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[SLIDE 1: BACKGROUND]

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today about our recent experience in Liberia since the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and Security Council Resolution 1509. As you all know, Liberia's fourteen-year civil war was devastating – over a quarter of a million people died and hundreds of thousands of people were displaced. Women and girls suffered from grave abuses of sexual violence. The country's infrastructure was completely destroyed and humanitarian organizations were the primary providers of basic services to the population at large.

With the signing of the peace agreement in Accra, and the establishment of the transitional government, the groundwork for advancing the country towards stability and recovery had to be laid. The UN Security Council set up the UN Mission in Liberia and gave it a broad mandate to support peace consolidation efforts. It was, at the time, the largest peacekeeping mission in

the world and provided an enabling context for the onset of Liberia's transition.

Although I have been invited to speak as the SG's special representative for Liberia, I will also draw on the experiences from my previous "incarnations", not least as Danish Ambassador to the UN in New York. At that time I was also deeply involved with the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission. And Liberia was one of the countries in the back of our minds when the negotiations on the PBC took place. In post-conflict situations, such as Liberia, it is critical for *any* recovery effort to look at how to build and maintain peace. We need to provide instant 'wins' or 'peace dividends' to a divided, wounded society. We need the population to return home, feel safe, have a job, and be able to support their families. We need to restore government capacity as soon as possible if that country is to move forward. We need to ensure that the entire country benefits from recovery, not just the capital city.

Early Recovery interventions must address these needs. With all due respect to the humanitarian community, it is **not** just about having exit strategies from humanitarian assistance. It must help the government to support peace

initiatives and it must restore government capacity. The early recovery efforts should be seen as a critical part of the overall peacebuilding process. I would also like to emphasize that we must stop watching post-conflict situations through phased lenses – peace keeping and peacebuilding are not two separate, sequential processes. They are two sides of the same coin and closely interlinked, and must be pursued simultaneously.

[SLIDE 2: LESSONS FROM RFTF]

Did we manage to address the early recovery needs in Liberia? Well, the answer is mixed. A Post-Conflict Needs Assessment was conducted by the Transitional Government (NTGL) and the international community in 2004. It led to the development of the Results Focused Transitional Framework, which provided the overall umbrella for the recovery efforts.

Several positive elements can be highlighted from the PCNA process: Firstly, it was carried out in close consultation with the transitional government. Secondly, a good dialogue was established with a wide range of national actors, even within the relatively short timeframe. The importance of a widely consultative process cannot be overemphasized. National actors were still developing initial trust and confidence with each other, and some

issues were still sensitive to handle. Yet, in such a situation, it is still important to try to get initial agreement on the root causes of the conflict and the basic needs. And thirdly, the PCNA established a foundation in terms of analysis and identification of post-conflict needs.

But the process also had several short-comings. One key problem was the broad focus of the RFTF. There were too many priorities – it tried to deal with everything at once. Liberia had 13 priority sectors that were grouped into 9 clusters. It was impossible to give full attention and resources to so many areas at the same time – important issues ended up being ignored. Instead, the RFTF should have been more *strategic* rather than *comprehensive*.

In addition, the many priorities were not adequately sequenced. The Government was stretched too thin and was unable to meet expectations. The limited NTGL structure could not effectively monitor or coordinate the many actors and implementing partners suddenly operating in Liberia. Many reforms were initiated but few were completed. The issue of national capacity building was crucial, but was given too little attention in the beginning in Liberia – and remains a problem in the country today. Future

PCNAs must do more to facilitate ownership through capacity development, building on what already exist. After all, capacity and ownership is directly linked to sustainability.

But we also need to be realistic about what can be achieved. Developing a strategy is one thing; implementing it is immensely more difficult, especially in a situation with a new transitional government with few administrative resources. Partnership does not mean that all responsibility is handed to the national authorities on day one. This would be irresponsible. Instead the implementation of early recovery activities and building of national capacity must be started as soon as possible – and simultaneously.

Finally, it has been a concern that the root causes of the Liberian conflict were not properly addressed. As a result, the major conflict drivers like unemployment, social exclusion and gender inequality were secondary to the more mainstream sectors like health and education. We would have achieved more by tailoring the mainstream interventions with the achievement of these peacebuilding outcomes. Liberia is a country where you very clearly see how closely security and development are interlinked.

