

**Address by His Excellency Jeremiah C. Sulunteh, Ambassador of the
Republic of Liberia to the United States at the National Convention of the
Federation of Lofa Associations in the Americas**

Des Moines, Iowa

May 25, 2013

Salutation:

- **Chairman, Executive Committee & Members of the Board of Directors of FLAA**
- **Mrs. Garmai Tokpa,**
President of the Federation of Lofa Associations in the Americas (FLAA)
- **Representatives of other Liberian Organizations**
- **Eminent sons and daughters of Lofa**
- **Distinguished Invited Guests**
- **Fellow Liberians & Friends of Liberia, Ladies & Gentlemen**

Permit me, at the outset, to bring you heart-felt greetings on behalf of Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, the Government and People of Liberia and the Embassy in Washington, DC.

I would like to pay homage to our forefathers and Pan-Africanist leaders, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and William V.S. Tubman of Liberia for initiating the idea that gave birth to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now African Union (AU). In like manner, we should like to congratulate the

continent for its 50th Anniversary celebrations taking place today in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and around the world.

I want to thank President Garmai Tokpa and core officers for the invite and am honored to join you for your annual convention, designated to develop an action plan for the future of Lofa County.

The theme for this auspicious occasion is “Making Lofa County a Citadel of Math and Science Education in the 21st Century”. This theme could not have been more appropriate than this. In its agenda for transformation, one key area that is cross-cutting for our forward march as Liberians is human development. We are all witnesses to the fact that many young Liberians were bypassed by education due to 14 years of senseless war that destroyed the fabric of our society, killed our leaders, family members and loved ones, including several teachers and a university president, as well as, displaced many and created a brain drain that affects our country even today.

As your Ambassador in the US, it is my pleasing duty to inform you of progress of the Government of Liberia. Over the last two years, Liberia has reached several milestones, including reaching the Millennium Challenge Corporation compact eligibility and establishing the US-Liberia Partnership Dialogue, which will institutionalize the important bilateral relationship between the US and Liberia. Three key areas of our development challenge will be addressed under these arrangements, including Agriculture and Food security, Power and Energy infrastructure and Human Development.

The importance of the special historical relationship between our two countries was manifested on January 15, 2013 when President Sirleaf and then United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton signed a Statement of Intent launching a Partnership Dialogue. Two weeks ago, the dialogue continued among officials of the Government of the United States and Liberia on the way forward. This was followed by a visit of President Sirleaf to Washington last week to follow up with some members of Congress and other U.S Government Officials. We pledge to remain engaged with United States, our important partner to ensure that the dialogue meets its goals of transforming Liberia.

Tonight, we have come to honor the Federation of the Lofa Associations in the Americas and to partner with you as you endeavor to make Lofa County a Citadel of Math and Science Education in Liberia.

Lofa County was among the counties created in 1964. It's current population of 276, 000 is spread across seven (7) districts, accommodating six tribal groups. The development priorities of Lofa include roads, health facilities and educational facilities. Lofa County is endowed with natural resources including deposits of iron ore, gold and diamonds. About 70% of the population engages in Agriculture.

Lofa County subscribes to traditional culture values, such as the Poro and Sande societies. Current challenges include land ownership, traditional practices and power sharing.

In terms of development challenges, statistics show the following:

- Health Services
 - There are 53 health services in Lofa County

- 4 Hospitals
 - 6 Health Centers
 - 41 Clinics
- Water & Sanitation
 - There are 657 protected wells
 - 194 Hand Pumps
 - Majority drink from creeks
- Latrines
 - There are 738 latrines in the county. This means that majority of the people use the bushes for that purpose.
- Electricity
 - 26.3% of the population use kerosene
 - 8.6 of the population use generators
 - 11% of the population use firewood
 - 50.2% of the population use palm oil
- Education
 - There are 469 schools in Lofa County
 - One Community College
 - Zorzor Rural Teachers Training Institute (ZRTTI)
 - Total student enrollment is 54, 942
 - ✓ 61% Male
 - ✓ 39% Female
 - There are 435 Teachers

Fellow Liberians, sons and daughters of Lofa, if your goal is to make your county the “Citadel of Math and Science” in Liberia then, there is a lot that will be expected of all Lofans, irrespective of where you live.

The data above shows that $\frac{54,942}{276,347} \times 100$

- ✓ 20% of your county population comprise of students, with a student’s-to-teachers ratio of $\frac{435}{54,942} \approx 80$ to 1.

A 69% to 38% rate of enrolment for boys to girls and with the assumption that majority of female students do not like Math and Sciences pose further challenges in meeting this goal.

While it is true that meeting this goal is not impossible, it will require the commitment of all Lofans to support education by providing scholarships, as inducements for students to major in natural sciences as compared to the social sciences.

It has been established that part of the unemployment problem in Liberia is attributed to the career choices of students. Liberia no doubt needs more civil engineers, mechanical and electrical engineers, petroleum engineers, geologist, and environmentalist as compared to those majoring in management, public administration and sociology. If this culture of career path is not broken, Liberia will continue to experience a mis-match between the availability of jobs and the lack of skills to match them.

Fellow citizens, every year, our Universities and Colleges graduate several thousand with degrees in various disciplines, but most of them do not match the jobs that are available on the jobs market. This speaks to the fact that there is a difference between qualification and competence.

In order to reclaim the future of Liberia, we must invest in the human capital of our country now than ever before. Liberia is endowed with a lot of resources (gold, diamond, iron ore, timber), and the most recent discovery of oil off our shores. These resources need proper management for equal and equitable distribution to all Liberians.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, friends of Liberia Lofa County was once referred to as the bread basket of Liberia. Where is Lofa County today? What has happened to your vast rain forest? What has happened to the huge harvest of rice, cassava, plantains and eddoes? What has happened to your pepper and peanuts?

Where are the many Lofa graduates in Agriculture and Forestry, Education, Chemistry, Physics and Math? Where are the sons and daughters of Lofa today?

What are your plans for a better Lofa? What are your plans to reconcile the Mandingos and Lormas in Ziggida, in Quadu Gbondi, in Zorzor, in Voinjama, in Kolahun, in Vahun and Salayea?

What are your plans for the Wologisi Mountain that could benefit the children of Lofa, Liberia and bring hope to our people?

My dear Uncles, these questions may not need answers tonight, but should draw our attention in the next little while as we contemplate on the future of our dear country Liberia.

Distinguished members of the Board, members of the Executive Committee, Madam President and core of Officers, fellow Liberians, this is the future of Lofa unfolding before you. It requires sober reflections, candid opinions, commitment and support to make your dear county, Lofa a proud county once again.

Thank you tonight.