



**Ambassador
Head of Delegation
European Union in Liberia**

May 16, 2025

Dear H.E. Ms. Nona Deprez

“Civil Society and Communities' Expectations for a mutually beneficial EU Forest Partnership for Liberia”

The NGO coalition of Liberia, comprising of NGOs working in the forest sector and forest dependent communities, have raised concern about the European Union (EU)'s intention to terminate its Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with Liberia, and has repeatedly stated that [“the VPA has been instrumental in improving forest governance, curbing illegal logging and enhancing transparency in Liberia’s forestry sector.”](#)

The Environmental Protection Agency Executive Director has also challenged the termination of the VPA during the 12th JIC by saying, “...the cancellation of the VPA is not good for Liberia”. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice raised its concern that the cancellation of the VPA was not involving the adequate Liberia representatives: “the VPA is a high-level agreement between the Government of Liberia and the European Union that started with diplomatic initiative between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the EU Delegations which resulted in the ratification of the VPA.....”¹ The Ministry of Justice, which legally represents the Liberian Government, indicated that the cancellation of the VPA should adhere to a comparable process to be legally-binding.

When it comes to the Forest Partnership the Government representatives who attend the Joint Implementation Committee meetings should not alone have the authority to decide how the Government of Liberia should enter into a Forest Partnership. Such a decision must be addressed at a higher level involving Liberian NGOs and communities before the Government of Liberia can commit to an implementation of the Forest Partnership.

¹ Aide Memoire, 12th Joint Implementation Committee meeting between Liberia and EU, November 2024

Liberian NGOs and communities are also advocating for a model of coexistence between the VPA and the Forest Partnership that values the involvement of all stakeholders in the agreement processes. In countries like Guyana, the Republic of Congo, and Honduras, the VPAs and Forest Partnerships are compatible and complementary, rather than mutually exclusive. In these nations, the Forest Partnership serves as a coordination tool that relies on the effective implementation of the VPA for its success.

This coexistence approach will encourage dialogue among governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders, ensuring that the legal objectives of the VPA are met. The VPA should be strengthened by the addition of a Forest Partnership rather than being replaced by it, providing room for necessary adjustments and improvements to foster an effective partnership with the EU.

By adopting this approach, we can achieve creative and sustainable solutions that uphold the successes of the VPA and enhance respect for forest governance. It will promote meaningful dialogue among governments, civil society, and industry stakeholders, ensuring that VPA objectives are fulfilled while also adding value and allowing for necessary enhancements to the Forest Partnership. Ultimately, this strategy will lead to better outcomes that maintain the integrity of the agreement while respecting the evolving landscape of forest governance.

The EU Forest Partnership for Liberia represents a critical opportunity to strengthen sustainable forest governance, enhance community participation, and ensure that forest resources contribute meaningfully to national development. To be truly effective, the envisioned Forest Partnership with Liberia must consider the following:

Maintain the VPA, A Legally Binding Agreement/Partnership with the EU

The VPA establishes a legally binding agreement between Liberia and the EU. Liberia's forests are an essential component of its economy and ecological system, making their governance a matter of national and international importance. A legally binding agreement ensures that commitments made under it are not merely voluntary but are enforceable, thereby promoting accountability among all parties. This existing framework has established clear mechanisms for compliance, dispute resolution, system governance, and penalties for non-adherence. Given the historical challenges of forest governance in Liberia, a legally binding agreement provides an incentive for responsible private sector participation.

Complement the VPA with the Forest Partnership

The Forest Partnership should not replace the existing VPA; rather, they should operate alongside one another. The VPA provides a well-established structure, system, and processes for improving forest governance, particularly regarding timber legality and trade. The EU and Liberia can leverage existing frameworks to enhance monitoring, enforcement, and sustainability measures by aligning the Forest Partnership with the VPA. The VPA's mechanisms for verifying legal timber production and trade should serve as a model for expanding legality requirements to other

commodities, including in response to the EUDR. EU support for inclusive development of Liberia's carbon legal framework should also be incorporated. Lastly, the Forest Partnership should heed to conservation priorities and to this end be designed to incorporate discussions on the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on Forestry & Biodiversity. In bringing together all of these key dimensions of forest governance (timber and agricultural supply chains, carbon and conservation), the partnership can maximize complementarity, alignment and coherence in EU-Liberia collaboration on forests. Additionally, the partnership must reinforce Liberia's commitment to sustainable forest management and responsible trade, ensuring continuity in governance and accountability mechanisms.