But experience also provides us with some general lessons about PCNAs. They need to remain flexible. Especially in countries with transitional governments like Liberia when new elections occur and priorities get reoriented. And with limited data available about the situation on the ground at the outset. This means having the ability to adapt the priorities while keeping the overall aims and accountability at the forefront. The Liberia exercise benefited from two reviews – in Washington in September 2004 and in Copenhagen in June 2005. This was positive, but as much as possible, such reviews should be undertaken locally to enhance local ownership – and I might add, to enhance international partners feel for the challenges and realities on the ground!

Furthermore, close links with other planning processes – humanitarian appeals, peacebuilding plans and the UN’s integrated mission planning processes – help bridge some of the funding gaps and foster overall coherence. Similarly, the creation of transitional frameworks should be done with successor arrangements in mind. In Liberia, there is evidence of the RFTF in the post-transition development architecture of the Liberian Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC) which mirrored the RFTF structures and eventually morphed into the four PRS pillars.

Overall, the RFTF provided the first major basis for partners to re-engage with the country and laid the foundation for a strong partnership. The momentum from this transitional period carried forward and has been built upon by the leadership of President Johnson-Sirleaf. With strong partnership comes resource mobilization and a positive image – both of which are so indispensable to successful recovery efforts.

[SLIDE 3: CLUSTER ROLL OUT]

It's not clear why Liberia was selected as a pilot country for the new Cluster Approach given that the worst of the humanitarian crisis was over and the country was well into transition in 2006. Nevertheless we did what we were told...with modifications. We adjusted the Early recovery guidance that was available from HQ at that time so it fitted our reality on the ground.

At the time, the new government of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was eager to move beyond relief and into full-scale recovery and development. She had issued a 150-Day Action Plan to deliver key results for the population based on lessons from the RFTF.

After two years of intensive humanitarian and recovery efforts, the new government strongly felt that the country was already in a reconstruction mode. It was difficult to explain the concept of ‘early recovery’ in such a context. Extensive discussions were held between the government and partners to focus the work of Liberia’s Early Recovery Cluster. It is important to note that in Liberia, the Government was always a participant in the clusters.

Three key areas -- basic rehabilitation of vital infrastructure, income generation and job creation, and support for early rule of law activities – were led overall by UNDP with sub-clusters led by ILO and UNMIL. This cluster structure contributed to coherence in planning and implementation in these diverse areas.

At the same time, the Government was moving forward with the preparations for their iPRS and setting up its related coordination mechanism through the LRDC. We increasingly looked at ways to incorporate or merge our clusters with these government-led sectors and formally did so within a year. Cluster leads remained linked to their sectoral

ministerial counterparts to provide support as needed. Today, our clusters are dormant but can be reactivated in response to a crisis.

It was important for the Early Recovery Cluster to build upon the transitional frameworks that were already in different stages of implementation such as the 150-Day Action Plan. Having a iPRS meant that we didn't need a separate recovery strategy. Instead we looked for ways to strengthen the government's capacity to deliver. We benefited by availing UNMIL's extensive field presence and substantive participation in the cluster discussions and assessments.

[SLIDE 4: Recovery at County Level (CSTs)]

Local community development is recognized as a successful way to support recovery at a decentralized level. In Liberia the establishment of County Support Teams has been a critical contribution in that regard. Given the history of Liberia's conflict and exclusionary past, it was important to re-establish local officials' legitimacy and capacity. This has been an important step towards a more inclusive government, aimed at addressing one of the key causes of the conflict.

Liberia's Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. Ambullai Johnson – who as you know is also here today – has been our main interlocutor on the CST project as well as our work with the funds from the Peacebuilding Fund. I am confident that he will have many important observations to add to my remarks.

CSTs are headed by UN facilitators – both from UN agencies or UNMIL – and provide a consolidated UN response to county challenges, supporting government and building the capacity of their institutions so that they can increasingly assume their responsibility for security, reconstruction and development.

To support the CSTs, a joint UN project, administered by UNDP, has focused on building the capacity of the local administration in assessing, planning, coordinating and raising resources for and delivering essential services in support of the consolidation of civil authority and recovery. Working through UNMIL in the counties, the project provides an innovative opportunity for joining the financial resources of the UN agencies with the human resources of UNMIL's Civil Affairs Section.

