

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS  
OF  
HONORABLE JOSEPH NYUMA BOAKAI, SR  
26<sup>th</sup> President of the Republic of Liberia  
January 22, 2024**

**HIS EXCELLENCY BOLA AHMED TINUBU, GCFR,  
PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF  
NIGERIA & CURRENT CHAIR OF ECOWAS  
AUTHORITY OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT;  
EXCELLENCIES HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT OF  
ECOWAS MEMBERS; REPRESENTATIVES OF FOREIGN  
HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT  
HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT GEORGE MANNEH WEAH  
HER EXCELLENCY FORMER PRESIDENT ELLEN JOHNSON  
SIRLEAF, HONORABLE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE  
55<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATURE; MADAM CHIEF JUSTICE AND JUSTICES  
OF THE SUPREME COURT; MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC  
CORPS; PRELATES & IMAMS;  
MEMBERS OF THE PRESS; EXCELLENCIES AND  
DISTINGUISHED GUESTS MY FELLOW CITIZENS;  
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:**

I give thanks and praises to God Almighty, the Great Guide and Sustainer of us all, for His manifold blessings. We pray for His continued grace as we embark upon this arduous journey together for national reconstruction and renewal.

The sacred oath of office taken moments ago by me and Vice President Jeremiah Kpan Koung has now been administered for the second time in a peaceful transfer of power since 2006. It is a celebration of the new democratic dispensation in our country. This must be a proud and historic moment for all Liberians that we have

in attendance at this ceremony a living former Liberian President with another now in transition. It is a rare occurrence and a departure from our recent past.

You, my fellow Liberians, have made this occasion possible by your determination to pursue and nurture democratic governance. We must continue to irreversibly latch ourselves onto the budding democratic culture sprouting from the rubbles of a most tragic and costly 14-year civil war.

I congratulate the 55<sup>th</sup> Legislature which has just been sworn in. Our Constitution provides for three independent and coordinate branches of government. I like to emphasize the “coordinate” element. It implies working together cooperatively toward a common objective of service to the Liberian people. We want to release the energies of our people to take their destiny into their own hands. We must rectify the flaws in our present Constitution to address the devolution of power and other pressing issues. I look forward to working with members of the Legislature individually and collectively, to advance the people’s agenda.

I applaud the people of Liberia who voted in their numbers for change. Not only did Liberians vote but they also showed unwavering resolve to protect their votes, a phenomenon not to be taken lightly. Hundreds became volunteer poll watchers at polling stations, including the hardest to reach places, throughout the country. The message they sent by their act of courage and determination is loud and clear: no more business as usual. It is a clarion call for a new Liberia, a different Liberia, a Liberia that genuinely practices the rule of law and adheres to the tenets of democratic governance in the interest of all our people.

This historic vote by the people has given me the mandate to serve as the 26<sup>th</sup> President of the Republic of Liberia. This mandate

makes me the president of all Liberians within our territorial confines and the diaspora at large. The elections are over. Partisanship must give way to nationalism and inclusive governance.

The march of time has brought us to this new beginning. We stand here today at the intersection of Liberia's past and its destiny. This was a country founded in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century on the idea of liberty. It was conceived as an experiment in liberal democracy: a destination of refuge for oppressed peoples of color to come and live in freedom and the pursuit of happiness. The various streams of the population would meet in fraternal embrace to build their country based on equality, equal access to justice and equal opportunity. It was intended to be the city on the hill on the African Continent.

A small group of the founding fathers even advocated a vision of a Liberian society that included both settlers and the rural populations as equals. Such a society would then seek to create a new great African civilization that would blend the best attributes of Christianity, Islam and traditional African beliefs.

The national mission to become a beacon of hope and the vision to create a new great African civilization were often waylaid by the country's internal contradictions. Through its long struggle for democracy, Liberia has had its share of periodic violent manifestations of historical antagonisms within its body politic. The 14-year civil war of our recent past has perhaps been the most traumatically challenging. It nearly brought us to our knees and inflicted near total self-destruction on us as a country.

We cannot thank enough those African countries whose citizens made the ultimate sacrifice to save us from ourselves. We will forever remember that the peace we have today came at a great price for many.

