

Opening Statement

By

**His Excellency, Ambassador Dee-Maxwell Saah Kemayah, Sr.
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of the Republic
of Liberia to the United Nations**

**Coordinating Meeting for the proposed United Nations General Assembly Resolution on the
International Day for Universal Access to Information
Uganda House, New York
July 16 2019**

Your Excellences
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Liberia to the United Nations, I am very much pleased to welcome all of you to this coordinating meeting on the proposed United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution on Universal Access to Information; an issue that is very important to His Excellency Dr. George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia, the Government, and People of Liberia.

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Liberia to the United Nations has convened this meeting; in collaboration with various partners; including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), International Institute for Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), and the African Platform on Access to Information (APAI).

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss how we can work together to give effect to a key aspect of the proposed resolution on the “Proclamation of September 28 as the International Day for the Universal Access to Information”, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its 38th Session in November 2015; wherein the General Conference requested the Director-General of UNESCO to bring the resolution to the attention of the United Nations Secretary-General, so that the “International Day for the Universal Access to Information” may also be adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

Consistent with the new United Nations development framework, namely, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which under Goal 16.10.2 recognizes access to information, we appreciate the importance of access to information as an enabler of all other sustainable development goals; whether it is ending poverty in all its forms everywhere; ending hunger and achieving food security and food nutrition; ensuring healthy lives and well-being; ensuring equitable education, gender equality and women empowerment; promoting peaceful and inclusive societies; building resilient infrastructure; or reducing inequalities within and among countries. None of these goals can be achieved without access to information.

In addition to the fact that access to information is necessary for the realization of the Seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), it is also important to facilitate the measurement of progress being made towards the realization of these goals.

As a country that has experienced conflict and major public health crisis such as the Ebola pandemic; Liberia appreciates the value of access to information; in combating problems of this scale, and knows firsthand what lack of information can mean for a society-- the difference between life and death.

We therefore believe that access to information is not only essential for the democratic functioning of a society, but is also pivotal and vital for the sustainable development of countries.

His Excellency Dr. George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia and the Government of Liberia are fully committed to promoting the advancement of citizens access to information. Liberia has one (1) of the best Access to Information Laws globally; allowing both the media and individual citizens to demand information from any Public Authority or Private Authority that carries out Government related functions. Also, in February this year-2019, His Excellency President Weah signed into Law the Kamara Abdullah Kamara (KAK) Act of Press Freedom, which decriminalizes free speech in Liberia through the amendments of Chapter 11 of the Penal Law of 1978, repealing Sections 11.11 on criminal libel against the President; Section 11.12 on Sedition and Section 11.14 on criminal malevolence. The enactment and signing into Law of the Kamara Abdullah Kamara (KAK) Act of Press Freedom, is a clear evidence; and further manifestation of the unflinching practical commitment of His Excellency Dr. George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia; to promoting and advancing press freedom, freedom of expression and access to information.

In light of the importance of access to information and its undeniable link as an enabler of all Seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), we wish to invite all of you to support this proposed resolution for the "Proclamation of September 28 as the International Day for Universal Access to Information", which the Republic of Liberia has resolved to introduce at the United Nations; as a complement to the UNESCO General Conference Resolution, unanimously adopted by UNESCO Member States nearly four (4) years ago.

The setting aside of a Day to celebrate and raise awareness on the importance of the right to information throughout the world, would create a platform for governments, civil society, citizens and development partners to reflect on challenges and ways to promote the advancement of access to information as a tangible tool for development and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

I therefore call upon all Members States of the United Nations to join us in co-sponsoring and supporting the adoption of this important proposed resolution--"Proclamation of September 28 as the International Day for the Universal Access to Information".

Finally, I thank the Permanent Mission of Uganda to the United Nations for hosting this coordinating meeting. I also wish to thank UNESCO, members of the African Platform on Access to Information (APAI), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the International Institute for Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) for the work done thus far. I urge all partners of this proposed resolution to remain steadfast until the ultimate goal is achieved. I thank all of you for coming to participate in this meeting; and also; eagerly look forward to working with all of you in making sure that the adoption of this proposed resolution becomes a reality.

Thank you for your kind attention.