

**Keynote Address by H.E. Jeremiah C. Sulunteh, Liberian Ambassador
to USA, Canada and Mexico**

**at the Convention of the United Bong County Associations in the
Americas (UBCAA)**

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

July 11, 2015

Salutation:

* The Distinguished Honorable Members of the Bong Legislative Caucus
(Hon. Prince Moye, Hon. George Mulbah and Hon. Tokpah Mulbah) ;
other delegates from Liberia

* Hon. Methuselah O. Bradley, Honorary Paramount Chief Gboveh of
Bong County

* Honorable David Flomo, President of UBCAA

Officials of UBCAA and Chapter Leaders

* Distinguished Invited guests, friends of Liberia, my fellow citizens

Introduction:

I bring you warm greetings and sincere best wishes from the Liberian Embassy in Washington DC and in the name of my family. Today, I stand on the shoulders of our forefathers who inherited, cultivated and resided on a piece of land that would be known as a country, called Liberia. I stand on the shoulders of our esteemed traditional leaders, Dolokelen Gboveh, Gwemei Woah, Jawo Mannelah, Dolokelen Paye,

Gor pudolo Gboi, Flomo Wennah, Nowai Leemue and Gormalon Walker, among others to bring you greetings fellow citizens of Bong County.

I wish to thank the President and officers of the United Bong County Associations in the Americas (UBCAA), for the invitation to keynote this convention that is aimed at bringing all of the people of Bong County together to chart a new course for the development of our beloved county.

As your representative in the Great United States, I would wish to report that the state of the relationship between our beloved Liberia and the United States is at its best. As you are aware, the United States continues to be a keen development partner to Liberia, given the special historical relationship that subsists between the two countries and peoples. A brief highlight of our diplomatic engagements include the following:

- * The establishment of the US/Liberia Partnership Dialogue
- * The Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact Development for Liberia's economic transformation
- * The US Power Africa Initiative, for which Liberia is a recipient
- * The US/Africa Trade Initiative (AGOA), of which Liberia is an eligible member
- * The outpouring US support towards Liberia Ebola fight, among many other development initiatives that continue to benefit our country.

Fellow citizens, with this brief on our current engagement in our diplomatic role, I will now like to speak to the issues for which we are gathered here this weekend.

In order to occasion the realization of sustained economic growth and development for our country, as well as, to reposition Bong County to make a more meaningful contribution to Liberia's future, we are pleased to consider your theme for this occasion: "**Working Together to Transform Bong County**". **With your indulgence, I like to extend your theme a little further to read: "Overcoming our Fears and working together to Transform Bong County"**

As we reflect on the important theme for this convention, I am reminded that while our country Liberia is at peace as a nation, Bong County is not at peace with itself. The problem with us in Bong County is us; and there is a need to solve that problem so as to remake our county.

I beg your indulgence to join me for a short tour of our county to see where have we come from?; where we are now?, and where we would like to go?:

Firstly, Where have we come from? I am told that our forefathers were peace loving, hard working and generous to their neighbors and strangers, alike. We are told that our forefathers were very cooperative with one another and that they always work together in group with one common purpose.

Today, it is unfortunate to note that we have deviated from what our esteemed forefathers stood for. We are rather holding onto excess baggage that continue to hold us back.

My fellow kinsmen, in order to work together to transform Bong County, we must do away with these excess baggage that continue to

impede our progress. The excess baggage I am referring to include the following:

- * Envy and jealousy among Bong County citizens, officials, lawmakers, business people, etc
- * Putting self interest above the county interest
- * Insensitivity to youth development/empowerment
- * Building lies on one another, rather than building systems
- * The perceived Lower and Upper Bong scenario that is seemingly dividing our county
- * Weak leadership and always seeking political sympathy, etc.

My fellow citizens, we should not allow Bong County to be defined by these excess baggage. We must leave them behind in order to work together for the development of our county.

Secondly, Where are we now? Bong County has come a long way, although created as a county only in 1964. The county is made up of 12 political districts, 13 chiefdoms, 42 clans, 26 cities and 468 towns. According to the Bong County Health Team, the county's population is estimated at 520,000, even though other sources estimate it at 378,161.

While we applaud the leadership of our county for fostering development thus far, there remains to be some cross-cutting issues that need to be addressed.

Education: In order to adequately respond to the ever-growing education needs of the county, the Bong County Development Agenda

calls for the construction of additional 83 elementary schools, 6 high schools and two teacher training institutes.