Thousands of our people fled to safety all over the Continent and were welcome with open arms. Now many of our young people realize they are African first and foremost. They appreciate their African heritage as they travel freely around the continent in search of trade and opportunities. They no longer have to look only across the ocean but can also look next door.

Several thousand also fled across the seas and the international community eventually mounted one of the largest peacekeeping operations for the country at the time. Our forefathers never contemplated a time when Liberians would be forced to flee their country in such mass movement. We thank the world for the extraordinary intervention.

At the time of Liberia's founding, almost the entire world was ruled by chieftaincies and kingdoms. In Africa, great kingdoms and great civilizations fell to the cruel swords and guns of colonialism. The country was able skillfully to navigate its Century of Survival. It entered into Treaties of Friendship and Commerce with major powers of the world.

In spite of its internal flaws, Liberia has punched above its weight in international relations. It has successfully discharged the responsibilities it believed history imposed on it as the oldest independent African Republic. For the first fifty years of its founding, Liberians elected nine presidents of African American descent. The country reached even deeper into the African Diaspora in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to elect two presidents whose families came from Barbados in the West Indies. Our people also elected a president who had roots in both Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

Many of our prominent politicians, jurists, journalists, clergymen, economists, and private citizens have been immigrants from our neighboring countries, other African countries and the West Indies. Our country has further endeavored to accommodate establishment

of whole communities of Diaspora Africans including the Marcus Garvey Movement, African Americans or Black Israelites from America.

We have proven our credentials as a responsible member of the community of nations. We were present at the creation of the international organizations and institutions that underpin our world order. We have used the legal instruments of those global institutions to fight for the cause of Africa's total freedom from the yoke of colonialism and apartheid. Where these legal remedies proved ineffective, we have provided financial and material support to the African Liberation Struggle.

Your vote in the 2023 election reflects our country's long and arduous struggle for democracy. We have evolved into a democratic dispensation, with inclusive governance as our watchword. Ordinary Liberians have made possible this democratic dividend which mightily contributes to national, regional, and global peace. This must now become an irreversible path to Liberia's destiny.

As we today celebrate this milestone, we can now begin to build Liberia into the solid bridge across the continents it was originally envisioned to be.

## **HIGH EXPECTATIONS:**

During the just ended political campaign, the state of the nation was laid bare. Many words were spoken. Angry words were spoken. The experts uncovered for us cogent analyses of our national condition. We can no more attempt to bury our heads in the proverbial sand. We see hard times, we see disfunction, we see culture of impunity, we see corruption in high and low places. It is these and similar conditions that we have come to RESCUE. But we come with false assurance to no one. Our plan to fix the ills we are

inheriting must go together with realistic expectations. We will act in the first hundred days of our Administration, and then diligently pursue our rescue mission.

I began my quest for the presidency because something seemed wrong with us Liberians, and the leadership of our country. Rather than the positives, we were accentuating the negatives about our country and about each other. We were initiating false starts, building on poor foundations. We were deepening our differences, creating new social fault lines. Inclusive and accountable governance was at an all-time low. We created a culture of unfinished business, engaged in ad hoc undertakings, making this behavior the “new normal.” We were cavalier about the rule of law. We lowered standards in many domains of our common life as a people. We seem to have lost our way, lost hope.

I have come to rekindle hope, to reposition us on our national pathway. I have come to remind us that though the accident of our births has made of us a diverse people, we must employ our CITIZENSHIP, our Liberian citizenship to make of us a united people, for only a United people can build a nation.

And where do we plan to take Liberia in the next six years? We must refocus our political energies. With the electoral campaign now behind us, I embrace all my fellow Liberians at home and in the diaspora. One of the good things brought to light by the campaign, and facilitated by social media, is that Liberians from all walks of life had a chance to engage a “national conversation” about our past, our present, and our future prospects. We learned together what is wrong with our country, and hopefully what is right as well.

Let us now recalibrate, let us “restore the years the locusts have eaten” by accentuating the positive about our country and about our fellow citizens. As we think, love, and build Liberia, let us take

this state of mind to the business of national healing and reconciliation, both the old and new emerging social cleavages. Let us restore inclusivity, transparency, and accountability to governance at all levels of our society, including government.

