

Statement Presented by Hon. Stephen Y. Neufville, Deputy Minister of Urban Affairs/MIA at the Plenary of the 3rd United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito, Ecuador, 17-20 October 2016 for the Adoption of the New Urban Agenda

Mr. Presiding Officer and Members of the Conference Secretariat, Fellow Delegates and Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I bring you profound greetings from the Government and people of Liberia. This is the first time for our country to be officially represented at this all important gathering of nations and contribute to the discussions for the carving out of a new blueprint for the emerging urban phenomenon having missed out on the two previous conferences. The Government of Liberia recognizes that urbanization is an irreversible trend .

According the results of the 2008 National Population and Housing Census, Liberia has a rural to urban migration rate of 4% and urban growth rate of 7% with a third of the national population of 3.5 million living in the Greater Monrovia District (GMD). The GMD comprises the Capital City of Monrovia and its adjoining urban agglomerations and is the socio-economic planning unit carved out by the Government of Liberia for the provision and monitoring of basic urban infrastructure and services for this highly concentrated population group.

As a result of this unique spatial planning perspective, it has become glaringly evident that the situation of the GMD continues to pose an overwhelming challenge for the government in terms of the existing huge mismatch between

the population needs and available resources which ultimately helps to intensify and deepen the urban poverty conditions of the populace.

The obtaining population explosion situation of GMD was exacerbated by the attending consequences of the 13 years civil crises of 1990-2003, the impact of which the government continues to address.

Although shifting demographics occasioned by high population concentration and densities contribute to greater urban economies of scale, but the situation in the GMD however leaves much to be desired due to weak physical and spatial/territorial planning imperatives which have also led to poor human activities such as construction and overgrazing in wetlands, waterways and uncontrolled pollution of the environment to the detriment of human safety and security by unduly exposing the population to chronic urban health issues, epidemics and the negative impacts of climate change.

While the concept of designated and planned growth poles may seem debatable but where planning fails then it becomes the sine-qua-none due to human quest and compulsion for survival and we as governments are obliged to begin designing the appropriate containment policies and strategies as short-medium term response measures and concomitantly forecast the long term prevention solutions that will ensure balanced territorial development.

The above represents the classical case of the GMD as the microcosm of urbanization in Liberia with the features of challenges and opportunities that it offers as a metropolitan area including the worst case scenario of being the epic center of the past Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) where most of the fatalities occurred.

In the face of limited resources coupled with acute institutional and human capacity constraints the GMD offers our best chance as a country for initiating the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA).

The LCP funded by the Cities Alliance (CA) is a collaborative effort that brings the Government of Liberia, in the short and medium term, in an interface with UN-Habitat, Habitat for Humanity International, Slum Dwellers International and WEIGO in a viable partnership that will create the required enabling environment for sustainable urban development in Liberia.

I am pleased to inform this body that working in concert with the private sector, local authorities, civil society actors and community groups, Liberia has recorded the following achievements

- Hosting of a National Urban Conference in October 2010 under the theme: **Strategies and Tools for Sustainable Urban Land Administration, Management and Development** with support from UN-Habitat and the Norwegian Refugee Council;
- Piloting of an urban land use inventory and mapping project in 2013-2015 in three provincial cities **for spatial data base and knowledge creation with support of SIDA and UN-Habitat;**
- Adopting of a National Decentralization Policy in 2012 for the gradual transfer of responsibilities from the central government to the local level of government for **preparation of the other urban centers outside of the GMD for gradual transfer of improved decision making, greater participation and accountability roles;**

- Hosting of the 1st National Urban Forum in June 2015 with the theme: **Towards a National Urban Policy** with support from UN-Habitat and Cities Alliance;
- Launching in June 2016 a 5-Year Liberia Country Programme (LCP) with funding from Cities Alliance with a main focus on **institutional and human capacity development and community engagement**;
- Starting of a five to eight months National Urban Policy (NUP) Feasibility Study Project in June 2016 with support from UN-Habitat and Cities Alliance to undertake a **comprehensive diagnostics of the existing situation and development of a viable knowledge management plan** that will **create greater awareness of urban issues amongst policy makers and promote sustained community buy-in**;
- Establishing of a Technical Support Team (TST) of national and sub-national government experts with professionals from private sector, civil society and community actors to drive the NUP feasibility process that **will generate a Policy Discussion Paper for the actual development of the NUP within two years beginning early 2017**;
and
- Reactivating the Liberia National Habitat Committee (LNHC) as a platform for coordination, networking, collaboration and cooperation in the urban sector to **avoid duplication and overlapping efforts that will promote coherence of actions and maximize available resources and time.**

In the realization of these achievements, we identified the below challenges and opportunities as crucial to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in the immediate term in Liberia.

- Lack of comprehensive spatial urban based disaggregated data and inadequate data sources **for effective urban planning and policy formulation;**
- Insufficient institutional and human capacity **that will serve as champions and drivers for sustainable urban management and development;**
- Existence of fragmented urban management and development policies and competing institutional structures and arrangements **that will foster duplication and undermine coherence of efforts and concerted actions;**
- Generation of a strong political and social commitment **that will promote the recognition and understanding of urbanization as a viable tool for inclusive growth and national development;**
- Development of comprehensive data base and country specific **indicators that will foster better knowledge creation and management to track trends, conditions and patterns in urbanization and measure performance;**
- Putting in place of forward looking institutional structures/arrangements, policies and strategies **through a thorough rationalization/review of the existing ones and repositioning them for the unhindered implementation of the NUA which highlights inclusive cities.**

- **Identifying the need to have an urban observatory platform to conduct periodic urban policy research and analysis and capitalized the nexus between physical/spatial/territorial and national socio-economic planning for balanced growth and development;**
- **Need to develop a medium-long term comprehensive public sector investment plan that can be leveraged by the private sector and partners and should be subject to regular review for reprioritization.**
- **Need for the development of a holistic and comprehensive Habitat 3 National Action Plan that will encapsulate and establish the synergies of the the Liberia Country Programme with the frameworks of the Agenda for Transformation (AfT), Decentralization Policy and the Local Government Act to avoid lose ends .**

In view of Liberia's efforts and challenges, I on behalf of my government, join all countries attending this very important conference to commit to the implementation of the new urban agenda. Moreover, we join others in calling for increased financial assistance to the least developed countries to meet their obligations both under the 2030 development agenda and the new urban agenda.

Finally I seize this opportunity to thank the government and the friendly people of Ecuador for the warm friendship and hospitality accorded us since our arrival in this historic and beautiful city of Quito.

Bravo!