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Port of Baltimore, Two African Ports Sign Sister Ports Agreement

BALTIMORE, MD (June 22, 2005) – On behalf of Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. and the State of Maryland, Lt. Governor Michael S. Steele today joined with representatives from The Republic of Gambia and The Republic of Ghana for a signing ceremony that establishes a sister ports agreement between the Port of Baltimore and Gambia's Port of Banjul and Ghana's Port of Takoradi. The signing was held in conjunction with the Corporate Council on Africa's 5th Biennial U.S. Africa Business Summit, which is running through June 24 at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront Hotel. Representing The Republic of Gambia was Neneh Macdoull-Gaye, Secretary of State Trade, Industry and Employment and representing The Republic of Ghana was His Excellency Fritz Z. Poku, Ambassador to the United States from The Republic of Ghana.

“The Ports of Banjul and Takoradi are natural partners for the Port of Baltimore, since they share many of the same strengths. This agreement is an important step toward opening up more trade and investment opportunities for both Maryland and African companies and will build on the positive momentum we created during our visit last June,” said Lt. Governor Michael S. Steele. “We recognize that Africa is an important economic driver in the world's economy and the Ports of Banjul and Takoradi hold promising prospects for Maryland exports in a number of sectors, especially electronics.”

As part of the agreement, the Port of Baltimore, Gambia's Port of Banjul and Ghana's Port of Takoradi will work to increase import and export traffic and investment opportunities between their respective port systems, as well as work to identify suitable partners interested in investment and provide assistance to businesspersons of both regions to facilitate trade and investment activities.

“It is fitting this sister port signing occurs on the one year anniversary of Lt. Governor Steele’s mission to West Africa,” said M. Kathleen Broadwater, Deputy Director of the Maryland Port Administration. “We look forward to these sister port relationships as we understand the economic impact of trade with Gambia and Ghana.”

The agreement will have a significant impact on Maryland businesses, but specifically with businesses that currently do business with Africa. A number of Prince George’s County businesses that do business with Africa attended the signing. Among the businesses are BTI Construction and Supply LLC, which recently entered into an agreement to provide 2,000 preformed houses to Gambia; The Berrin Group, which is active in mining operations in three African cities and recently launched the first chain of retail clothing stores that sell U.S. exported clothing to West Africa; and Jewell Industries, which imports spices from Africa and around the world.

“Prince George’s County has worked cooperatively with the Port of Baltimore through Maryland’s Department of Business and Economic Development for the successful signing of these port agreements to effect meaningful trade between Prince George’s County companies and member countries from the economic communities of West African states,” said Patricia Hayes-Parker, Vice President of the Prince George’s County Economic Development Corporation. “The Prince George’s Economic Development Corporation is pleased and very proud to have taken the lead in this business initiative.”

Turning 300 in 2006, the Port of Baltimore has consistently ranked as one of the top U.S. ports for several reasons. Located more than 160 miles inland, Baltimore is the closest U.S. Atlantic seaport to major mid-Western destinations and manufacturing centers. Nestled in the heart of the fourth largest, second wealthiest consumer market in the nation, it also serves as a prime distribution location.