

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY

H.E. JOSEPH NYUMA BOAKAI, Sr.

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

at the World Food Forum 2024

Rome, Italy

October 14, 2024

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Heads of State and Government

Dr. Qu Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),

The Chair of the Independent Council,

Distinguished Ministers and Esteemed FAO Members,

Esteemed Heads of Delegation, and Representatives of Institutions,

Distinguished Development partners,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you, Mr. Director General, for the kind invitation to address this august body, as we discuss “Good Food Today, Good Food Tomorrow” against the backdrop of food insecurity, and the urgent need to improve the world’s agrifood systems. It is an honor to address you on this pressing concern that transcends borders and affects millions of lives. Today, we are witnessing the alarming rise of hunger and malnutrition across various parts of the globe, with the impact profoundly affecting the African continent.

Africa, a land abundant with natural resources and agricultural potential, tragically finds itself at the epicenter of this crisis. According to FAO reports, millions of people across this diverse continent, and many other parts of the world face acute food shortages. The stark reality is that, despite its fertile soils and vibrant cultures,

Africa is beset by complex challenges such as climate change, conflict, economic instability, and inadequate infrastructural investments in agriculture.

These factors have not only aggravated the food crisis but have also deepened vulnerabilities within communities, limiting their access to adequate nutrition and the means for improving their lives. Today, one in five people in Africa go to bed hungry, a statistic that compels us to act decisively.

We are not here today simply to highlight the challenges, but to call for concrete action — urgent, impactful steps that will drive tangible change on the ground.

Liberia stands ready to contribute to this global movement for food security by sharing our vision and experiences in building an inclusive, resilient, and transformative agrifood system—one that can deliver sustainable food security and nutrition for our people not just today but in the future.

Located in the heart of West Africa's Upper Guinea Rainforest region, Liberia is recognized as one of the world's most biodiverse areas. We are also one of the world's wettest countries, with an annual rainfall exceeding 2500 mm.

Our revised 2021 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) commits to reducing GHG emissions by 64% below the projected business-as-usual level by 2030. In doing so, we reaffirm our dedication to environmental sustainability, with 10% of the reduction unconditional and 54% dependent on international support.

Liberia is a vital net carbon sink, absorbing more greenhouse gases (GHGs) than it emits, and proudly contains over 40 percent of West Africa's remaining rainforest. While we remain proud of our contributions to addressing global warming, we must also recognize the importance of our dependence on the soil for our food security and economic development.

Mr. Director General, colleagues, and distinguished delegations:

We must prioritize funding for agricultural innovation and sustainable farming practices. By equipping farmers with the right tools, knowledge, and resources, we can increase crop yields and diversify production, ensuring farmers can feed their families and lift themselves out of poverty.

Liberia's agricultural sector is vital to the country's economy, accounting for 28.9% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and providing a livelihood for over 68% of our population. Development in food and cash crops, fisheries, and livestock can drive rapid growth in the next few years through sustainable practices and improved inputs. We will focus on food crops, fisheries, and organic cash crops like palm oil and cocoa, which have a positive impact on food security and local commerce.

Our vision for sustainable agriculture and food security is simple but ambitious. It requires that we purposefully invest in sustainable value chains that promote agricultural productivity, reduce food loss, enhance processing capabilities, improve market access, and develop inclusive agribusiness models that empower smallholder farmers, women, and youth.

We are also starting an Agro-Industrial Development Program, centered on Oil Palm and Cocoa. This initiative will transform the oleo-products industry into a cornerstone of our economic growth and wealth creation. Our vision encompasses six key objectives: achieving sustained economic growth, establishing new pillars of growth, creating wealth in our rural communities, generating vital foreign exchange, boosting employment opportunities, and attracting foreign direct investments.

Liberia's ideal climate equips us to develop a robust oleo-chemicals industry, with an initial focus on oil palm cultivation. Currently, we face a significant shortfall of over 40,000 tons of palm oil, and across West Africa, that deficit reaches 1.8

million tons. This program is not just about agriculture; it's about enhancing our food security and securing a prosperous future for all Liberians.

The plan is to put under cultivation some 100,000 Hectares of land initially to meet local demand and later increase to 300,000 hectares to meet the West African market. The agricultural plans will be accompanied by plans for the processing/milling, refining, and marketing of the oil and downstream processed products.

To achieve this, we will leverage technology and digitization and strengthen agricultural research and extension services. In addition, we will remain sensitive to conservation commitments, and we will improve access to finance by establishing an agriculture enterprise development bank.

Mr. Director General, colleagues, and distinguished participants:

As we look toward the future and begin preparing "Good Food For All, For Today And Tomorrow" we must act with urgency, determination, and focus, targeting the following areas:

1. **Support for Local Food Systems:** Let us commit to bolstering local food production networks. By investing in rural infrastructure — such as roads, markets, and storage facilities — we can improve supply chains and decrease post-harvest losses. Supporting local farmers' cooperatives and smallholder initiatives will empower communities and foster resilience.

2. **Promoting Climate Resilience:** Climate change is an undeniable reality and a significant threat to food security. We must adopt and implement climate-smart agricultural practices and invest in research for drought-resistant crops that can withstand changing weather patterns, ensuring our food systems remain stable in the face of environmental uncertainty.

3. **Strengthening Social Safety Nets:** In moments of crisis, vulnerable populations often suffer the most. It is imperative that we broaden social protection programs that can provide direct support to those most at risk of food insecurity. Ensuring access to nutrition for children, pregnant women, and the elderly is essential to break the cycle of poverty and malnourishment.

And...

4. **Global Collaboration and Partnerships:** Lastly, we cannot face these challenges alone. We must engage in cross-border collaborations, share best practices, and foster partnerships between governments, civil society, private sector stakeholders, and international organizations. United, we can take dedicated actions to create sustainable food systems that not only feed our nations but lay the foundation for enduring peace and prosperity.

Mr. Director General, Excellencies, and distinguished participants:

The global population is growing, with increasing pressures on our food systems. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and soil degradation further threaten our ability to meet the food needs of a growing population. This year's World Food Forum presents an opportunity for all of us to reflect, deliberate, and commit to actions that will help transform national and community agrifood systems.

The time for rhetoric has passed; it is now the moment for robust, unified action. We have the knowledge, the resources, and the humanity to tackle this crisis head-on. Let us emerge from this meeting, not with mere commitments but with actionable steps that we will plant firmly in the ground as we sow the seeds of hope and resilience.

On behalf of the people of Liberia, I reaffirm our commitment to strengthening partnerships and contributing to the global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Together, let us foster a future where no child, no parent, and no community is left to face the anguish of hunger. Our actions today can help shape the landscape of tomorrow. Together, we can ensure a more resilient, sustainable, and prosperous future for our planet and its people.

Thank you!