**DECLARATION OF THE NATIONAL LAND CONFERENCE 2022**

BUCHANAN CITY, GRAND BASSA COUNTY

REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

**THE GBEHZOHN DECLARATION**

**WE, THE DELEGATES TO THE NATIONAL LAND CONFERENCE**, comprising of representatives of various Government Ministries, Agencies and Commissions, local government, communities from the fifteen (15) counties of Liberia, civil society and community-based organizations, private sector, international institutions and donor agencies, convened in Buchanan City, Grand Bassa County from March 1 – 3, 2022:

**HAVING COLLECTIVELY ASSESSED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAND RIGHTS LAW OF 2018**, and noted progress and challenges related to implementation of the Act broadly and Customary Land formalization, specifically;

**HAVING ACKNOWLEDGED THAT GAPS IN THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK** pose additional challenges to the effective implementation of the law;

**HAVING WELCOMED THE COMMITMENTS** of the Government of Liberia, civil society and international organizations and donors to support implementation of the law;

**HAVING TAKEN NOTE OF CHALLENGES BEING ENCOUNTERED** during the Customary Land formalization, including long-standing boundary disputes, entrenched cultural practices that result in marginalization and exclusion of different segments of the populations at the community level;

**HAVING RECOGNIZED THAT LIMITED TECHNICAL CAPACITY** is hindering the development of Land Use Plans at the national and community levels;

**HAVING SPECIFICALLY HIGHLIGHTED THE THREATS** posed by inflow of illegal migrants from other West African Countries are land and national security issues; and

**HAVING RECOGNIZED THE OPPORTUNITIES** the law presents for local communities to formalize, secure and strengthen their ownership and tenure of their Customary Land and the opportunities the resources thereon provide;

**HAVING DELIBERATED ON THE ISSUE OF COORDINATION IN THE LAND SECTOR**, and realizing the crucial need for coordination in the sector to avoid duplication, maximize resources and promote transparency in the land sector;

**DO HEREBY RESOLVED TO**:

1. **EXTEND PROFOUND GRATITUDE** to the Government of Liberia, especially the Liberia Land Authority, for its commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Land Rights Law 2018;
2. **COLLECTIVELY EXPRESS GRATITUDE** to international development partners including donors, bilateral and multilateral institutions, international NGOs and foundations supporting the land sector;
3. **APPRECIATE CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY- BASED ORGANIZATIONS** supporting communities to formalize their Customary Land rights;
4. **APPRECIATE AND ENCOURAGE DEVELOPMENT AND DONOR PARTNERS** to continue their support to the land sector through programming that channels resources to strategic priorities established by the Government of Liberia, especially the Liberia Land Authority and other stakeholders, including:
   1. The finalization and adoption of the Land Rights Law Regulations of 2022 to address the gaps in the regulatory framework;
   2. Establishing a Dedicated Fund to support the conduct of Confirmatory Surveys in communities that have formalize their Customary Land; and
   3. Strengthening the technical capacity of the Liberia Land Authority and other government institutions to fully implement the Land Rights Law and improve overall governance of the land sector;
   4. Strengthening the organizational capacity of Community Land Development and Management Committees (CLDMCs) to enable them to effectively implement their mandate;
   5. Strengthening human and technical capacity within government, civil society, private sector and communities to be able to develop and implement Participatory Land Use Plans at the national, county and community levels;
5. **CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA** to prioritize the following strategic objectives:
   1. That County Land Offices across the country are fully functional, and adequately resourced to effectively support communities as they complete the formalization process;
   2. That the Liberia Land Rights Act Regulations of 2022 be finalized, ensuring that the regulations are fully compliant with the law;
   3. That the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice and the Liberia Land Authority develop Standard Operation Procedures to guide the participation and support of traditional and customary authorities to Customary Land formalization and governance of community lands;
   4. That Confirmatory Surveys are conducted for communities that have benefited from Customary Land formalization;
   5. That an integrated land information and management system be established to modernize land information management and improve land administration at the national, county and local levels;
   6. That there be a coordination and collaboration framework/mechanism established between local government administrations and County Land Offices;
   7. That a Ministerial Committee be established to investigate the influx of illegal migrants into Liberia and propose measures to address the situation; and
   8. Mainstream principles of good governance of land as established in various international regional and national frameworks and instruments such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forest in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), the Principles on Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (RAI), Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW); African Union Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa.
6. **CALL ON CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS** to improve facilitation of the formalization process by:
   1. Strengthening engagement with local government and traditional leaders to secure their participation at all stages of the Customary Land formalization process;
   2. Streamlining the formalization process to shorten its duration and reduce the cost but doing so in compliance with the law;
   3. Facilitating continuous dialogue between the Community Forest Management Bodies (CFMBs), Community Land Development and Management Committees (CLDMCs), and other community governance bodies to ensure collaboration and cooperation for effective land governance at the community level;
   4. Ensuring full compliance with the law during the formalization process, including the participation of women, youth and people living with disabilities, and equal representation on the CLDMCs; and
   5. Taking steps to improve working relations with the Liberia Land Authority and, strengthening coordination, collaboration, and information sharing within civil society.
7. **CALL ON ALL STAKEHOLDERS** to commit to advancing, securing, and strengthening the land rights of women, youth and other traditionally marginalized groups including:
   1. Directing resources to strengthening the capacity of women to actively and meaningfully participate in land governance at all levels;
   2. Researching and analyzing gender issues and power dynamics within the land sector in order to deepen understanding and, strengthen programming and delivery, to improve the situation of women, youth and other traditionally marginalized groups in the land sector; and
   3. Taking actions to identify and work with champions at all levels of government to engage in advocacy for land rights of women, youth and traditionally marginalized groups.
   4. Building on existing coordination mechanisms including the Donor / international development partners coordination meetings, the Multi Actor Platform on Land Governance in Liberia (MAP Liberia Land Platform), the CSO Working Group on Land Reform, among others, to strengthen both policy and operational level coordination in the sector;
8. **CALL ON ALL STAKEHOLDERS**, including government, civil society, communities, international organizations and development partners, and the private sector to establish an all-inclusive body to operationalize the Gbehzohn Declaration of 2022.

WE, THE DELEGATES DO HEREBY ADOPT, **THE GBEHZOHN DECLARATION,** BY PROCLAMATION on this 3rd Day of March 2022 in the City of Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, Republic of Liberia.