

***Address by His Excellency Jeremiah C. Sulunteh, Ambassador of the Republic of Liberia to the United States at the Inauguration of Officers of the Association of Citizens and Friends of Liberia (ACFLI)***

***Sacramento, CA***

***March 30, 2013***

**Madam President and Officers-Elect of ACFLI**

**The Chairman and Member of the Board of ACFLI**

**Mr. Gaye Sleh, President of ULAA**

**Special Invitees**

**Distinguished Ladies and 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.

I wish to thank the President and officers-elect of the Association of Citizens and Friends of Liberia (ACFLI) for the kind invitation extended me to serve as the Keynote Speaker on this auspicious occasion for the installation of officers-elect of your dynamic organization.

Since taking up assignment as the Ambassador of the Republic of Liberia accredited to the United States in 2012, this is my first visit to the Golden State of California to meet with fellow Liberians and friends of Liberia.

I am grateful to the Almighty for affording me the opportunity to be with you this Holy Weekend to participate in the induction of your newly-elected officers, and also for us to gather together to share ideas regarding the common good of our community in the Diaspora and our beloved country, as a whole. Happy Easter to you and your families.

I consider very laudable your theme for this occasion: ***“Nurturing Relationships to Strengthen Our Community.”*** While addressing the specifics of the topic, kindly permit me, ladies and gentlemen, to highlight some of the progress being made in our beloved country and at the Embassy in Washington. This is to show that when we nurture good relationships and promote harmony and unity amongst ourselves as a people, our community, society and our country at large would be strengthened.

Madam President-elect, fellow Liberians, I am pleased to inform you that the state of our beloved country, Liberia, is well. Despite the many challenges, steady progress has been made in the rebuilding of our war-torn country. Although peaceful and stable, our country is in a fragile state due to the security situation in the ECOWAS region.

The Government has restored Liberia’s tainted international image, and has instituted major reform policies and programs to rebuild the country’s ruined economy and infrastructure, as well as built system to ensure sustainable peace and progress.

Those who have visited Liberia in recent years would agree that the country is on a course of accelerated development in all aspects of national endeavor. You would notice improvement in various areas, from the rehabilitation and construction of roads, medical and educational facilities to improvement of health care delivery, as well as progress towards quality education, among others.

A visit to Liberia today is characterized by reconditioned roads and street lights in some areas, whereas just a few years ago the city was dark and traffic was greatly impeded due to potholes and puddles. Most parts of the country were also not accessible or were extremely difficult to reach because of deplorable conditions of almost all existing roads, while many other places lacked roads.

To remedy this major problem, the Government has focused on the rehabilitation and construction of roads throughout the length and breadth of the country, making travel to many parts easier.

A few examples of some of the major highways constructed or being built are the Fishtown-Harper highway in Southeastern Liberia, the repaved Monrovia to Buchanan highway, and the highway currently being rehabilitated from Red Light in Monrovia to Gbarnga, Bong County, which will be extended to the border with neighboring Guinea, through Lofa County.

On the Education Front, hundreds of schools have been renovated or built throughout the country, while the government made primary education free and compulsory. Emphasis on girls education has been accelerated over the past few years, with an encouraging girls-to-boys ratio.

The Fendell campus of the University of Liberia outside Monrovia has been rehabilitated, with the help of our international partners, and most of the university's colleges have relocated there. The William V.S. Tubman College of Technology that was destroyed during the war has been renovated and elevated to the William V.S. Tubman University. The government has also opened community colleges in Grand Bassa, Cape Mount and Lofa counties, respectively, while there is construction of community colleges in Bong and Nimba counties.

In an effort to improve the health conditions of the people, the government has rehabilitated or constructed numerous health facilities throughout the country. An example of the Government's effort to make health care accessible to the people throughout the country is modern Jackson F. Doe Memorial Hospital built in Tappita, Nimba County.

Fellow Liberians, we are all witnesses to the fact that the Mount Coffee Hydro Plant that provided electricity to Monrovia and the White Plains Water Reservoir that provided water were both destroyed on June 2, 1990. The demand for

electricity in Monrovia then was 60 mega watts. Today, due to the large population in Monrovia, the demand has increased to 220 mega watts.

In recognition of the fact that electricity is the engine that drives a modern economy and is critical for national development, the Government is making all efforts to restore electricity to many parts of Monrovia, and efforts has begun for the rehabilitation of the Mount Coffee Hydro Plant, which is expected to be operational by 2016.

Without electricity, the huge foreign direct investments in Liberia cannot and will not create the needed job opportunities that the Liberian people so desire.