We must discourage the culture of unfinished business, doing things in a haphazard and unserious manner. We must restore hope to ourselves, individually, and as a collectivity. We must also restore dignity and integrity to public service – livable remuneration and pension schemes to civil servants and foreign service government workers. We must restore respect for the rule of law, and respect for officers of the law across our three branches of government.

The twenty-five individuals who have held this office before me have each made their contributions to our common patrimony. We must build upon their strengths and correct their shortcomings. I thank President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, my former boss for her stewardship when the country needed to come out of the ruins of war. I commend my immediate predecessor, President George Weah, for living up to the dictates of our Constitution and laws in ensuring the smooth transfer of power. The people wanted change, and we have no option but to do the people's bidding.

## **Intersection of History and Destiny**

My fellow compatriots, permit me to say a few words about my person and this political journey. First, Kartumu, my wife, friend, and confidant of over 50 years, and I are humbled and moved by the overwhelming demonstration of love, affection, and support from you, the great people of this land.

On our journey on this road in the last five decades, we have met different people - old and young, rich, and poor, great and

ordinary, sick and healthy. We have been in your homes, on your farms, and at your businesses. We have mourned with you and shared in your joy, felt your pain, your frustration, and your hopes.

The experiences on this journey and the stories of resilience, determination, courage, and success have provided me with a profound insight into the soul of our country and the inspiration to forge on and to be true to myself about serving you. But this journey had its beginning deep in one of the remotest regions in the northwest of our country--in Warsonga, Lofa County.

As I have proudly referenced on many occasions, I was born to a mother with disabilities, Madam Lusu Kumba Kpetu, and a father, Mr. Bundor Tamba Yamba, who was mostly absent. My childhood, like many of you, was anything but normal. However, by the grace of God and with modest help from family, and the compassion of strangers and ordinary people like those I met on the campaign, I was able to pull through by my bootstraps.

I worked hard in menial jobs fending for myself in a country at the time steeped in patronage and a class system determined by the family in which one was born or associated.

In Monrovia, I attended high school at the College of West Africa, one of the most prestigious and elite schools in the country, where I also worked as a janitor, became a bookstore salesman, and librarian. There, I won an election and became President of the Student Council Government.

In all this, I managed to make friends across the social class lines.

I went to college, started a professional life, and served the public in capacities including Managing Director of the Liberia Produce and Marketing Corporation, Minister of Agriculture, and Vice President. The rest, as they say, is history.



I thought to share this brief story of my life for two reasons: first, to inspire every boy and girl, and all the young people of this country that with determination, focus and hard work, you can be who you want to be in this country and the world; every one of you has been endowed with talents and other gifts by God to enable you serve your country and humanity in a spirit of compassion; and that you can overcome barriers and challenges, and excel in your station of life.

Second, to let you know, my fellow compatriots, that when we work hard together as a country, there is nothing that history has imposed on us, including the foundational problems, that we cannot overcome.

Like every generation before now and the others to come after us, we have an opportunity and a duty to rebuild or build better. And like those before us and the ones to come after us, we must respond to that call of duty in an epoch-defining way that sets the tone for the future, not fixated on the next elections but rather on the next generation and generations unborn.

### **Liberia First: A Vision for National Renewal**

That is why, with your support, my countrymen and women, we will respond to this duty - the mandate you have entrusted to us - by committing to make the bold decisions needed to thrust us into the actions we must take to transform our country. Our response, reflecting the agenda our government is poised to set, will not only address the immediate challenges we face as a country but also tackle head-on, the foundational problems that may militate against our agenda and undermine the change we deeply crave.

Fellow citizens, our agenda sets broad goals for improved governance and institutional capacity. It will prepare us to make bold decisions for economic development and sustained growth, including increased productivity.

It will ensure we rebuild the broken infrastructure and improve the delivery of health and social services such as combatting the drug epidemic ravaging our youth and eating away the future of this country. It will address crimes and security, and the empowerment of the people in the decision-making process affecting their welfare.

