



***“Lessons from the Field: Revising the Public Health Laws in Liberia,
a Post – Conflict State”***

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Georgetown University Law Center
E.B. Williams Law Library, Room 358
600 New Jersey Ave., NW Washington, DC 20001

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Liberia suffered a devastating civil war from 1989-2003, with serious consequences for people and their families and major disruptions in every sector, including the health sector. These were the conditions inherited by the new government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf when she was elected as the first female head of state in Africa in 2006. Nevertheless, with concerted efforts by the government and its international partners, Liberia has made major improvements in the health of its people. Health service delivery in Liberia has evolved from the humanitarian phase of the early post-conflict period to a transition phase with a wider donor base – where many health services and discussions on health service delivery were held outside of the government – to a development phase with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare engaged in a participatory planning process to develop a new 10-year strategy and plan for health improvements in Liberia.

As Liberia has embarked upon the development phase in the health sector, the Ministry recognized the importance of developing a sound legal and regulatory framework that would support its approach, and asked for legal assistance from the Ministry’s US-based legal experts. Ms. Austin served as the in-country member of a team of lawyers engaged by the Ministry to revise Liberia’s 1976 Public Health Law, and she developed the analytical approach and strategic plan that the team is using to assist the Ministry. Ms. Austin will discuss the short run and longer term challenges and opportunities presented in this project, including the tools available from other countries and international organizations she used to assist the team in this task and additional research that could be done that would greatly facilitate this effort.

Jeannette L. Austin, J.D., M.P.P., received her master’s degree in global health law from Georgetown University Law Center in 2010. In September 2011, she will be joining the Harvard Global Health Institute as Program Director, Graduate Initiatives and Senior Advisor for International Activities. After receiving her global health law degree, Ms. Austin worked in the U.S. State Department as Special Advisor on Global Health Issues, where she was involved in two major interagency development initiatives: global health and global hunger. She is currently a Senior Legal Advisor with the International Senior Lawyers Project and worked with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in the Republic of Liberia, spending two months working in Monrovia, Liberia. Prior to her global health work, Ms. Austin practiced corporate law in several major law firms and served as in-house counsel in the private and non-profit sectors. In addition to her legal work, Ms. Austin was Budget Director for the City of St. Louis, and the Treasurer and Finance Committee Chair of The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. Ms. Austin is a trained mediator and community conference facilitator.