

I am really pleased that so many of you agreed to come to Leipzig. Who would have guessed that more than fifty enterprises and investors would come here, to inquire about business opportunities in Liberia? Just one year ago, the country was still suffering from the deadly disease of Ebola. Given the decline in the number of new patients and the declaration by the WHO of Liberia as an Ebola-free country, there have been no more casualties in Liberia since May 2015. But the country, having just recovered from the effects of the deadly disease, is now facing another challenge: this time the decline of the commodity prices, world wide. Sales of iron ore, the country's main export, are now less profitable and some mining companies were forced to lay off employees, or, worse, had to stop production altogether.

Why am I telling you this right at the beginning of my speech? Not to scare you away, to be sure. Rather to the contrary: I want to be faithful to the old adage: there is an opportunity in every moment of crisis. I want to give you an accurate picture of a country that has to face challenges, just like so many other countries in Africa. But at the same time, I want to point out the opportunities that are available to those who are now willing to believe in Liberia. Because the African market, and also the Liberian one, is complex, but also full of opportunities. None of you, business man or investor, would be here if you did not already know that Liberia has something to offer. The contributors and I want to prove to you that you are right. We hope to anticipate your questions and to provide you with all the answers you may need. And please, if there is anything that we did not address, come and talk to us individually.

Ladies and gentlemen, what is true for all businesses in Liberia is the following: those who act well and sustainably are those who provide apprenticeship and job opportunities for the local population. Because this is exactly what the country needs the most, right now, after the Civil War, Ebola, and the decline in commodity prices. We will provide support and assistance, should you choose to help the country. We will give you further information on this in the course of this event. At this time, you are able to take advantage of unique opportunities, without having to deal with large and powerful competition. Those who choose to establish themselves in Liberia at this time are acting in a humanitarian manner, a laudable position, I believe.

In the 1970s, Liberia was one of the wealthiest nations in Africa. The long civil war, which began in the Fall of 1989, was a devastating blow to the nation. Let me remind you that this happened at a time when the peaceful revolution started here in Leipzig. At first, a quick recovery under the leadership of President Ellen Johnson, the first democratically elected leader in Africa and later Nobel Prize recipient, took place and managed to fight the devastating disease of Ebola. I know that the Liberian people only wishes to actively participate in the development of the nation and to pave its own way to happiness and prosperity. As a result, investors and enterprises from Germany are welcome, not only by the inhabitants, but also by the government officials. Liberia was founded in 1822 by the United States, and to this day the nation has maintained close ties to the United States. But Liberia and Germany are also tied by an old and strong alliance. Through one of the largest iron ore mines, the Bong Mine, German qualities such as industriousness, reliability, and a sense of quality are well known and appreciated. Such a reputation puts every one of you at an advantage.

The nation's official language is English. Hence, there should not be any problem communicating for most of you. As far as time is concerned, Liberia is one hour behind in the Winter and two in the Summer. A plane flight via Brussels Airlines takes six hours on average, and thus does not present any major obstacles. We can inform you about specifics of the tax system. In addition, we hope to answer questions such as: am I able to buy real estate as a native of Germany? Can I transfer any gains to Germany? What is awaiting me in terms of corruption? What support systems are available to me?

Be assured, ladies and gentlemen, that you are welcome in Liberia. I am glad to assist you, if you are contemplating a commitment to Liberia, and this is also true for the Liberian Embassy in Berlin, the German and the Liberian government, and many of those present here tonight. Everyone is aware at present that Africa is where the future lies, and that this is a time to grasp the opportunities. For sure, there is some risk involved in entering the African market. However, bear in mind that such risks are highly reduced when one has influential allies and adequate knowledge of the present market situation. We hope to provide you with information on both accounts, as this may open the doors for you.

I want to thank all contributors who found their way to Leipzig to provide you with information and to support you in your decision-making process. I thank you, the Honorable Ethel Davis, Liberian Ambassador in Berlin, Mr. Westphal of the Ministry for Economic Collaboration and Development, Mr. Wisner, Director of Liberia National Investment Commission, Mr. Davis, CEO of IHK Liberia, Mr. Hempel, and Mr. Zagel, Mr. Boehner, and my friend Mr. Blibo, who will report to us about his office in Liberia.

I want to extend special thanks to Ambassador Krausser, who offered to moderate the event, You know the entire West African territory and you know Liberia. You also served as the German Ambassador to Guinea, one of Liberia's neighboring countries. I am now passing the microphone to you.