

STATEMENT BY SENATOR GBEGZOHNGAR M. FINDLEY – LIBERIA

Thursday 3 MARCH 2011 at the plenary 4: EITI Stakeholder Forum

At the 5th EITI Global Conference

Following fourteen years of civil crisis, the government and people of Liberia in May 2007 established the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (LEITI) as one of the key pillars of governance/integrity to support the reconstruction of the economy, governance and overall social development of Liberia.

Within a relative short period (two year) of its existence, LEITI become one of the leaders in EITI implementation worldwide. Indeed, LEITI is recognized globally for (1) its rapid implementation progress; (2) its extended scope that include the forestry and agriculture sectors; (3) the share commitment and engagement of all its stakeholders; and (4) the exemplary political will that underpins the foregoing achievements and distinctive features.

OUR MILESTONES

- 1. Widest scope:** Liberia is the first and only country in the world to include forestry and agriculture in its EITI program in addition to the mining and oil sectors. Although forestry and the agriculture sectors are not required by the international EITI rules to be included in a national EITI program, Liberia opted for their inclusion in order to widen/spread the transparency nest across the main export earners.
- 2. Contract Transparency:** Liberia is probably the first country to include contracts transparency in its EITI program. LEITI requires (1) the disclosure and publication of all agreements and concession in the mining, oil, forestry and agriculture sectors, and (2) the periodic audit of such agreements and concessions to ensure that they were awarded in keeping with the applicable laws. Presently, the LEITI has been given copies of all concessions, contracts and agreements concerning operations in the Mining, oil, forestry and agriculture sectors. Anyone can access these agreements. Hence, Liberia is once again showing leadership in rejecting the questionably argument of “commercial confidentiality” which some have cited as a basis not to disclose concession agreement in the extractive sectors.

- 3. Pace-setting Progress:** Liberia is the first EITI country to (1) publish an EITI Report and (2) complete EITI validation within the two-year period set by the EITI Board.
- 4. Dedicated EITI Legislation:** Liberia is the second EITI implementation country to have a dedicated EITI legislation. The only other country with EITI legislation is Nigeria.
- 5. Political will:** Much of the progress in Liberia relative to the EITI implementation is due to an abundance of political will for the EITI progress and transparency in general. The EITI has therefore been specifically named as a key component of the government Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and the National Anti-Corruption Strategy. The personal support of the President is the single most important driver of the LEITI progress. The President's office has been opened to the LEITI, and the President has been actively involved in matters concerning LEITI. The President launched the first LEITI Report early 2009, and also led the LEITI delegation to the 2009 EITI international conference in Doha, Qatar.
- 6. Positive Support of other Government officials:** The LEITI is also indebted to the high support of key ministers designated to lead EITI implementation. The National Legislature also deserves recognition for its continuing support and the speedy passage of the LEITI Act. I may also add that the 2009 LEITI Report was used by the Legislature in the 2010-2011 Budget Progress.
- 7. Mass Public Support:** Many Liberians are amazed in seeing the LEITI Report, which contains specific tax details that were many years hidden from them. They are therefore very supportive of LEITI. It was in response to the requests of some of these Liberians that the LEITI included the agriculture sector in the scope of LEITI.
- 8. Best implementing Country Aware:** Based on its rapid progress and trend-setting performance, Liberia won the best EITI implementation Country Aware presented by the EITI Board in Doha, Qatar.
- 9. EITI Compliant:** In 2009, Liberia undertook validation and became EITI compliant in October of the same year. Validation is EITI's quality assurance mechanism and an essential feature of the EITI process that serves two critical functions: Firstly, it promotes dialogue and learning at the country level and secondly, it safeguards the EITI brand by holding all EITI implementation countries to the same global standard. Liberia became the first country in Africa and the second in the world to be EITI compliant.

10. Demonstration of commitment through Adequate Support: Despite limited financial resources and mounting post-war reconstruction needs, the Government of Liberia has provided increasing budgetary support for LEITI. The Government of Liberia contributed \$50,000 to LEITI budget in 2006/2007; increased it to \$100,000 in the 2008/2008 budget, and recently doubled it to \$200,000.00 in the current budget year.

11. Effective Communication Strategy: Liberia is among few EITI countries with a comprehensive strategy for communicating the EITI. LEITI has put up billboards, visited and conducted outreach (town hall meetings and discussions with residents and citizens of the political sub-divisions) in all fifteen counties of the country. LEITI also engages with the electronic and print media to air jingles and drama, hold public discussions on EITI implementation, etc. LEITI quarterly newsletters are widely read in and out of Liberia.