

Welcome Remarks by GoL at the UK-Liberia High-Level Business Briefing 5th December, London

Statement by Eugene Lenn Nagbe, In UK



From left L-R(Mr. Asaad R. Fadel, Senior Vice president, Mano, Minister Nangbe and Mr. Mohamad Helm Othman Basha, Group Managing Director, Sime Darby Beherd) at the Investment forum in UK on Thursday.

Ladies & Gentlemen, prospective investors,

First of all I would like to thank the organiser, Mr. Atam & DMA for giving us the opportunity during this Forum to address an important milestone in Liberia's investment climate.

I would like to introduce to you to the two gentlemen up on stage with me. On my left is Mr. Mohamad Helmy Othman Basha, Group Managing Director, Sime Darby Plantation and Mr Fady Fadel, CEO Mano Palm Oil Industry Limited.

Thank you for attending today's event to help us put Liberia's development back on track.

Liberia is a country with a lot of potential to offer entrepreneurs and investors looking for opportunities.

Two such companies that have tapped into that potential are Sime Darby Plantation and Mano Palm Oil Industry or MPOI.

Sime Darby Plantation has been a key component of the palm oil industry in Liberia, providing locals with a source of income over the last few years. The Government of Liberia has seen the efforts Sime Darby Plantation put in to boost our palm oil sector.

So it was with a heavy heart that we received news of Sime Darby Plantation's intention to exit their upstream operations in Liberia due to the extremely challenging commodity market conditions.

However, we were extremely pleased they found another local home grown buyer, MPOI to take over their operations.

MPOI has built its foot print in Liberia over the past 50 years, making it one of the leading manufacturers of soaps and detergents that contains crude palm oil (CPO).

MPOI has been purchasing crude palm oil from Sime Darby Plantation and has gone on to become a key trader of CPO in the international market – an important component of the palm oil industry value chain.

Their decision to take over Sime Darby Plantation's operations has come as a welcome relief. While the low commodity price may be challenging for an upstream business, it is actually good for downstream players like MPOI that use Crude Palm Oil as their manufacturing input.

Ladies & Gentlemen

The taking over of Sime Darby Plantation's operations by another buyer means a lot for this country and our Government in particular. It ensures the level of confidence investors have in the Liberian economy.

In Liberia, the Agriculture area is one sector that can improve the economy and create more jobs for Liberians. So, this is why the government sees this take over by another responsible company as the best way to stimulate the economy.

We were also heartened to hear that MPOI will incorporate the Outgrowers Scheme, a vital component in the sector that has been successful in many third world countries.

Liberia has been encouraging local farmers to take advantage of this as it makes communities self-sufficient and empowers them. Moreover, the Outgrowers' scheme, reduces the employment stress on our government.

The Ministry of Agriculture and related sectors have been working with other players to implement this scheme and today, the entry of this new buyer has reinvigorated the government's efforts.

I am happy to announce that the funding for this scheme has been secured and will be implemented in the shortest possible time. It was one of the preconditions set by SDPL on any buyer. We want to commend SDPL for implementing such a brilliant move to ensure a continued responsible and sustainable business operation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

SDPL and MPOI are finalizing their terms and conditions of the Sales & Purchase Agreement and the Government of Liberia is taking a key interest in ensuring the deal will go through for the benefit of the people of Liberia.

On the ground, daily operations are "business as usual" for employees, communities, vendors and other related stakeholders, with only ownerships exchanging hands. SDPL will provide the technical expertise for MANCO and the new management team to run the operations smoothly during the transition period.

Thank you once again to MPOI and SDPL. We hope your businesses will continue to prosper.

As for the government, we can assure MPOI and all parties that they will enjoy the incentives and benefits provided to SDPL previously and also to other businesses and investors in Liberia.

We hope this will encourage prospective investors to come into Liberia.

May I now call upon Mr. Helmy from Sime Darby Plantation or Mr Fady Fadel from MPOI to say a few words.

Thank you