

**Patriotism and Self-Discipline –
The Way Forward for National Transformation**

Liberian's 170th National Flag Day Oration

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Today, I am humbled to have been selected to serve as guest speaker for the 170th celebration of the anniversary of Liberia's National Flag Day. My profound thanks and appreciation go to the Ministry of Education for selecting me for this assignment. I dare not fail to also give thanks to almighty God for affording me this opportunity to serve Him and my nation as I address the people of Liberia during this critical period of Liberia's nationhood.

For this occasion, I have been requested to speak on the theme: **"Patriotism - the Way Forward for National Transformation"**.

Rephrasing the theme, I will say: **"As Liberia moves forward at this very critical period of its history, in 2017, and toward National Transformation, we need patriotic and self-disciplined citizens."**

(Repeat)

Fellow Liberians and partners in progress, during the last 170 years, since 1847, when the Liberian National Flag was first hoisted, Liberians have commemorated the day with various levels of grandeur. The extend of the celebrations always depended on the prevailing circumstances and the mood of the day. During times of world war, civil war, and national crisis, like the Ebola crisis, the nature of celebration has been affected.

Putting on our imaginary hats, let us envisage the first Flag Day in 1847. In the vicinity where we, the citizens in that small community, with a brass band paraded through the city of Monrovia in a festive mood, like we are doing, today. The weather most likely was wet and rainy; the few streets were unpaved and muddy;

there certainly were no cars honking, no electricity, no running water, and definitely no public-school system, with students from 30 senior high schools participating. Nevertheless, the hearts of Liberians and those assembled swelled with pride and joy as they celebrated the “Lone Star”, the new Flag that had been designed as a national emblem. The long and arduous struggle for freedom and nationhood had been surmounted. It was time to celebrate, as we are doing today.

Even though the Liberian flag is copied after that of the United States of America; notwithstanding, the “Lone Star” has its unique significance that we should cherish and remember whenever we pledge our allegiance to it.

*The 11 stripes (6 red and 5 white) signify the 11 signers of the Declaration of Independence of Liberia

* The red signifies the courage, valor and bravery of the founding fathers and mothers of the nation

* The white signifies the purity of heart that motivated the founding of the republic.

* The single star in the blue field represents the only republic in Africa in 1847.

It is very important to note that my reference to “**founding mothers and fathers of Liberia**”, means: **ALL, both the settler and the indigenous groups who worked collectively and collaboratively from the inception, sometime agreeing and other time disagreeing, but finally establishing the Republic of Liberia, that we call our homeland today.**

When one studies Liberian history carefully, it will be revealed that numerous individuals, from the indigenous group joined forces and supported the efforts to establish the Republic of Liberia. A few commonly known and outstanding individuals include: King Sao Boso also called King Boatswain, Madame Suakoko, Henry Too Wesley, T. N. Flo Lewis, Boima Bofi Fahnbuleh, Bob Gray, Zolu Dumah (Queen Victoria asked Parliament to pension some of the native African chiefs in the region who had been especially cooperative in breaking up the slave trade. Chief Zolu Dumah was head of his section of the country, and as such, received this pension). President Sirleaf named the reconstructed Vaitown bridge in his honor.

These individuals, along with ALL of the founding mothers and fathers would be very proud to note that the nation has survived, irrespective of the several crisis and setbacks and they would be proud to celebrate the Lone Star today, after 170 years.

Moving forward for national transformation, on this 170th national Flag Day, I declare that I strongly disagree with the suggestion from some Liberians that the design of the Liberian Flag be changed to reflect some cultural, traditional or geographic symbols. I am of the conviction that, instead of changing our flags with its current symbols agreed upon in 1847, it is necessary that we change our attitude, our mindset and value system. We cannot change history; but, we can change the future.

I believe that Liberians can change their future, positively, if we became more informed about our unique and significant history. This will increase our spirit of **national pride, loyalty and patriotism**. These attributes are greatly needed as Liberia moves forward to achieve the **National 2030 Vision** that calls for the reduction of ignorance, poverty and diseases; sustainable development; inclusive growth and wealth creation.