Fellow citizens, while we look to the future with hope, it is also important that we view that future, including the aspiration and the attending agenda, from the prism of our past; the historical foundations, which for better or worse have influenced and shaped our society in the nearly 200 years of statehood.

I believe the success of Liberia also depends on the examination of the national situation in its historical context, in addition to our strengths, our system-wide weaknesses, the existential threats we faced as a country, the potential we have been endowed, and the opportunities we must seize to build a great country. How we confront these more proactively will help drive the transformative process required.

## **Unity**

The truth we must face is that like many countries, we, too, are a divided society, with some of our differences triggered by historical narratives, ethnicity, exclusion, and marginalization - all having been exploited over the years to create social, political, and economic disparities, and intense adversarial political divisions that deeply feed personal aggrandizement and stoke conflict.

As our history has shown and generations of Liberians have experienced, despite the sanguine aspirations of the founding fathers as envisioned in the declaration of independence for the promise of liberty from “... the most grinding oppression” and “ deep degradation” suffered in the United States, and with “every avenue to improvement ... effectually closed,” it is counter-intuitive that the very foundation of our country and the nature of its statehood, would stab at the very core of this vision and create a divided society.

As it seemed then, and for over a century, this vision only applied to a few – the descendants of the colonists and settler class. But class domination, economic and social exclusion, or marginalization of the majority of Liberians did not end with one hundred and thirty years of an oligarchy.

It later transformed into a new era of domination by a small ruling elite, made largely of elements across both indigenous and settler divide, who sought to maintain the trappings of the old order, using the state and its centralized system to marginalize the people for personal gains. The effect is the perpetuation of an unjust and unequal society by the new elites and their informal networks.

As the first independent Republic in Africa, Liberia was hailed as the beacon of hope for the African continent and for the African Diaspora worldwide. However, as seen over the years at home, the social and material conditions of the country’s population have not reflected that hope because of the entrenched predatory behavior of the state and the various governing elites. Today, I say with all conviction, that we have walked this road for far too long and it is now time we change course.

That change comes when we unite and work together in nation-building rather than continue to build an impervious state that is not responsive to the needs and dreams of most Liberians but to those presiding over it. We have been building the state and its capacity since independence and after the war but must equally now embark on nation-building to accommodate each other, and leverage shared values and beliefs for the promotion of a just society with equality for all.

We must foster a Liberian identity that overcomes the contrasting historical narratives, blurs the lines of regions and counties, gender, and historically sinister and destructive individualism that triggers greed and corruption as opposed to compassionate service for the public good.

We must unite to confront the challenges and break free from this stranglehold, for we are one people indivisible with a common purpose, who must come together in our diversity to build a stable and harmonious society in which every man and woman, and every boy and girl can have a chance to live a dignified life.

This presidential election was hard fought and looked to have further divided our country politically and regionally. But what unites us is bigger than what divides us. I am therefore extending a hand of cooperation and peace to my political opponents, knowing the common bond between us is "Liberia" and the need to harness its potential for the good of its people.

As is said, "We must work together or fail separately." I am, therefore, assuring all Liberians that I will be the President for all irrespective of whether you voted for me or not, your party affiliation, county, religion, gender, region, and social and economic status.

There is no contest between so-called “Green Liberia” and “Blue Liberia”, “Southeastern Liberia” and “North Central Liberia”. There is only one LIBERIA! We share a common CITIZENSHIP!

Compatriots and Distinguished Guests, we have managed to withstand a checkered history. We experienced economic growth in the 50s and 60s; endured near state collapse in challenging times, scorched by political crisis and war; preserved our sovereignty despite balkanization and two great wars; and gained the respect of the world by resolving our deep fissures politically. But the seemingly perennial presence of the vestiges of Liberia’s foundational challenges still stare us in the face.

I believe we can overcome the challenges we face as a country when we apply our collective gifts and talents to this new course we seek and draw from the exceptionalism that Liberia is.

We are a rich diversity within a great mosaic; the first independent Republic in Africa never colonized in the scramble for the continent. We have a common thread of culture running through our diversity, a shared history of trials and tribulations, celebration and grief, as well as one of dignity and respect in the world.

