WELCOME SPEECH FROM THE AMCOW PRESIDENT ON THE OCCASION OF THEMATIC CONSULTATIONS ON WATER CONVENED BY AMCOW ON THE MARGINS OF THE UN POST 2015 EMINENT PERSONS PANEL OUTREACH MEETING IN MONROVIA PRESENTED BY THE AMCOW VICE PRESIDENT (WEST AFRICA) & MINISTER FOR WATER RESOURCES, NIGERIA, HON. SARAH RENG OCHEKPE

Protocol
On behalf of the Council of Ministers and Executive Committee of the African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW), I am delighted to welcome you to today’s thematic consultations on water on the margins of the outreach meeting of the UN Eminent Persons Panel on “the World We Want” beyond 2015. I am particularly pleased that we have in our midst Her Excellency, President Sirleaf Johnson. Your Excellency, AMCOW is deeply grateful for your unwavering commitment to your very important role as Africa’s Goodwill Ambassador on Water and Sanitation. Africa has continued to benefit positively from your compelling globally respected voice and strong advocacy for water and
sanitation in the continent and we feel so proud of our decision to confer this role on your Excellency.

Today we have gathered because of the undeniable need for us to define the world we want beyond 2015. When the world set out at the turn of the millennium in 2000 to set for itself a set of eight goals to achieve on or before 2015, it was with the overall objective of making the world a better place to live in, to reduce poverty, disease and socio-economic inequalities and promote development by improving social and economic conditions across the globe especially with regard to the developing countries and the world's poorest.

Since the adoption of these goals in 2000, developing countries have been struggling to make impact in the MDGs implementation with several of the least developed countries especially in sub Saharan countries virtually limping. With less than three years to the sprint finish, successes have been low, while overwhelming fears pervade of several of these countries being off track.

For instance, Target No. 7C is to “Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.” Though the good news is that Africa has met the MDG target on drinking water, yet there remain over 300 million Africans who don’t have access to safe drinking water and about 14 African countries that are still groaning under the distress of acute water shortage. As I
Speak, about 400 people, mostly children, are likely to die in Africa from water borne diseases, a figure from the about 4 million who suffer same grim fate yearly across the globe.

The statistics on sanitation is even more unpalatable for our continent. It is estimated that Africa may miss the MDG sanitation target with 584 million people said not to have access to an improved sanitation facility. It is worrying that 60 per cent of hospital beds in developing countries are occupied by people suffering from water-related diseases. Much more worrying is that due to lack of access to safe water and unsanitary conditions, more children under the age of five die of diarrhoea than AIDS, measles and malaria combined.

The World Health Organization has observed that ‘If humankind would manage its water resources properly, ensure everyone has reliable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and make basic hygiene practices the norm, we could save around 1.8 million lives yearly – mainly the lives of young children.’

Today the debate still rages on why we did not get it right with the MDGs. Some have critically questioned the apparent lack of analysis and justification behind the chosen MDG objectives, the difficulty or lack of measurements for some of the goals, and uneven progress towards reaching the goals. Many have also attributed the absence of exhaustive consultations among relevant stakeholders in the drawing
up of the goals as another major drawback. Others have equally bemoaned the fact that although developed countries’ aid for achieving the MDGs has been rising over recent years, many of the poor countries where the aid is channelled has used more than half the aid to service overhanging foreign debt while much of the remaining aid money goes towards natural disaster relief and military aid which do little to further development.

If it is argued that the formulators of the MDGs did not engage in enough strategic consultations in ensuring that the implementation process of MDGs is owned by those the goals target, then the thrust of the recent engagement initiated by the United Nations to define the world we want beyond 2015 becomes indispensable. AMCOW is emboldened by this recognition that we need to engage in this sort of conversations and that is why we have tagged the regional water consultations in Monrovia: “Hearing the Africa Voice”. This time, we want to hear not only the voices of the policy makers and analysts, the experts and development workers but more importantly, the voices of the women, especially the rural dwellers who bear the most brunt of the consequences of lack of access to fresh waters, the farmers, the youth, and the children. Their voices matter and if we can constellate all the ideas they bring and turn them into strategic actions, we would by so doing bring all hands on deck and make our world beyond 2015 a more purposeful, motivating and satisfying one.
AMCOW working as the specialized technical committee on water and sanitation of the African Union and in close concert with the AUC Commissioner and her Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture, are ready to drive the process at both the regional and national levels. We intend to not only place attention on safe water and sanitation, we will also focus on using the wider resources that make water our lifeblood to stimulate growth and development in the continent. By so doing, we ensure food and energy security, grow the economy and become more self-reliant in tackling the needs we face in providing drinking water and safe sanitation.

With the impressive support of our Goodwill Ambassador, President Sirleaf Johnson who has continued to galvanize huge political backing at the highest levels for water and sanitation, and the indispensable collaboration of our development and strategic partners, I believe we can and we will succeed.

Your Excellency Madam President, Excellences, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, thank you for listening and welcome.