



Official Remarks by Minister F. Sakila Nyumalin, Sr. on Strengthening Liberia–Sierra Leone Cross-Border Collaboration Through the REAP Project

On behalf of the Government and people of Liberia, I would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to the Government and citizens of Sierra Leone for the warm welcome extended to me and my delegation during our visit. It is both an honor and a privilege to be here, and I would like to take a moment to introduce the esteemed members of my delegation.

Under the leadership of President Joseph Nyuma Boakai, our government is dedicated to ensuring that all Liberians live in a secure environment that promotes peace and enables sustainable livelihoods. The Resilience, Empowerment, Access, and Peacebuilding Project is crucial to realizing this vision, and its timing is of utmost importance. This initiative aims to strengthen social cohesion, enhance border management, improve local governance, and promote climate-smart agriculture in the Gola Forest areas, all with the goal of reducing conflict risks and building economic resilience that benefits both Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The Gola Forest Landscape plays a vital role in fostering sustainable peace, security, and resilience in our region. By empowering local community members, forest rangers, and border authorities through technical support and resources, we can safeguard our borders, conserve our forests, and ultimately minimize cross-border conflicts, fostering peace and harmony.

We understand that the success of this project relies heavily on the steadfast support of our partners. I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our UN partners, particularly the UN Peacebuilding Fund for their financial support of this initiative. We also appreciate the invaluable contributions from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the World Food Programme (WFP), local authorities, and Civil Society Organizations working in the border communities of Grand Cape Mount and Gbarpolu Counties in Liberia, as well as in

Kenema and Pujehun Districts in Sierra Leone. The collaboration among these institutions brings together diverse strengths and opportunities that will enhance the effectiveness of our efforts.

Our gathering today in Bo, Sierra Leone, as members of the Project Steering Committee (PSC), sends a strong message to our citizens and the world: Liberia and Sierra Leone share a deep bond, strengthened by our shared history, economic ties, and cultural connections. The Gola Forest serves as a crucial trans-boundary ecosystem, essential for biodiversity, livelihoods, and regional stability. We are committed to jointly managing the Gola landscape in line with previous agreements made in 2011 and renewed in 2020.

This project addresses several critical challenges faced by our border communities, including inadequate border management and law enforcement, limited economic opportunities—especially for youth and women—environmental threats such as illegal logging, mining, and poaching, and growing pressures from informal cross-border activities. By enhancing community resilience, promoting sustainable land use, and building trust between border authorities, rangers, and local populations on both sides of the border, we can effectively tackle these challenges.

Furthermore, I want to highlight that this project aligns with Liberia's National Development Plan, the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development, and the County Development Agenda. The regions of Grand Cape Mount and Gbarpolu are pivotal to the successful implementation of these initiatives, and we sincerely appreciate this focus.

In closing, I would like to recognize the crucial role of the Mano River Union and ECOWAS in promoting cross-border cooperation, security, and integration. Together, let us encourage ongoing collaboration among implementing partners, local communities, and the UN to ensure the long-term sustainability of our efforts beyond the project's lifespan.

As a government, we remain committed to ensuring that Liberia's border communities thrive in a peaceful, prosperous, and resilient future, contributing to the stability and progress of the entire sub-region.