We have given the world a unique brand of hospitality that attracted millions to our shores and the glorious stories told by people around the world about a Liberia of yesteryears that offered opportunities and hope to all peoples who set foot on this land are too familiar.

Our resilience and resolve to shed the image of violence for which we were known for most of three decades, to uphold a democratic culture despite years of strife, autocracy, dictatorship, and war, and a deeply rooted communal spirit in a society that celebrates close and proximate relationships are a marvel to the world.

## **Seizing the moment today to transform the future**

Today, history has given us a moment that we must seize for course correction and the molding of a new mindset. That moment begins now.

We are a country facing challenges and threats, some of which are existential. In the recent past, we have had a war that left in its wake telltale loss of lives and destruction of our country; the economy, in recent years, has been grossly mismanaged; social and youth problems, including a drug epidemic, are destroying the youth and essentially pose a threat to our future; unemployment is high and most of those working hardly have a livable income as the cost of living keeps escalating.

In addition to poor livelihoods, the state of security in the country is dire causing panic in several quarters of the population. The education system is facing multiple challenges including gross inequities in access. The country's natural and beautiful environment and ecosystem are gradually being degraded. Our health system is suboptimum in its delivery to the people. Limited access to food is undermining the country's food security, while poor, limited, broken, and nonexistent infrastructure in parts of the country is undermining growth and development.

With commodity prices uncontrollably fluctuating on the world market, current economic challenges are becoming even more acute. We are still confronted with the menace of corruption, which continues to eat away at the core of our social and economic development. We face an international system that is becoming more competitive than ever before, with the threat of climate change, pandemics, and terrorism always evident on our horizon.

Amid these challenges, we have made some progress, especially after the war. We have made progress in our democracy, instituted several institutional reforms, and have also largely kept the peace. However, we have yet to achieve economic progress in ways that reflect the country's potential and promise. But I believe our economic conditions can improve when we seize the opportunities we have: and that we will do!

It is in our hands now to build a new Liberia, the Liberia we all want. We have been blessed naturally. We are a land richly endowed with resources that other countries envy. Our oceans, rivers and streams are teeming with some of the world's exotic species. Our forests are coveted and are a part of the frontier in the fight against climate change, and together with the judicious exploitation of other natural resources, will help unlock the doors to the country's development. Our landscape is beautiful and still pristine. Our soil is rich, and our water resources are abundant. Our population is young and dynamic and with the demographic dividend to be gained from a young population, we can experience an unprecedented level of productivity.

We now must exploit our human and material resources in optimum ways for the benefit of all Liberians.

My fellow compatriots, it is precisely because of these possibilities and opportunities that we offer to chart a new direction for the country; a new way and a mindset that will lead to an equal future and a transformed country in which the promise of Liberia will show in the lives of the people.

## **Our Path to Progress**

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Our vision, dubbed ARREST (Agriculture, Roads, Rule of Law, Education, Sanitation, Tourism), defines the development path we set for our people. We must and will harness opportunities in agriculture, roads, and other infrastructure development; improve the rule of law, rethink the education sector, improve sanitation, and unlock the potential of tourism.

We believe the economic linkages these will create and their reinforcement of each other in meeting our developmental goals will help arrest and reverse years of economic downturn.

Agriculture must be the key driver of our economy and potentially of national development. As a major source of employment in the country, agriculture provides over 50 percent of our population with livelihood and contributes substantially to the country's GDP.

It is our long-held view that, more than any other sector, agriculture is the most critical catalyst to drive growth in an agro-based economy like ours, create employment and ensure food security. It is our goal to leverage our comparative advantage in agriculture including the provision of incentives and application of appropriate technology, as well as key interventions across the value chain such as food processing, storage, marketing, and trading.

I believe our strategy for improving agriculture will help with food self-sufficiency, boost economic transformation, and reduce poverty.

The poor state of our roads has undermined development and reduced the quality of life of citizens. This is indeed a major contributor to rural neglect in the country.



