REMARKS BY HON. AUGUSTINE KPEHE NGAFUAN
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High-Level Development Dialogue
Theme: “Navigating Development in a World of Crises: Resilience, Equity, and Planetary Stewardship”

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Dr. Olushayo Olu, United Nations Resident Coordinator of the UN (ad interim);

Colleagues from Government;

Representatives of the World Bank and our Development Partners;

Civil Society Representatives;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good afternoon.

I am pleased to join you for this important dialogue under a theme that speaks directly to the times in which we live: “Navigating Development in a World of Crises: Resilience, Equity, and Planetary Stewardship.”

We are pursuing development in a world that seems to move from one crisis to another—conflict, economic uncertainty, shrinking aid, climate shocks, disrupted supply chains, and rising food and energy prices.

And for a country like Liberia, these are not distant problems.

Global turbulence eventually finds a local address.

When conflict thousands of miles away pushes up oil prices, the impact eventually reaches the taxi driver and kehkeh rider in Monrovia.

When global supply chains are disrupted, the consequences show up in the price of rice, medicine, fuel, cement, and other essentials.

When donor countries reduce development assistance, the effects can reach our schools, hospitals, roads, farms, and communities.

So Liberia cannot insulate itself completely from global crises.

The more important question is: How do we build a Liberia strong enough to absorb shocks without surrendering our development ambitions?

That is what resilience means to me.

BUILDING RESILIENCE BEFORE THE CRISIS

Too often, we start talking about resilience after the crisis has arrived.

But you do not begin building the roof when the rain starts falling.

Resilience is built beforehand.

We build it by strengthening institutions and public financial management. We build it through roads and electricity. Through agriculture, education and healthcare. Through economic diversification. And through institutions capable of continuing to function when circumstances become difficult.

Liberia has experienced civil conflict, Ebola, COVID-19, commodity shocks and economic downturns. One lesson should therefore be deeply embedded in our national consciousness:

We cannot always prevent the next shock, but we can determine how prepared we are when it comes.

Development planning must therefore do two things simultaneously: solve today's problems and reduce tomorrow's vulnerabilities.

MORE NEEDS, FEWER RESOURCES

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen:

Perhaps the greatest challenge confronting development today is financing.

The arithmetic is uncomfortable: needs are rising while traditional development resources are tightening.

Liberia remains profoundly grateful for the support of our bilateral and multilateral partners. But declining aid flows are sending developing countries an unmistakable message.

We must increasingly strengthen our capacity to finance our own development.

That begins with domestic resource mobilization.

Every additional dollar we legitimately mobilize through stronger tax administration, improved customs systems, reduced leakages, better management of natural-resource revenues and broader economic activity gives Liberia greater control over its development destiny.

For me, therefore, domestic resource mobilization is not simply a Ministry of Finance issue.

It is an issue of development sovereignty. And I am pleased to report that our resource mobilization efforts are yielding fruits as we are set to hit the historic US$1 billion-dollar domestic resource target some in this month.

But raising more revenue is only half the story.

We must also spend better.

The question cannot simply be, “How much did government spend?”

The better question is, “What did the Liberian people get for what government spent?”

Did spending produce another kilometer of road? More reliable electricity? Better classrooms? Medicines in clinics? Improved agricultural productivity? More jobs? And we are showing actual results on all these fronts.

At the same time, we must become more innovative in mobilizing external financing—leveraging concessional resources, working with the World Bank, African Development Bank and other partners, responsibly mobilizing private capital, and developing bankable projects that investors can support.

Government cannot finance Liberia's transformation alone. Development partners cannot finance it alone either.

Ultimately, we need a productive private sector creating businesses, jobs, exports, incomes and tax revenues.

Aid can help finance development. But only a productive economy can sustain development.

DEVELOPMENT MUST HAVE A HUMAN FACE

The second important word in today's theme is equity.

Economic shocks do not affect everybody equally.

A 10-percent increase in food prices may inconvenience one household. For another household, it may mean reducing meals from three to two.

That is why macroeconomic stability and social protection must go together.

We must maintain fiscal discipline. But development must also reach the farmer in Lofa, the market woman in Red Light, the fisherman in Grand Kru, the rubber farmer in Margibi, the young entrepreneur in Ganta, and the mother seeking healthcare for her child in River Gee.

National averages matter. GDP matters. Revenue matters.

But ultimately, development must have a human face.

People must be able to see it, touch it and feel it in their everyday lives.

And nowhere is this more important than with our young people.

Our youthful population can become our greatest national asset—but only if we invest in education, skills, agriculture, entrepreneurship, technology and job creation

Without opportunity, youthfulness can generate frustration.

With opportunity, it becomes a demographic dividend.

THE ENVIRONMENT IS ALSO THE ECONOMY

The third pillar is planetary stewardship.

For too long, we have sometimes spoken as though the economy and the environment occupy separate rooms.

They do not.

Liberia's forests, coastline, biodiversity, water resources and ecosystems are environmental assets, yes—but they are also economic assets and the inheritance of generations yet unborn.

So the question is not whether Liberia should develop or protect its environment.

That is a false choice.

The real question is: How do we develop today without destroying tomorrow?

Our forests must create value without disappearing.

Our minerals must generate prosperity without leaving environmental devastation behind.

Our cities must grow without becoming overwhelmed by flooding, pollution and waste.

And our energy transition must expand access while moving toward cleaner and more sustainable sources.

We are not owners of Liberia only for ourselves

We are trustees for Liberians yet unborn.

TRUST IS ALSO DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL

Finally, none of this succeeds without partnership and trust.

At a time when multilateralism is under pressure, Liberia must continue strengthening partnerships with the United Nations, World Bank, African Development Bank, bilateral partners, civil society and the private sector.

But government must also do its part.

We must strengthen transparency and accountability. We must improve procurement and public financial management. We must combat corruption and ensure that public resources increasingly produce public results.

Because trust is also development capital.

When citizens trust institutions, when investors trust the rules, and when development partners trust national systems, cooperation becomes easier and every development dollar travels further.

CONCLUSION

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen:

Liberia cannot determine when a war will erupt somewhere in the world.

We cannot determine global oil prices.

We cannot determine the budgets of donor countries

And Liberia alone cannot stop climate change.

But there are things we can determine.

We can determine how prepared we are.

We can choose stronger institutions over weaker ones.

We can mobilize more of our own resources.

We can choose productive investment over waste.

We can diversify our economy.

We can protect the vulnerable.

We can manage our natural wealth responsibly.

And we can choose partnership over fragmentation.

So the turbulence around us should not cause Liberia to lower its development ambitions

It should cause us to strengthen the foundations beneath those ambitions.

For in the final analysis, development is not measured only by how fast a country moves when the road is smooth.

It is also measured by how firmly a country stands when the road becomes rough.

Our task is therefore to build a Liberia that can withstand shocks without losing direction; pursue prosperity without leaving people behind; and use the gifts of nature without stealing the inheritance of future generations.

That is resilience.

That is equity.

That is planetary stewardship.

And that is the development journey we must travel together.

I thank you.