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Embassy of the Republic of Liberia in the United States ,

Tue, Mar 10, 2020

by Al-Jerome A. Chede

True to one of its sacred mandates to project a positive image of Liberia, the Liberian Embassy near Washington, D.C. on Thursday, February 20, 2020 opened its doors to almost a dozen students from the Maryland University of Baltimore.

The morning was bright and clear with a temperature of 43 degrees Fahrenheit; the embassy staff in a professional and convivial mood

welcomed the students with open hearts and hands. Led by faculty advisor, Professor Gloria Chuku, the students gracefully filed into the conference room of the embassy. Everyone sat around the big oval table artistically carved out of an aged mahogany oakwood eagerly waiting to pounce on the embassy staff with a lot of thought-provoking questions; solid questions derived from weeks of research, reading and critical thinking.

The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), Abratha Doe wasted no time in introducing her staff beginning with Minister Counselor for Trade, Sophie Togba Mawlue, First Secretary, Josiah Domah, Diaspora Counselor, Nadia Kamara and Finda Davies. Also introduced were Logistics and Operations Administrator, Edmore Delaney and Minister Counselor for Press and Public Affairs, Al-jerome Anastas Chede. The intellectual fireworks started immediately after the students introduced themselves. The Agenda of the discussion was based on the African Union Document: Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

Interestingly, over ninety percent of the students were science majors but with deep interest in African history. They were all Africans and descendants of Africa who were selected to represent the Maryland University of Baltimore campus for the 18th annual International Model African Union Conference.

The student delegates included; Misses Fehintola Bright-Awon Uga, Khaliya Souray, Lois Akomeah, Farrah Kuranchie and Gloria Okeke others were Messrs: Oluwakemi Biaou, Assefa Akinwole, Topia Oni, Jeremiah Oghafua.

Addressing questions on national security reform, Dcm Doe named gender based-violence as a human security problem and lamented that Liberia's security structure was not initially prepared to handle such situation. She



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explained that the traditional Military was trained to man borders and resist external physical threats and not to deal with the many psychological issues attending rape, human trafficking and other gender-based exploitations. She praised the UN for correcting that through several training programs and for putting into motion a continuous security personnel training frame work before departing Liberia.

First Secretary Domah led the presentation. He added that the old Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) was disbanded and a new one organized and trained with the help of the United Nations ensuring geographic balance, minimum high school education, non-factional alliance and a patriotic commitment to the state instead of the status -quo.

On the issue of Youth empowerment, The Minister Counselor for Trade, Mrs. Mawlue emphasized that, the government of Liberia has invested in Technical and Vocational Educational Training (TVET) programs to build the capacities of young people and help them out of poverty. Diplomat Mawlue also disclosed that the government has declared all Public Universities and community colleges tuition free and is even paying the West Africa Examination fees for all qualified ninth and twelve graders in the country.

Counselor Kamara quickly added “the government and international partners have also set up adult literacy programs in rural Liberia while encouraging residents to get fully involved in local and national governments”.

Realizing transparent political governance, Pan-African solidarity and economic unity in Africa was a topic of intense cross exchanging of ideas. Yes, the students were well positioned. Miss Fehintola Bright-Awon Uga could not mince her thoughts about the rapaciousness of African leaders and their unwillingness to achieve a single continental political authority due to selfishness. She frowned on the misuse of political authority by African leaders who suppress and violate the fundamental human rights of their people.

Fehintola, supported by Lois Akomeah and Farrah Kuranchie as well as Assefa Akinwole and Topia Oni blamed rampant corruption on the heartlessness of African leaders who bank billions of dollars abroad in western economies while their people wallop in detestable poverty. The students however expressed enthusiasm that their generation could achieve a lot in getting closer to the Pan-Africanistic dreams of WE Dubois, Marcus Garvey and Kwame Nkrumah.

Counselor Davis opined that western powers were afraid of the power and influence a United Africa could wield in the world. She noted that they were doing everything possible overtly to undermine such unity and caution African leaders to be selfless and unite the continent.

Counselloer Kamara addressed the question of terrorism spreading through Africa by saying that Liberia was partnering with other countries to battle terrorism on the ground as well as in cyber space. She explained that international partners were training Liberian security forces to spot and identify factors that lead to extremism. She named high poverty, illiteracy, porous borders and weak political structures as fertile elements that fuel extremism.

The students wondered what was Liberia doing to boost agriculture and tourism? In addressing that question, Logistics and Operations Administrator, Edmore Delaney, disclosed that capitalizing on the gains of tourism in Liberia has always been a challenge. Delaney explained that the government of Liberia has developed policies and taken steps to improve Liberia’s struggling tourism industry, an action, which he observed would increase the inflow of foreign capital. He also pointed out that the government has programs that give out loans to farmers to help them produce more food for local consumption and for export.

The meeting which was initially planned for an hour took more than three hours of intensive exchange of ideas and views. Other topics of discussion included:

1. The ten-year plan of Action Promoting Democracy
2. Promoting Balance and Inclusive Economic Growth
3. Empowering African Women and Eliminating all forms of Violence and Discrimination

4. Entrenching Universal Principles of Human Rights, Justice and the Rule of Law
5. Achieving Freedom from Armed Conflict, Terrorism, Intolerance and Extremism and
6. Promoting Sustainable Ecosystems and Climate Resilient Economies.

Over all, the students demonstrated an insatiable thirst for knowledge and so there was a great sigh of relief when janitorial Engineer, Nimalka Joseph, finally signaled that Lunch was ready. Everyone seemed mentally and physically exhausted; it was indeed time to refuel; a traditional Liberian cuisine of Potato greens and Cassava leaves with rice was served to the delight of the students, many of whom, were experiencing the dishes for the first time.

Over lunch, Minister Counselor, Al-Jerome Chede challenged the students to do well in their various disciplines and at the same time bravely hold the feet of African leaders to the fire. "it is your future that we are handling today; you have the right to question all our actions and inactions because you will directly bear the consequences now or in the years to come".

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