Moving forward, let us review some brief historical highlights that should make Liberians proud, enhance our commitment to preserve the peace and stability that we enjoy today and motivate us to work with diligence and determination to attain the national transformation goals

Though small and fragile, in its 170 years of existence, Liberia has exhibited noble qualities, principles and services that have contributed to the preservation of its sovereignty and also enhanced the advancement of the Community of Nations. Siding with the allies, Liberia was used as a strategic military base during the First and Second World Wars. Following the end of World War I, Liberia was the only African nation that participated in and signed the Versailles Peace Accord in Paris. Liberia was also a founding member of both the “League of Nations” and the “United Nations”. Liberia faithfully paying its dues, fulfilled all of its obligations to these world organizations. Liberia further championed the causes and contributed

financially to the Liberation Movement of African States and the independence of many nations, including Israel.

Liberia can boast of a great legacy and an interesting history, the untold stories of a people of courage, wisdom, dignity, loyalty, diligence, faith and resilience.

From its founding, throughout its history, Liberia had to confront crises of all magnitude: **Having to** deal with slave trading in Liberia for several years during its establishment; **having to** fight wars with their fellow Liberians, instigated by slave traders and also resulting from cultural clashes, social misunderstandings, misconceptions and deceptions; **having to** cope with the harsh, tropical environment and deadly diseases, particularly the “African fever” (malaria) that caused the death of over 80% of the settlers upon their arrival; **having to** face challenges related to availability of materials and human resources, needed for infra-structural, social and economic developments; **having to** confront the oppression and disadvantages imposed by colonialists and superpower nations; **having to** exist as a sovereign nation, irrespective of the general global perception that blacks were inferior and incapable of governing themselves. In the face of all of these challenges, Liberia struggled to overcome, survive and has remained a sovereign republic for 170 years. - **“A Home of Glorious Liberty by God’s Command”!**

“How has this happened?” One would ask. I believe that it is because the **nation was built on firm foundation of: faith in God, hope, diligence, wisdom, determination, courage, love of freedom and justice, loyalty and patriotism, conviction, neighborliness.** I am convinced that the unfinished and unwritten story of Liberia, when written will fully answer this question. **(How did Liberia survived as the first republic in Africa)**

I believe that **this vision for national transformation is noble** and that God has always had this great plan and vision for Liberia. However, even though, we have made significant achievements during the recovery and reconstruction period, 2003 to 2012, Liberia still has **some very serious issues** that need to be analyzed and addressed conscientiously, with serious political will.

- The most serious issue relates to the **vulnerability of the youth and young adults**, especially the last 2 generations. These youth and young adults, between age 1 to 24, have to cope and survive in systems that have deteriorated: (family/home; education and capacity building skills, health, justice, water/light, social). These are essential to prepare the next generation to be leaders and managers of their homes, the community and the nation. **(Basic communication skills like reading, composition, thinking /problem solving, gainful employment skills need to be developed)** Unless this situation is addressed, seriously, with determination and strategic planning, the goal of national transformation of 2030 will not be achieved.
- Another issue relates to the **ethnic divide** that was perpetuated in the 1980s, which helped to sustain the 14 years civil war, and resulted in the dismantling of ALL national systems, with the devastating of all infrastructure in the nation.

Liberians should see themselves first and foremost as Liberians. Promoting tribalism and ethnic divide is a hindrance to the goal of national transformation.

- The additional issue related to greed, selfishness, economic inequality and lack of justice. These concerns sustain corruption of all kind and may result in national insecurity and instability.
- Taking into consideration the election activities that we are experiencing, I believe that, as Liberia moves forward, the election laws could be revised so as to reduce the number of political parties and minimize the disruption of traffic and the effective operation of government.

In closing, I believe that the issues highlighted above may seem overwhelming; nevertheless, the same God who brought Liberia through the last 170 years, through endless issues, and overcoming numerous crisis, will help the nation, if Liberians pray fervently. This was the primary and effective action of the founding mothers and father. **They prayed**, with faith and **they believed that God** would provide the wisdom, courage, resources, help and all things needed for **national transformation**.

Happy and Blessed Flag Day to all of us.

