



Monrovia, 30th June 2016

Press Release

Ministry of Justice and Forestry Development Authority Sign Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen Forestry Compliance and Enforcement

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concerning cooperation in their strategic partnership to enhance forestry compliance and enforcement.

Speaking at the signing ceremony at the Ministry of Justice in Monrovia on Thursday, 30th June 2016, Justice Minister Frederick Cherue said the MoU provides a framework for cooperation between his ministry and the FDA. He emphasized that the MoU is a key element of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement, signed between the Republic of Liberia and the European Union (EU), under the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan. The VPA came into force in 2013.

On his part, Forestry Development Authority Managing Director, Harrison Karnwea who signed for the FDA, mentioned that the MoU would enhance law enforcement in the forestry sector with the support of the European Union and the United Kingdom Department for International Development, under the initiative dubbed: "Forest Governance Capacity Building in Liberia with the FDA and MoJ in support of the VPA Process".

In remarks, European Union Ambassador to Liberia, Tiina Intelmann welcomed the signing of the MoU and the efforts to establish solid governance of the forestry sector in Liberia. She stressed that transparency and accountability were crucial to ensuring that all Liberians benefitted from the abundant natural resources of their beautiful country. "We will continue to support you in this effort and look forward to seeing legitimate jobs and economic opportunities being created" She stated.

Background

The forest sector has a long and challenging history regarding law enforcement. In 2003, to prevent forestry from continuing to fuel the Liberian conflict, the United Nations imposed a ban on the exportation of Liberian timber.

Later in 2006, after inauguration, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf issued Executive Order Number One, cancelling all forestry concessions. Previous reviews had determined that not a single forestry concession complied with Liberian law at the time.

To reactivate the forestry sector, Liberia enacted the National Forestry Reform Law of 2006, which recognized that forestry is important for commercial, community, and conservation objectives and provided a framework to allow for commercial logging under Forest Management Contracts (FMC) and Private Use Permits (PUPs), among others. In 2009 Liberia enacted the Community Rights Law to provide opportunities to communities in commercial forestry.

Abuses found in granting PUPs prompted President Johnson Sirleaf to reinforce FDA's resolution of placing a moratorium on PUPs since 2012. A significant step forward to control illegal logging in Liberia is the Voluntary Partnership Agreement that entered into force in 2013, part of which is the legal support to the MOJ and FDA.

With all the efforts by the government of Liberia to strengthen the laws, regulations, and institutions governing forestry, forest governance has been progressing in recent years. However, achievements to date are considered not sufficiently robust to protect the Liberian forests against illegal logging. To help respond to enforcement challenges and enhance effective coordination between the MOJ and the FDA, this MOU aims to formalize cooperation covering the following.

I. Activities

Specific activities covered under this MOU include, but are not limited to:

- A. Working collaboratively to develop policies, strategies and practices for the implementation and enforcement of the laws that govern the forestry sector in Liberia.
- B. Maximizing MOJ access to FDA technical expertise in order to provide for more effective cooperation in the development of enforcement cases, negotiation of forestry related contracts and assistance in the drafting of regulations.
- C. Working to ensure that the FDA's actions are in compliance with all of the applicable laws.
- D. Encouraging and facilitating the sharing of data, including but not limited to data related to all licenses.
- E. Developing joint initiatives for the advancement of human capital within MOJ and FDA through teaching and training.
- F. Encouraging professional exchanges and formal liaison relationships between MOJ and FDA personnel including but not limited to the Minister, Managing Director, Deputy Ministers, and Deputy Managing Directors.

The senior leadership of MoJ and FDA has pledged to meet on a quarterly basis to discuss any issues relevant to this MOU including the governance of the forestry sector in general. Work under this MOU will be jointly planned and monitored by MoJ and FDA. This MOU may be supplemented by protocols or operating procedures addressing particular issues in more detail.