This is why we view the building of good roads as a critical intervention in infrastructure improvement for economic growth and national development. Our development agenda and the critical areas we want to address for economic growth cannot be realized without the appropriate investment in road connectivity and other infrastructure developments.

We plan to invest in roads to connect our people, improve agriculture, commerce and industry, education, promote tourism, and provide needed social services such as quality health care delivery for our people.

Enforcing the rule of law and public safety is vital to the ARREST agenda for overall national development. Our government pledges to improve transparency, accountability, and openness to promote good governance. In addition, access to justice to preserve social, economic, and political rights and freedoms and long-term stability in the country will be a top priority of our government.

Corruption is a menace and a drawback. Commitment to the application of the rule of law, therefore, will be essential in the fight against corruption, as halting the tide of public corruption is an important part of our development agenda for the transformation of our country. We must, accordingly, reset the fight against corruption and impunity to demonstrate firmness and resolve. We have decided to set up an office to explore the feasibility for the establishment of War and Economic Crimes Court (WECC) to provide an opportunity for those who bear the greatest responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity to account for their actions in court. An estimated quarter of a million of our people perished in the war. We cannot forever remain unmoved by this searing national tragedy without closure.

We shall seek advice and assistance from the Office of the United Nations Secretary General to ensure that the court, if found feasible, will be in compliance with highest standards of similar courts everywhere. The Legislature will have its say appropriately in this matter in order to avoid any appearance of vendetta or witch-hunt.

Similarly, predictable business practices, including contractual certainty and public safety as enforced under the rule of law will establish a better investment climate as we seek to expand the private sector and create jobs that best serve our people.

Education is essential to our development, but we believe that in its current state, it offers less of the bold actions needed to transform the country. We must begin to rethink and retool how we address the challenges of our educational system in ways that best serve our developmental needs.

In this direction, and for the development outcomes we desire under the ARREST agenda, we will invest in vocational training and science education to support the required workforce development essential to providing jobs, increasing productivity, and improving the quality of life of our people.

That investment will also build the capacity of Liberians to compete in a globalized workplace and leverage technology for entrepreneurship. As we also begin to think about evolving a knowledge-based economy, we will continue to invest in technological training and IT programs. In this connection, we shall adopt the development of multiuser rail system to encourage expansion and greater productivity in our mining sector for jobs creation.

We view sanitation as a major area of concern because it relates to our public health system and directly impacts efficient workforce development and deployment. The lack of safe drinking water and proper garbage and sewage disposal systems has exposed millions of Liberians and residents living in congested cities, towns and rural communities to diseases and other health risks.

Given the inequities in an already inadequate healthcare delivery system, exposure to poor hygienic practices is a national developmental risk. As our interconnected world is making us increasingly mutually vulnerable to pandemics, addressing the challenges of sanitation and health care will be a major priority of our government. I must however pause to thank our volunteers and supporters including diplomats who helped to give our city face lift.

We will invest and partner with others to improve the provision of safe drinking water, basic hygiene practices, and related and affordable healthcare delivery services for our people, especially children and the vulnerable of our population.

Developing Liberia's tourism is key to the country's social and economic growth. It has the potential to generate employment and income for thousands of our people, particularly our youth population. However, this great national resource remains untapped and undeveloped, depriving the country and its people of significant economic benefits.

With our country endowed so much with natural beauty and some of the world's most coveted flora and fauna habitats, we can develop a tourism industry that will welcome the world to Liberia as a top tourist destination.

Our development agenda will, as a matter of top priority, feature the needed investment in this and related sectors, such as security, the fight against drug trafficking and other crimes, corruption, as well as improved infrastructure.

Fellow Liberians, this is the path we have chosen to address our socio-economic challenges and bring relief to you the people.

And with you joining us as we provide the leadership, it is possible to transform our country.

We can build a capable and responsive state, halt the tide of corruption, develop a productive economy with increasing/significant participation of Liberians, remove structural barriers, stem the tide of rural neglect especially in the Southeast, and eventually win the fight against the drug epidemic.

To you, the residents of this country, we acknowledge you have had a continuous presence in our country dating back to its founding. Join us and bring your talent and resources to the growth of our economy, particularly in the productive sectors, but not in areas of unfair advantages to deprive our people.

