebuild their country. Basic human development services, including health care delivery and education were being provided by humanitarian organizations.

* An interim leadership was established and general and presidential elections were organized in 2005, where I had the opportunity to participate as a vice presidential candidate to retired UN Special Representative, Winston Tubman.

* By 2006, and soon after Liberia's first democratic elections after the civil war, the Mission began to make adjustments in its authorized strength. Between 2007-2010, the Security Council reduced the Mission's strength further. By 2012, and after a second successful democratic elections, the Council reduced the Mission's strength further. By 2015, a third phase of the drawdown was effected and by June 30, 2016, the final phase is expected to be concluded.

V- Government of Liberia's Transition Plan:

* The UN Security Council's decision for withdrawal is highlighted by its confidence in Liberia, both to continue the remarkable job it has done in the fight against the deadly Ebola Virus Disease, and to build on the progress made since the deployment of the peacekeeping mission in 2003.

* In this regard, the Government of Liberia in 2015 prepared in close consultation with UNMIL and other stakeholders a plan for security transition. The plan sets clear benchmarks for Liberian authorities to take over all security responsibilities, such as providing presidential guard; civilian policing; immigration and boarder controls and national defense.

* The plan is less about replacing UNMIL and is more about addressing the challenges of maintaining security, peace and access to justice in post-war Liberia.

* In order for the plan to succeed, the Government will endeavor to prioritize security sector and rule of law reforms. With support from its traditional ally, the USA, as well as, the international community, Liberia will sustain its hard earned peace.

VI- Closing:

* As UNMIL withdraws from Liberia in the next 105 days, a successful security paradigm will require a concerted community involvement, consultation and

cooperation among stakeholders, as well as, capacity building for justice and corrections personnel to be deployed throughout Liberia.

* With only about 5,000 police officers, a little over 2,000 military personnel, inadequate immigration personnel, as well as, limited officers of the Coast Guards, there is a dire need to increase manpower training for the security sector.

* While there is a need for an increase in the strength of the police and military, numbers are not the full story. Logistics are equally needed to enhance effective security operations, in order to enjoy the confidence of the communities.

*** Lessons learned:

* Future peacekeeping missions should include training and capacity building as a major component of roles and responsibilities. Peacekeeping mission should not only be about restoring peace, it should also be about sustaining the peace.

* Even though Liberia has demonstrated to be a post-conflict success story in West Africa, a lasting peace in Liberia should not be left to chance, as West Africa remains a fragile community. The recent unfortunate situation in the Ivory Coast is a common example.

* We should like to recommend therefore, that there should be a post-withdrawal back up plan, including a small, but robust military presence in Liberia, with appropriate military hardware, as observers during the 2017 general and presidential elections.

Thanks so much for the opportunity to make these remarks.