Ensuring the Completion of the FLEGT Process

The Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade (FLEGT) process has been instrumental in establishing legal frameworks for timber legality in Liberia. However, full implementation remains incomplete. The EU Forest Partnership should prioritize completing the FLEGT process to ensure that timber legality is fully realized and enforced. Achieving this milestone is crucial, as it would set a precedent for regulating other commodities, such as palm oil, rubber, and cocoa, under similar sustainability and legality standards. By finalizing the FLEGT process, Liberia can position itself as a leader in sustainable commodity production, opening doors for improved trade relations with the EU and other international markets. This will also positively position Liberia within the Broader Market Recognition Coalition ([BMRC](#)) initiative in the context of the growing global recognition of national systems as a market and global objective.

Provide for Inclusive Engagement with Forest-dependent Communities and Civil Society

A fundamental aspect of the Forest Partnership must be the inclusion of community forestry structures and NGOs in decision-making processes. Liberia's forests are home to numerous local communities. They take care of the forests, and rely on its resources for their livelihoods. It is essential that these communities, along with NGOs advocating for their rights, have a formal seat at the negotiating table. Inclusive engagement will ensure that policies and programs developed under the Forest Partnership reflect the needs and priorities of those directly affected by forest governance decisions. Strengthening community forestry structures and NGOs through participatory decision-making processes will lead to more equitable and sustainable outcomes.

Participatory decision-making spaces within the VPA need to be maintained and broadened with EU support and with a mandated civil society component, including the NMSMC, the LIC and JIC. In addition, all the processes leading to concluding Liberia's Forest Partnership with the EU should be through a participatory process with civil society and community representation in line with Liberia's forest sector legal framework on public participation.

Capacity Building for All Stakeholders

Sustainable forest governance requires the active involvement of multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society, communities, and businesses. The new EU Forest Partnership must include comprehensive capacity-building initiatives tailored to the needs of different

stakeholder groups. Government institutions such as the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA) require training and resources to enhance their enforcement and monitoring capabilities. NGOs and community groups must be empowered with knowledge and tools to effectively advocate for sustainable forest management and community rights, as well as monitor forests. Businesses operating in the forestry sector also need guidance on complying with legality requirements and adopting sustainable practices. A well-structured capacity-building component will strengthen Liberia's forest governance system and ensure that all stakeholders can contribute meaningfully to the partnership's success. In this regard, the envisioned FP must be provided adequate financial resources to ensure its intentional and objective implementation.

Ensure Engagement across the Government of Liberia, to Guarantee Support, Coherence and Accountability

In addition to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and forest-dependent communities being provided formal roles in the Forest Partnership (FP), it is imperative that the structure of the FP also includes strategic representation from key government ministries and legislative bodies. These should include the Ministry of Mines and Energy, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA), Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA) and the Committees on Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Fisheries from both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

This cross-sectoral and intergovernmental inclusion is not merely a matter of coordination—it is foundational to ensuring policy coherence, transparency, and sustained political buy-in. The experience of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) process in Liberia clearly demonstrates that a multi-stakeholder structure, formally recognizing and integrating relevant government entities, has been one of the most transformational features of the initiative. It has created pathways for joint decision-making, improved inter-agency collaboration, and enabled more holistic responses to governance and enforcement challenges in the forest sector.

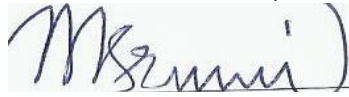
Moreover, the formal inclusion of legislative committees in the FP ensures sustained political oversight and policy support across political cycles. Their engagement provides a platform for monitoring implementation, pushing for legislative reforms, and safeguarding forest governance priorities in national budgeting and lawmaking processes.

Conclusion

The EU Forest Partnership with Liberia has the potential to transform forest governance in the country, but its success depends on its structure, implementation, and inclusivity. Aligning the Forest Partnership with the legally binding VPA framework will ensure accountability and provide the necessary structure for effective implementation. Completing the FLEGT process is essential for regulating timber legality and setting a foundation for other commodities. Furthermore, community forestry structures and NGOs must be given a formal role in decision-making to ensure that governance is both participatory and transparent. Finally, capacity-building initiatives should

be a core component of the partnership to strengthen the capabilities of all stakeholders involved. By addressing these key areas, the new EU Forest Partnership can create a sustainable and equitable future for Liberia's forests and the people who depend on them.

G. Mitchell Browne, Sr.



National Facilitator

NGO Coalition of Liberia

Andrew Y. Zeleman

National Facilitator

National Union of Community Forest Development Committee (NUCFDCs)

Bonathan G. Walaka

Head of Secretariat

National Union of Community Forest Management Bodies (NUCFMB)



Attested: _____

Dayugar Johnson

Chair, Management team

NGO Coalition of Liberia