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## A Group of Liberian Early Childhood Educators Attend Study Tour in United States

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Washington, D.C. – November 22, 2013: As part of effort to improve Liberia's early childhood educational system, a group of 17 early childhood educators from Liberia are concluding a three-week study tour in the United States.

Being held from November 6-26, 2013, the Early Childhood Study Tour has been focused on providing experiences aimed at developing Liberia's early childhood educational system. The study tour was also intended to deepen the knowledge and skills of the selected early childhood educators and to



Sponsored by the Open Society Foundations/Open Society Initiative for West Africa in partnership with the Ministry of Education, other partners of the study tour are the Early Childhood Leadership Institute at the University of the District of Columbia in Washington, D.C., Bank Street College in New York, and the Friends of Liberia - a philanthropic organization of Americans devoted to the peace and development of Liberia.

One of the highlights of the study tour was a symposium held on November 18th at the Early Childhood Leadership Institute at the University of the District of Columbia, sponsored by the Embassy of Liberia in the United States, in collaboration with the Open Society Foundations and the other partners already mentioned. The symposium, attended by a large number of American educators and others, was held under the theme, "Creating World Class Early Childhood Educators for Liberia: The Vision, The Challenges, The Opportunities for Partnerships and Collaboration."

During the symposium, as was the case during the course of the study tour, the Liberian educators made presentations focused on the state of Liberia's early childhood educational system, and engaged in discussions and information sharing with their American counterparts of early childhood teachers and administrators.



The study tour took the Liberian educators to several colleges with early childhood education training programs, and they also visited classrooms and interacted with their American counterparts and students.

Speaking at the symposium in Washington, D.C., Liberia's Ambassador to the United States, His Excellency Jeremiah C. Sulunteh hoped that the study tour by the Liberian educators was being informative and educational to help break barriers that would advance the cause of early childhood education in Liberia.

A former classroom teacher, Ambassador Sulunteh indicated that as Liberia continues on a course of reconstruction and development following years of devastating civil crises, the Liberian Government has recognized human development as one of its priority areas in the transformation of the country.

"This is why from the day of its inauguration in 2006, the Liberian Government, under the very capable leadership of Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, declared free and compulsory primary education" in Liberia, he said.

Ambassador Sulunteh stated that even though there was high increase in student enrollment as a result of the government's free and compulsory education program, there is a critical challenge due to lack of adequately trained teachers for early childhood education.

He pointed out that in order to combat the major problem related to unqualified teachers, the Government of Liberia, with support from some of Liberia's international partners, including the United States, has now reactivated the country's Rural Teachers Training Institutes.

Ambassador Sulunteh thanked the United Peace Corps program in Liberia, which was resumed in 2008. In addition to being assigned at the Rural Teachers Training Institutes, the Peace Corps volunteers are teaching Math, Science and English at several schools in various parts of Liberia.

Ambassador Sulunteh thanked the Open Society Foundations, the Early Childhood Leadership Institute of the University of the District of Columbia, Bank Street College, and Friends of Liberia for the support to improve education in Liberia, particularly early childhood educational system.

The Embassy also held a working dinner on November 19th at the residence of the Ambassador, during which an extensive discussion was held on Liberia's educational needs and ways in which United States organizations



The delegation of early childhood educators from Liberia has been headed by Honorable Felicia Sackie Doe-Sumah, Assistant Minister of Education, Early Childhood Bureau. Others on the delegation are Dr. Yar D. Gorway-Gono, President of Nimba County Community College, and Professor Florence B. Koroma, Dean of the School of Education, Stella Maria Delutheria in Monrovia. The Open Society Foundations was represented by

**Gabriel I.H. Williams**

**Minister Counselor for Press and Public Affairs**

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