

Address to the State Assembly of North Carolina  
By Liberia Ambassador Jeremiah Sulunteh  
Raleigh, North Carolina  
May 29, 2012

## **I. SALUTATION**

- Hon. Tom Tillis, Speaker of the House of Assembly of North Carolina
- Distinguished Members of the North Carolina General Assembly
- Mr. Hunter, the leadership and members of the Liberian Association of Piedmont,
- Fellow Liberians and friends of Liberia
- Ladies & Gentlemen

## **II. GREETINGS:**

On behalf of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the Government and people of Liberia, the Liberian Embassy, I bring you warm greetings and extend my thanks and appreciation for this opportunity to address this assembly.

A fortnight ago, the leaders of Africa and the continent celebrated 50 years of African liberation. Our forefathers and pan-Africanists, including Sekou Toure of Guinea, Kwamee Nkrumah of Ghana and William V. S. Tubman of Liberia met in rural city in Liberia, where they brainstormed on establishing what would be the Organization of African Unity, now the African Union.

Similarly, 50 years ago, African Americans led by Martin Luther King and others marched in search of equality, social justice and liberty, as if the call for freedom in Africa would resonate with the west.

## **III. US/LIBERIA RELATIONSHIP**

Along with Somalia and Ethiopia, Liberia is one of the three modern countries in Sub-Saharan Africa without roots in the European scramble for Africa. Beginning in 1820, the region was colonized by freed American slaves with the help of the American Colonization Society.

In 1847, these colonists founded the Republic of Liberia, establishing a government modeled on that of the United States and naming the Capital City Monrovia after James Monrovia, the fifth president of the United States and a prominent supporter of the Colonization.

As I visit this beautiful State of North Carolina, I am reminded that Liberia also has a long rich history with Winston-Salem dating back to the founding of Liberia as a free democratic state. The connection between Salem, NC and Liberia began in October 1836 when local residents immigrated to Liberia via the American Colonization Society. The connection continued when, following the end of the American Civil War, the Moravian Church established a neighborhood for Freedmen, names "Liberia" on land of the former Schumann Plantation, which become the historic Happy Hill community.

In December 1832, the Port Cresson colony was founded in what is now Buchanan, a county in Liberia, by black Quakers of the New York and Pennsylvania Colonization Societies. It was established as a settlement for black emigrants from the United States. The emigrants named the settlement in honor of Elliott Cresson, a Philadelphia merchant and Pennsylvania Colonization Society founder who funded their voyage to Liberia.

Since its founding, Liberia and the United States have enjoyed unique and special relationship. On behalf of President Sirleaf, the Government and people of Liberia, we wish to reaffirm our unshakable determination to foster closer and more fruitful relations with the United States of America.

Distinguished Members of the North Carolina General Assembly, distinguished guests and friends of Liberia, we note with satisfaction that Liberia and the United States share a common commitment to the advancement of international peace, security and respect for human rights. Liberia will continue to cooperate with the United States and other members of the International Community in combating terrorism. We will also remain steadfast against any attempts to reverse the achievements made in the spread of democratic values and good governance in Africa and other parts of the world.

The United States has been a strong bilateral partner in supporting Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction program. Liberia cannot forget that the United States was its major advocate and the first Paris Club Creditor to commit and sign 100% cancellation of Liberia's debt. Nor can Liberia fail to mention the critical role played by the United States in our recent electoral process, including the construction of our National Elections Commission Headquarters and providing financial support.

We note with deep appreciation the contribution of the United States towards the training of our Armed Forces and our National Coast Guards, as well as the valuable assistance given in the overall security sector reform. We also express appreciation

for the support in the rehabilitation of our educational and health infrastructure, including the renovation of Teachers Training Institutes and the reactivation of the Peace Corps Program. For all these efforts, we salute the American people and like to extend our profound gratitude.

Members of the General Assembly and friends of Liberia, we should like to report that Liberia is on an irreversible path to national recovery and prosperity. Over the last six years, the Government has built systems, structures and formulated policies and strategies to reduce poverty and lift Liberia and Liberians. 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 master plan of vision 2030.

#### IV. Current Progress/Challenges & Need for More U.S. Support

The first phase of implementation of the Vision 2030 for Liberia is its five year development plan crafted as the Agenda for Transformation (LAFT). The LAFT will focus on key priorities, including energy and power infrastructure, agriculture and food security, as well as human development.

Two of the key priority areas are being highlighted in the US/Liberia Partnership Dialogue signed in January 15, 2013 between President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and former Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton. A follow up discussion were held three weeks ago in Washington. The Partnership Dialogue will seek to institutionalize the relationship between U.S. and Liberia. The two critical priorities for growth and job creation in Liberia are the enhancement of the critical importance of power generation, distribution and transmission to help drive economic development.

President Sirleaf's visit to meet with some members of Congress in Washington two weeks ago was also highlighted by the need for collaboration on power electricity in Liberia, not only in the context of the Partnership Dialogue, but also as it relates to the Mano River Union.

In order to meet current demand of 1000 mega watts, the government is endeavoring to develop the Mount Coffee Hydro Plant with the hope that when storage basins are built up the river, it could capture and store the rains during the raining season. In this regard, the Government and people of Liberia look forward to America's support to meet this critical challenge.

Distinguished members of the Assembly, Liberia was also recently qualified for compact eligibility under the Millennium Challenge Corporation and it is our fervent hope that additional resources will be galvanized to support various programs in its development agenda, including land rights, fiscal management, small-business management, girls education, etc.

I should also like to report that human development is a critical factor for Liberia's future development and management of its resources. About 62% of Liberia's 4.1million population comprised the youth (between the ages of 15 and 35), and 70% of this youthful population is unemployed. The reason for the high unemployment in Liberia is due in part to the lack of skills to match most of the available job opportunities. Majority of Liberia's youth was bypassed by education during the 14 year-conflict.

Statistics show that although there were 1.5 million students enrolled in about 12,000 schools in Liberia in 2012, the retention rate, especially among female students was low. Girls drop out are mostly tied to lack of support to stay in school, as well as, teenage pregnancy. Consequently, subsidies for educational support are the way out for student retention. It has been established that certain key areas that could be useful to human development in Liberia will include vocational and technical education at the community college level and natural sciences, rather than the social sciences at the universities. Going forward, the Government of Liberia would wish to seek support in the areas of scholarships and study abroad exchanges and technical cooperation with your universities and community colleges.

The Government of Liberia would like to applaud the current technical cooperation existing between Forsythe Community College and Grand Bassa Community College, and look forward to strengthening this relationship as we seek more of such support for other community colleges in Liberia.

In the area of Agriculture and food security, there is a need to support small farms and farmers' cooperatives to improve productivity that will sustain food security. The need for the establishment of food processing technology is equally critical to boost agricultural productivity and value added.

In her message to the US Congress, President Sirleaf challenged the US private sector to come to invest in Liberia, as Liberia's success is America's success. In like manner, I call on you today America, our partner for the past 166 years to see Liberia as a place to invest. Come, come America!!!!

Distinguished members of this Assembly, friends of Liberia, we look forward to a continued collaboration with you, and thank you for this opportunity.