

## **Special Message by the Executive Chairperson, Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission – LACC**

### **@ a One-Day Anti-Corruption Symposium climaxing the Observance of International Anti-Corruption Day at the EJS Ministerial Complex**

**December 8, 2023**

The Honorable Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Republic of Liberia, the UN Resident Coordinator, Madam Executive Chairperson, Vice Executive Chairperson, Donors, and Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations, the National Integrity Forum (NIF), Panelists and Presenters, Donor Partners, the Media, my esteemed colleagues and members of the Board of Commissioners of the LACC, the Executive Director and program managers, our hardworking staff, Ladies, and Gentlemen.

Corruption undermines economic development, good governance, and the security of nations globally. Accordingly, in 2003, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and requested that the Secretary-General designate the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) as the secretariat for the Convention's Conference of State Parties (Resolution 58/4). In that resolution, 9<sup>th</sup> December is designated as the annual International Anti-Corruption Day (IACD) to be celebrated by all UNCAC parties.

International Anti-corruption Day is used to raise awareness against corruption and the role of UNCAC in combating and preventing it. IACD is marked by activities to educate the public on issues of graft, mobilize political will and resources to address global problems, and celebrate and reinforce the achievements of humanity in the fight against corruption.

This year, the International Theme for IACD 2023: Uniting the World Against Corruption for Peace, Security, and Development, and the National Theme: Promoting Integrity for Increased Public Participation in the Fight Against Corruption. Both themes shed important light on the realities that bedevil the global community generally and Liberia in particular.

More than ever before, peace and security are becoming elusive, while economic predators look for every opportunity to embezzle state resources to the detriment of ordinary citizens. Corruption has the potential to cause dissatisfaction and instigate instability if political leadership is not intentional in ensuring that corrupt individuals are held accountable for their corrupt behavior.

In Liberia, the need for increased public participation cannot be overemphasized; this is particularly urgent as we are faced with diminishing public trust in the fight against corruption. Many Liberians believe we are talking more about corruption but doing less in combating it. While this perception is not entirely true, it brings to the fore their deep disappointment/frustration with the culture of impunity.

I, therefore call on all Liberians and stakeholders in the fight against corruption to close ranks by uniting ourselves against corrupt individuals in the Liberian society to be friends with them, reject their office, make them know that they are corrupt, and name and shame them until they are embarrassed.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission is making significant strides in the fight against corruption. Plans are underway to digitize the assets declaration program of the LACC. This vision, when realized, is expected to boost asset declaration compliance among public officials. The digitized asset declaration infrastructure of the Commission will enable declarants to declare their assets from the comfort of their homes and offices; it will also, with enhanced technical capacity increase asset declaration compliance among local government officials as they will then download the AD from the LACC or Executive Mansion Website and submit them via email to our headquarters in Monrovia. Their declaration will be notarized and they will be issued acknowledgement slips in real time.

The Commission has crafted a decentralization program and is engaging partners for funding support for its decentralization program. The implementation of the said program will establish regional offices in five regions of Liberia, expand our operations to the county level, and heighten educational awareness, as well as investigations and prosecution.

Fellow anti-corruption practitioners, we are aware that the journey before us is long and difficult. However, let us gather strength from some achievements we have made in the fight against corruption. We have reasons to be hopeful; we have reasons to celebrate and gaze into the future with reasonable optimism.

In this connection, I am pleased, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, to inform and/ or remind you about a few successes in the fight against corruption in Liberia. It will interest you to note that the 2022, restated and amended Act of the LACC grants the LACC direct prosecutorial power. This enabling legislation empowers the commission to investigate corruption cases, obtain indictments and proceed to court, without having to wait ninety (90) days as was provided for in the 2008 Act that established the Commission. Additionally, I am pleased to inform you that the commission now has a Whistleblower Act and a Witness Protection Act.

The aforementioned enabling legislations have given the former toothless bulldog teeth to bite. Watch out, there is a new sheriff in town.

The Commission is deeply grateful to civil society organizations for their relentless advocacy in support of the passage of the above-mentioned bills into law.

The Commission is grateful to both houses of the Liberian Legislature: The House of Representatives and the Senate. The passage of these legislations demonstrates true political will. There is a misconception, hidden in the culture of the imperial presidency, that political will is exclusively resident in the presidency. That is not true. There are three distinct and coordinated branches of the Government of Liberia. The Legislature makes laws, the Executive enforces the laws and the Judiciary interprets the laws. You acted consistent with your mandate and we are proud of you.

We acknowledge the goodwill and moral support of our development partners especially. Thank you

The Commission is profusely thankful to the President for signing and printing the new anti-corruption. History will remember you kindly, Your Excellency.

As we climax activities marking the observances of IACD 2923, let me remind you that there are challenges that confront us in the fight against corruption. These challenges, among other things, include a lack of specialized courts to solely prosecute corruption cases, inadequate budgetary support to anti-graft institutions, and issues of financial autonomy and operational independence.

While the commission appreciates the government for the granting of direct prosecutorial power, we call on the Legislature to go a step further to pass into law the establishment of a Specialized Corruption Court, to relieve the LACC of the burden of getting cases assigned, obtaining indictments as Criminal Court C continues to adjudicates many other cases, including corruption cases.

The LACC Act grants financial autonomy to the commission, which means the LACC should receive quarterly allotments to facilitate its program implementation and operations. Unfortunately, this policy provision of the Act is not being adhered to, thus impeding the effective implementation of the program and operations of the commission. Worse still, the salary of our staff is low and monthly salary payment is often delayed. This is a serious challenge that should claim the immediate attention of the national government.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, you will agree with me that the fiscal budget of any nation reflects its priorities. Sadly, the budget of Liberia over the years has not shown that the fight against corruption is a major priority of successive governments. Since the establishment of the commission, its budgetary appropriation has not reached 3.0 million. Yet, we declared corruption as “Public Enemy Number One.” If the government of Liberia must succeed in the fight against corruption, we must go beyond declarations to action and match our words with our deeds by giving adequate financial support to LACC and other integrity institutions to enhance the fight against corruption.

Until we address corruption head-on, the development agenda of Liberia will be a mirage.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, there is general agreement that corruption is harmful, undermining investment and exacerbating poverty, but can anything be done about it?

Accountability systems, such as Income and asset declarations by public officials are more prevalent, and more often the information is open to the public, than in the past, and many countries use [electronic systems](#) for declaration and verification. Technological advances are helping strengthen public financial management, limit the prevalence of ghost workers, improve monitoring of infrastructure projects, and strengthen transparency and efficiency of public procurement.

With improved educational awareness and increased public participation in the fight against corruption, we are hopeful that the fight against corruption is gaining momentum among policymakers and ordinary citizens. Further, with the granting of direct prosecutorial power to the commission, the LACC will leave no stones unturned in identifying, prosecuting and punishing corrupt individuals in the Liberian society.

Let me assure our partners in the fight against corrupt that there is no hiding place for corrupt people in Liberia. Integrity institutions are closing ranks in information sharing, intelligence gathering and inter-agency collaborations towards ensuring that the resources of Liberians are used for the greater good and well-being of all Liberians.

Liberia cannot know lasting peace and development without effectively fighting corruption

Therefore, we call on all Liberians to promote integrity and increase public participation in the fight against corruption in Liberia

Let us unite in the fight against corruption for peace, prosperity and development.

Thank you.