Health: While there has been improvement in the health care delivery system, enormous gaps remain in both access and quality of care. Although there are more than 30 clinics spread over the county, there is a gap between physicians to population ratio. In order to fill the gap in the health sector, the county requires additional 64 health posts, two nursing training institutes and one more hospital, even as we appreciate the construction of the C.B. Dunbar Hospital.

Water and Sanitation: According to a recent survey, water for domestic use comes mainly from unprotected sources. Gbarnga City, our capital, does not have a pipe-born water system. Hand pumps exist, though not in great enough numbers to serve the city and districts and many are non-functional. Even the districts have limited safe drinking water:

Although 45% of households in the county indicated that they use toilets, only 15% use ventilated improved pit latrines or flush toilets. The rest of our people use traditional toilets, such as open field or bush.

As we continue this tour of our county, I am constrained to ask the following questions; these questions have to do with what is happening to the management of the resources of Bong County?

a) In the midst of all of these developmental challenges, I wonder what have we been doing with the county development fund?

b) I wonder what strategies do we have in place for the efficient utilization of our share of the Mitta Steel fund?

- c) I wonder what benefits do the people of Bong County get from China Union that is operating in Bong Mine?
- d) I wonder what negotiations have we made for the operation of our forest resources, such as the one in Garmue and other places?
- e) I wonder what strategy have we pondered for the management of our water resources, such as the Kpatawee Water Fall and that which is in Kokoya?
- f) Lastly, and maybe more troubling is what has happened to the budgetary allocation appropriated by the Government of Liberia for the construction of the Bong County Community College? It is a shame to know that the college is currently squatting at the Methodist High School campus as the county struggles to complete the construction of the community college.

Thirdly, Where are we going from here? As citizens, we need to unite than ever before to work together to transform Bong County. In order to work together, we must also overcome our **FEAR. The citizens of Bong County continue to harbor fear! We always fear that someone will not agree with us, so there is no need to try.**

Yes, my brothers and sisters, to overcome our fear in Bong County will require us to come together to forge a common front. The time to do that is NOW!! We therefore call on all of you to come together for once in the name of our county and country.

My dear Bong County citizens, our people have demonstrated immense resilience and have been key in supporting national leadership. As we celebrate the work of our forefathers and embrace a bright future, we should note that Bong County has been the center for political

marriages for the past two decades. During the last two democratic elections, almost all of the political parties chose Gbarnga as the venue for their political party conventions and rallies.

My fellow compatriots, we must now dream a new dream for our country. The dream of a new Liberia is not a new story to be told. I should now take a break to pay homage to some of our compatriots who had this dream several years ago to seek leadership for the majority of our people and who fought for true democracy in Liberia. I am talking about Jackson F. Doe of Nimba County; Gabriel William Kpolleh of Bong County, and Edward Biyan Kesselly of Lofa County.

We realize however, that these distinguished politicians were responding to the early calls made by Gabriel Fangalo of Nimba County, James Y. Gbarbea of Bong County and Robert Kennedy of Lofa County, when they advocated for democratic freedom, equitable distribution of the country's resources, respect for human rights, and inclusion of all Liberians in the body politic of Liberia.

As the majority of the Liberian people now position themselves to take state power in a more civilized and democratic fashion, I beseech you my country men and women, to be careful of political chameleons who want to take on your identity only during the period of elections. And once elected, they will change their colors and identities and will not know you anymore.

Fellow citizens, we believe that the time has come that you too can demonstrate leadership. You cannot always afford to be followers in this country. If the people of Bong County are capable to do anything to make other people somebody, then why can't we do something to make ourselves somebody?

Fellow Liberians, the clock of time has now struck the alarm for Liberians to take their eyes away from the seashores to the interior of our country, where there is abundant human and natural resources, capable of transforming our country.

It is now therefore our responsibility to live the dream of these past political leaders. A dream for the total emancipation of our people from socio-political and economic backwardness. That dream calls for a new direction for genuine reconciliation among our people; efficient management and equitable distribution of our resources, affordable and accessible health care, enhanced education and training, as well as, job creation for all of our people.

Finally, fellow citizens, as I now position to close, let me once again encourage all Bong County citizens that it's about time to play a major role in shaping the destiny of Liberia. It's about time to hold together; it's about time to leave the excess baggage behind and forge ahead; it's about time to overcome our fears for leadership and step up to the plate;

The Republic of Liberia is watching Bong County; the future leadership of Liberia is similar to the " little bird story of life and death". Liberia's future is in your hands people of Bong County. you either lead now, or be led, as you have always been!

My fellow countrymen and women, if we are convinced that there is something good in Bong County that continues to attract Liberians to the county, then certainly, there is something good that can come out of Bong County for Liberia's future development.

I thank you all very much!!!