The Government's efforts to provide electricity throughout the country was further enhanced in 2012, when the Government and the World Bank signed a financing agreement for the West Africa Power Pool (WAPP) program at the World Bank Headquarters in Washington, D.C. I had the honor to sign the agreement on behalf of the Government, which is intended to provide electricity to all border towns between the Ivory Coast and Liberia's southeastern areas such as Maryland, Grand Gedeh, and Nimba counties. When implemented, this project will come alive on December 25, 2015.

Despite the progress made in the country, many challenges still remain. The Government is instituting measures to address problems such as limited manpower and capacity, corruption, genuine reconciliation, as well as reforming laws and constitutional provisions to meet present realities. These areas of national imperative remain the major challenges in our country.

Fellow Liberians, as we reflect on ***"Nurturing Relationships to Strengthen Our Communities,"*** I am very pleased to inform you that the state of the relationship between our beloved country Liberia and the United States is at its best, thanks to the foreign policy being pursued by the Government of Liberia.

As you may be aware, the United States is the single largest bilateral donor and development partner of our country, providing hundreds of millions of dollars for various programs to rebuild our country.

Since taking up assignment in Washington, D.C., my focus has been to explore every avenue that would further enhance the already very cordial relationship, so as to derive maximum benefit for our country. My passion for development diplomacy has driven my interest to call for the strengthening of our relationship with the U.S.

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 that institutionalizes the long-standing bilateral relationship between Liberia and the United States of America.

The U.S.-Liberia Partnership Dialogue is intended to promote diplomatic and economic cooperation between the two countries by providing a flexible, non-binding mechanism to ensure sustained, high-level, bilateral engagement on issues of mutual interest.

It will allow the two countries to look at their relationship strategically, with a view towards the long term, and to focus on those areas that encourage broad-based economic growth, including agriculture and food security, energy and power infrastructure, and human development.

Furthermore, the signing of the Statement of Intent for the Partnership Dialogue was preceded by Liberia's qualification for the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact, through which our country will receive additional resources for our development programs.

We are also pleased to inform you, in this formal manner even though it is already known that on March 18, 2013 President Obama extended the status of Liberians

on the Deferred Enforcement Departure (DED) in the United States for another 18 months.

The extension means an authorization for employment beginning March 31, 2013, which is the date the current DED should have expired. Our effort should now be directed towards more engagement with the United States Government that those on the DED will be given the status of Permanent Residency.

As I said to the Liberian people and before the Senate during my confirmation hearing, and as I reiterate today, what the many Liberians in the U.S. want is not a continuous extension of the DED, but for the privilege to obtain permanent residency.

I would also like to inform you that the Government of President Sirleaf, in recognition of the importance of Liberians in the Diaspora, is taking measures that would harmonize the Constitution and laws of Liberia to legalize dual citizenship.

We wish to assure that the Embassy will continue to be actively engaged with ULAA and all other well-meaning Liberian organizations in the United States on such matters that would benefit Diaspora Liberians.

Distinguished invited guests, fellow Liberians, all of these developments are possible only when we nurture the appropriate relationships to strengthen our communities, our counties, and our common patrimony, Liberia.

Nurturing relationships requires hard work and sacrifice; it requires tolerance, forgiveness and reconciliation. It requires patience with and respect for one another. But how can we nurture a relationship when you and your neighbors are not on speaking terms? How can you nurture a relationship when you are not willing to sacrifice an hour of your time for the community work? How can you nurture a relationship when you are not willing to forgive and reconcile with your fellow Liberians, irrespective of what the war may have caused you?

How can you nurture relationship to strengthen your communities when ULAA, the umbrella organization of Liberians in the Diaspora is divided, and there is inner fighting in most of the county or community organizations? How can you nurture a relationship, fellow Liberians, when you do not tolerate each other?

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I am troubled by the recent call in Liberia by some citizens to declare Liberia as a Christian State. I wonder then, where is our religious tolerance? What happens to the other religious beliefs in Liberia; Islam, African Traditional Religion (non-believers in Christianity and Islam)?

As a community and as a nation, we should rather spend our precious time to resurrect the minds of our young Liberians from the moral degradation that has permeated the lives of the youth to the renewal of our national integrity. Moral ethics has been on the decline in our Liberian communities.

When you leave here tonight, and before you go to sleep, try to log on to the Internet to read the comments on the Liberian newspapers online or log on to Facebook and all you read will be insults to those in authority. All the descriptions that depict negativity are seen posted there about everyone in government and about the country. ***“Nurturing Relationships to Strengthen Our Community”*** means a change of our attitudes and our behaviors towards our fellow man and our community

Fellow citizens and friends of Liberia, irrespective of our ethnic, religious or sectional differences, we are one people called Liberians. Let us endeavor to be one another’s keeper. We will succeed in whatever program we undertake as a community only when we are united. Mutual trust and unity come about by nurturing good relationships amongst ourselves. That should be our message and the legacy for our communities and our children.

I thank you for your attention.