This has facilitated the rehabilitation of county structures and local courts, for example, strengthened capacity for local development and preparation for the 2008-2011 PRS. The CSTs also supported the county development agenda (CDA) preparation, which constituted the consultative process for the PRS. This was a huge undertaking with organization of county consultations and then regional consultative fora throughout Liberia.

The CSTs are now considered an important vehicle to support the implementation of the PRS at the county level. In addition, this foundation for participatory planning and capacity broad-based development will dovetail with efforts for a ten-year national county development strategy. Infrastructure rehabilitation links to the wider national infrastructure development programme. Engaging with longer-term partners also facilitates overall sustainability.

I should also note that the County Support Teams have formed the backbone of our integrated UN approach at the field level, which has provided us with a good starting point. Just last week we had a successful UNMIL-UN Country Team retreat where we examined ways to integrate further our

efforts to achieve UNMILs benchmarks and PRS and UNDAF implementation via the CSTs.

[SLIDE 5: Overall Lessons Learnt]

Early recovery activities require early planning and programming to ensure effective coordination, alignment and impact. The late introduction of early recovery activities in Liberia – long after the onset of transition – imposed additional negotiation challenges and transaction costs.

Early recovery should link up with existing national strategies and implementation arrangements where they exist. The alignment with the iPRS and LRDC frameworks in Liberia facilitated coherence, ownership and overall effectiveness rather which a duplicate, stand-alone early recovery strategy would not have done.

Early recovery is still a confusing concept to many and the interpretations seem to cover almost anything. In the context of complex post-conflict situations, early recovery interventions need to be strategic. There should be a strong focus on areas of comparative advantage or of critical importance as part of a peace dividend. Building long-term development capacity proved to be a very strategic entry point for Liberia.

But I would also like to emphasize, once again, that early recovery should be seen as an integral part of peacebuilding. We have a tendency within the international community to create separate processes, probably because we feel more comfortable working within well-defined boxes. It might make sense at Board meetings and Conferences such like this. But not on the ground and certainly not by national actors with limited capacity. In a post-conflict environment there is no clear separation between peace-keeping, early recovery and peacebuilding etc. All our planning and all our strategies need to address the same tough challenges, for example, how to ensure more job creation from the onset of the signing of the Peace Agreement in order to have better employment opportunities for ex-combatants going through our disarmament process. Or how to build infrastructure so that all parts of the country can be reached. Or how to build rule of law institutions. All crucial – in Liberia at least – to ensure that the country does not relapse into conflict.

In addition, flexibility is critical for countries to determine their appropriate mechanisms for addressing the challenges of early recovery. Actors need to be prepared for sudden deviations – all the more important when there is a

transitional authority in place or there are still areas of a country not fully stabilized.

Recognizing the limitations of national institutions should also be factored into planning and assessments. PCNAs should have time limitations, and should set realistic expectations. Focusing on fewer priorities provides the government with more possibility to coordinate, monitor and report on the overall implementation progress. This must be combined with some kind of financial reporting framework which would allow the government to have a clear overview of the multiple funding arrangements.

Another problem is that resource mobilization for early recovery remains difficult. Too often, we risk that the level of service we are providing to populations drops once the humanitarian actors start to phase out and early recovery activities are supposed to take over. In Liberia this sector was relatively under-funded, when included in consolidated appeals. Luckily we found supportive donors to finance our CST initiative that allowed us to really foster decentralization and restoration of state capacity at local levels. It also brought the UN family together at the county level, integrating our planning and implementation efforts.

This brings me to insert a final side comment about the UN cooperation in Liberia. Although Liberia is not one of the “one UN pilot countries”, I have been very impressed by the level of integration and cooperation. This includes innovative approaches such as joint programmes, joint offices and joint use of UN assets – but also a general willingness to find pragmatic solutions to common challenges. And it includes a very close cooperation between the peacekeeping mission and other UN actors. Luckily no one can accuse me of bragging, because the credit goes to people who have been in the Mission before me, not least my predecessor Alan Doss, my deputy Jordan Ryan and heads of agencies.

Let me close by saying that despite its initial start-up challenges, the early recovery approach has had an overall positive impact on Liberia’s reconstruction efforts. A flexible application helped tailor UN response to strategic national capacity development needs thereby strengthening the foundation for longer-term participatory development. Continuous refinement of the early recovery concept, tools and instruments, and predictable funding will help improve its relevance and efficacy as part of the growing post-conflict response menu.