Let me renew thanks to the International Community for its engagement with us during our worst and better moments. We are ready to engage you for the mutual benefit of our people. We note and are proud of our history as one of the oldest and continuous republics in the world, and our leadership in shaping the post-World War Two order. As a beacon of hope in Africa, we supported the independence and liberation movements on the continent and helped found sub-regional, regional, continental and global organizations.

Our storied diplomacy helped us traverse the challenges of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and helped preserve our State. Despite a 14-year civil war, and one of the worst human tragedies in Africa, we refuse to be defined by this dark chapter in our national history.

Under our leadership, we will strive for Liberia to rise and take its rightful place in the world as a leader in global affairs, maintaining its traditional liberal and democratic ideals at home while fostering international cooperation driven by “development diplomacy” focused on a repurposed national development agenda aimed at giving our people better livelihoods.

We will strengthen cooperation with our region in the spirit of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and support the African Union in its (AU) continent-wide initiatives aimed at improving the lives of our people. We also will foster South-South cooperation to address mutual developmental issues in the global south.

Liberia’s relationship with the United States of America is spoken about in glorious terms. But on the eve of our 177<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we are yet to show how we have made this traditional relationship work for us in ways that have helped the transformation this country craves.

This is not to suggest, however, that we are not aware of the debate over the dynamics of two centuries of a relationship nurtured across the Atlantic. But given this long relationship, it is a bit discomfoting to be found debating about how we as a country are still struggling to come to terms with the extent to which we think the relationship might benefit us.

We believe we deserve more, but we would be remiss if we did not mention that we cannot ask the United States to do for us what we

can do for ourselves, including leveraging the relationship for the good of our country.

For example, how might we expect American taxpayer money to support our development needs when government officials embezzle public funds with impunity and government officials personally pocket taxes raised locally?

We believe we can make the relationship work to our benefit if and when we partner with the United States in ways that promote an equitable society. In this light, working with the U.S. to build our democracy, to end the culture of corruption and impunity, and to promote deep economic and cultural cooperation, while collaborating on serious global challenges like climate change and international security cooperation, will help lift the relationship to a mutually beneficial level.

To the business community, we say the country is always open to business - legitimate business that links to our development agenda, creation of wealth, increased productivity, and serious participation of Liberians in the economy.

This country can only be built by Liberians with the help of others. We support business profitability, but we will avoid profitability that does not translate to general economic prosperity for citizens. Growth must come with development, and growth must be equitable. We will welcome Foreign Direct Investment but in a partnership that will ensure our people benefit fully from our resources.

To the Liberian Diaspora Community in the United States and around the world, we recognize your role in the effort to build the society and help improve the country's political, economic, and social conditions. The Diaspora Community will have a pivotal role

in our government and be an important partner in the renewal we seek for Liberia.

We will seek new engagements to leverage the critical mass of the Diaspora in national development. I am, therefore, announcing the holding of periodic Diaspora Conferences to enhance diaspora engagement in national development.

To Civil Society, your voice will matter because you will make us better. We extend a hand of partnership to you to collaborate with us in ways that reinforce our roles to improve the conditions of our people and elevate our country.

Let me now speak directly to the youth. You will be the drivers of the change we seek. As our future, you are invited to be more involved as we explore ways of working with you to develop a national service program to help prepare young people for future leadership roles. Our agenda will create the space you need. You must therefore prepare yourselves to play a significant role in changing your country.

I stand before you today to promise the commitment of my Administration to the public good; to working for the millions of Liberians waiting for the beginning of a new day; and to build the people's trust in their government and institutions.

**To you, my fellow Liberians across the length and breadth of our great country, let us this day begin a process of national renewal and make this century the Liberian century. Let us unite and build together.**

**Let us resolve to make our country a truly bright and shining star – "the Lone Star Forever". And in so doing, let**

**us reflect on the words of our national hymn: “In union strong, success is sure. We cannot fail”.**

**We look forward with hope, faith and confidence, as we Think Liberia, Love Liberia, and together Build Liberia.**

**May Almighty God bless us all and save our State.**

**Thank You!**