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OVERVIEW OF EVENTS COMMEMORATING THE 165TH INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Embassy of the Republic of Liberia in the United States , Sat, Jul 28, 2012

By Gabriel I.H. Williams : Minister Counselor for Press and Public Affairs

Events commemorating the 165th Independence Anniversary of the Republic of Liberia, held under the auspices of the Embassy of Liberia in Washington, D.C. focused on how Liberians in the Diaspora can be more actively involved in the reconstruction and development of their homeland.

Through a series of events, including a day-long symposium, an All-Day Cultural Extravaganza, and an Intercessory Worship Service, Liberians of all walks of life in the United States expressed their determination and resolved to be actively engaged in the national development process of Liberia.



In order to ensure sustainable peace and progress in Liberia, Diaspora Liberians committed themselves to forging unity of purpose through volunteerism, entrepreneurship, galvanizing resources, and other endeavors. The four-day series of events was held under the theme, “The Role of the Liberian Diaspora in the Reconstruction and Development of Liberia and the Importance of Dual Citizenship in the Context of Reconstruction and Development in Liberia.”

The series of events in commemoration of the 165th Independence Anniversary were as follows:

- Friday, July 20, 2012, a day-long Symposium to consider the theme of this year's celebration was held at the Sheraton Washington North Hotel, attended by nearly 125 participants, including Liberian community leaders, and the Liberian government.



Keynote Speaker: Former Minister of

Foreign Affairs, Her Excellency Olubanke King-Akerele, delivered the keynote address, in which, among other things, she emphasized that Liberians in the Diaspora are better positioned to generate many benefits for the home country, which include continuous remittances, improved quality of human capital, and periodic return of foreign-trained professionals to fill training needs and provide quality leadership at home. Minister King-Akerele explored a three-pronged sub-theme of "Guiding Our Inheritance, Preserving Our Space, and Enhancing Our Future," as a way of fostering and sustaining the impact and contributions made by Diaspora Liberians.

Minister King-Akerele encouraged the Liberian Diaspora Community to search for all information and formulate the means necessary to encourage home-based Liberians at multiple levels with the hope of diffusing real and latent reasons for suspicion and cynicism about dual citizenship and related issues, such as the seemingly persistent "cleavages" between "those who stayed" in Liberia and "those who left" the country during the war years. Panelists: The first part of the panel discussion was held under the sub-theme, "The Role of the Liberian Diaspora in the Reconstruction and Development of Liberia." The panelists that addressed this theme were Dr. Sakui Malakpa of the University of Toledo in Ohio; Cllr. Kwame Clement, Lawyer and Journalist; and Bishop Philip E. Nelson, III, of the Grain Coast Ministries, Inc.

The panelists discussed the need for Liberians in the Diaspora to develop a strong patriotic spirit and get involved in collaborative efforts through various channels to support the economic and social development of our common homeland.



development of our common homeland.

The panelists also expressed the need for quality and affordable education throughout the country. The panelists observed that it is imperative that serious attention be given to technical education in the sciences, as well as vocational education to provide employable skills for those who cannot attend college to become productive citizens.

The second part of the panel deliberated on the sub-theme, “The Importance of Dual Citizenship in the Context of Reconstruction and Development of Liberia.”

The panelists were Cllr. Edward W. Neufville, III, an immigration lawyer, Mr. John F. Lloyd, journalist and



The panelists recognized the cultural,

economic, educational, and professional benefits of dual citizenship. They called for the harmonization of the Liberian Constitution and laws to reflect the reality of post-war Liberia, considering the large number of Liberians abroad, who effectively constitutes a major part of Liberia’s middle class.

- Saturday, July 21, 2012, hundreds of Liberians and friends of Liberia converged on the grounds of the Chancery at 5201 16th, NW, for an All Day Cultural Extravaganza. The purpose of the extravaganza was to showcase the diversity and richness of Liberia’s culture. With the “Cin Devil” and other mask dancers, the event brought its bringing their children and non-



Liberians having an opportunity to

experience the beauty and richness of Liberian culture.

- Sunday, July 22, 2012, an Intercessory Service was held at the historic Shiloh Baptist Church downtown Washington, DC, which has a history of close relationship with Liberia dating back to nearly the period of our country’s founding. We have learned that it was at Shiloh Baptist Church that a board was established that led to



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The well attended, soul stirring, and

thought provoking service was held under the auspices of the Association of Liberian Christian Ministers (ALCM).

In his sermon, the Rev. Justus Reeves called on Liberians to adapt the principles of the ants, who work for their collective survival, and plan in advance as a way of being able to overcome unforeseen problems that may adversely affect them.

Thursday, July 26, 2012, a diplomatic reception, attended by officials of the U.S. Department of State, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, former and current officials of the Liberian Government, Liberian community leaders, friends and partners of Liberia, as well as hundreds of Liberians from all walks of life was held at the residence of the Ambassador.

During the occasion, a special message to the Liberian Diaspora from President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on the occasion of the Nation's 165th Independence Anniversary was read to the audience.

In her message, President Sirleaf gave an overview of her first term, during which her government started to lay the foundations for sustainable peace, security, social and economic stabilization. She added that the major areas of that reconstruction agenda included security sector reform, economic revitalization, governance and the rule of law, and the restoration of basic social services and infrastructure development.



"In this second term, we aim at transformation, with focus on infrastructure expansion, youth empowerment,

reconciliation and justice, and changing minds and attitudes. We call on you, fellow citizens, to do your part to ensure that this transformation takes place,” President Sirleaf said.

According to President Sirleaf, one of the cardinal issues Liberians face is reconciliation. “Our administration has taken steps to create a just and fair society, with opportunities for all Liberians. We want to create an environment where social and economic justice is a reality. This is why we call on all Liberians to come on board,” the Liberian leader noted.

In his remarks at the reception, His Excellency Jeremiah C. Sulunteh, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Liberia to the United States, indicated that Liberia is on an irreversible path to national recovery and prosperity. “Today, Liberia has been rated as a post-conflict success story looking forward to consolidate its new democracy and move towards sustainable economic growth, guided by its medium term master plan of Vision 2030,” he added.

On Liberia/United States relations, Ambassador Sulunteh noted with satisfaction that Liberia and the U.S. share a common commitment to the advancement of international peace, security and respect for human rights. He added that Liberia will continue to cooperate with the United States and other members of the international community in combating terrorism, and will remain steadfast against attempts to reverse the achievements made in the spread of democratic values and good governance in Africa and other parts of the world.

Ambassador Sulunteh emphasized that the United States has been a strong bilateral partner in supporting Liberia’s post-conflict reconstruction. He recounted major U.S. leadership role in the cancellation of Liberia’s international debt, the reactivation and training of the Armed Forces of Liberia and the National Coast Guards, rehabilitation of educational and health infrastructure, and the return of the U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers, among others.

He paid special tribute to former U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, Her Excellency Linda Thomas-Greenfield, for her tremendous and memorable service in Liberia.

Also speaking at the Diplomatic Reception, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Department of State, Donald Yamamoto, spoke of the great bond between the United States and Liberia.

Mr. Yamamoto indicated that the United States looks forward to continue close ties with Liberia as both countries look to the future.

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