

REFLECTIONS

Facing Crisis with Change

"ebola, " a Deadly Symptom of Systemic National Crises in Liberia

A Call to Change Attitude and Habits in Societies, The Liberian Case

Presented by

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Compiler

"It Is Time For Change"

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Distinguished Guests present, Officials of the Sagamore Institute, Family, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Today, I am pleased to represent the William R. Tolbert, Jr. Foundation, as I extend very warm greetings to you beautiful people who have responded to the invitation of Sagamore Institute to participate in this book signing celebration of “It Is Time For Change,” and to listen to my “Reflections” on **Facing Crisis with Change.**

With profound gratitude, I extend a big thank you to Jay Hein, President of the Sagamore Institute, with his Staff, for hosting this event in our honor, and for the tedious efforts in the arrangements made for today and for their gracious partnership with the W.R. Tolbert, Jr. Foundation in the advancement of its vision and mission.

I dare not fail to give thanks and praises to God for life, for health, for this opportunity to present some reflections and for His help and blessings through our lives, even for today!

As a careful educator, it is expedient that I proceed by highlighting the order of my reflections.

In these reflections, I will focus on how, “ebola”, though the most deadly, is only a severe symptom of **numerous systemic national crises** in Liberia. My discussion will cover the following topics:

- **Crises in Liberian History**
- **Changes Are Necessary Responses to Crises**

- **The William R. Tolbert, Jr. Foundation as a response to Liberia’s systemic crises**, implementing programs and activities that teach fundamental principles and values essential for handling crisis and preserving national sovereignty, heritages and legacies
- **The book entitled: “It Is Time For Change” as a valuable resource** with some formulae, principles, values and ideas useful for handling crisis and change
- **Some Suggested Actions for Change in Response to the ebola CRISIS**

CRISIS in Liberian History:

CRISIS is a 24/7 topic of discussion all over the world today!

“ebola” seems to supersede all! Interestingly, “ebola” has become synonymous with Liberia. A nation once unknown and forgotten, suddenly, has become the center of world attention, in an ugly, fearful and negative context. Liberians, all over the world, are concerned or embarrassed to acknowledge their nationality. Nevertheless, Liberia, even though most vulnerable, is very valuable and has a glorious heritage and noble legacy, unknown by Liberians and the world.

Like all nations and people, Liberia has known its share of crisis since its inception. I recall my maternal grand uncle, Uncle Varney Jaleiba, telling us stories about his great, great grand- parents and the crisis they experienced in Timbuktu, Mali, over 500 years ago, that forced his ethnic group to trek southward to the grain coast of West Africa, now Liberia. They settled in Levumah (meaning a Place of Rest) in the Vai/Mende language. The migration, change of loca-

tion or relocation to the grain coast of West Africa by various ethnic groups during the 1600 and 1700s was a result of crisis.

I also recall my fraternal grandmother, “ Gran” Charlotte Augusta Hoff-Tolbert, telling us stories, passed down to her from her grandparents, about the crisis of slavery in the United States of America (**indescribable but one has to read the book and see the movie called: “Twelve Years a Slave” to gain an impression of the extend of the crisis**). Those experiences compelled the Hoff family and thousands of Africans /Americans, to seek a change from the enslavement environment and move back to West Africa in the 1800s. They took refuge in a land, with an environ and culture foreign to them, yet the home of their ancestors.

The migration to the “Grain Coast” of West Africa, now Liberia, was instigated by CRISES: political, social, economic or oppressions of all kinds. Consequently, I am of the opinion that, **“The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here”** is a befitting motto for Liberia

From its founding, throughout its history, Liberia had to confront crises of all magnitude: **having to** deal with slave trading in Liberia; **having to** fight wars with their fellow Liberians, instigated by slave traders and also resulting from cultural clash and social misunderstands and deceptions; **having to** cope with 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 and social developments; **having to** confront the oppression and disadvantages imposed by colonialists and super-power nations; **having to** exist as a sovereign nation, irrespective of the general

global perception that blacks were inferior and incapable of governing themselves. Through all of these, Liberia overcame, survived and remained a sovereign republic, *“A Home of Glorious Liberty by God’s Command”!*

“How has this happened?” One would ask. I believe that it is because the **na- tion 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.

But, like the Jaleibas and thousands who responded to crisis in Timbuktu and trekked to Levumah; where Liberia is today, and like the Hoffs who responded to the Slavery Crisis, in the USA and sailed to West Africa to seek freedom, I am of the conviction that it took courage, determination and wisdom to be able to overcome the storms during the history of Liberia’s crisis. Those were the qualities that served as the foundation of the nation.

During a seminar with Pointman Leadership Institute, I learned that crisis, when translated in a Chinese language means, “a dangerous opportunity.” I believe that “ebola”, like all other crises Liberia confronts today, will give us the opportunity to **reflect and address issues, change attitude and change mind sets, and take concrete actions.** The primary and effective action is **praying with faith and believing that God will provide the wisdom, courage, re- sources, help and all things needed to be victorious.**

Liberians have always prayed when confronted with crises. For example, in 1919, President Daniel E. Howard, in obvious helplessness and desperation, called for a National Prayer and Fast. It was when Liberia declared war on Germany during (World War I), in support of the allies, at the request of the

United States of America. A German submarine was about to bomb the small city of Monrovia, when a British gunboat intervened. Liberians have never doubted that it was God's intervention and His answer to their prayers. Today, that German submarine is on display in the Chicago Museum of Science and Technology. **"Praying" with faith, believing that God will provide the wisdom, courage, resources, help and all things needed to be victorious.**

Today, Liberia is facing one of its most critical crises, the deadly "ebola". This crisis has become a global one, Liberia being **"the epic center."** It has exposed the **vulnerability** of a very **valuable and significant nation** that once stood tall among the community of nations.

Though small and fragile, in its 167 years of existence, Liberia has exhibited noble qualities and principles that have contributed to the preservation of its sovereignty and to 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 represented by the then Secretary of State, Hon. C.D.B. King, who later became President of the Republic of Liberia. Liberia was also a founding member of both the "League of Nations" and the "United Nations". While paying its dues and fulfilling its obligations to these world organizations, Liberia 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, Hope and Love. These have been the Foundation, "the substance", which have pre-

served the nation through crises in times past. These should be the guiding principles, on which Liberians need to revisit, celebrate and reflect on during this current crisis. Though the storm of “ebola” may rage, Liberians, after reflecting upon those values and fundamental principles, should rise up, unite, and take responsible actions, with courage and determination.

As I mentioned earlier, I believe that “ebola” is only a symptom of other **grave systemic crises** the nation needs to confront:

- **Education crisis**—The nation faces a serious crisis where there is over 65% illiteracy rate and with below standard education that lacks relevancy, functionality and approaches to teach and develop critical thinking and problem solving skills in the learners.
- **Health and Sanitation** —The lack of sufficient safe drinking water, toilet facilities and health education are basic to this crisis. The ratio of doctors and health care workers to the population is astounding. The very few doctors and health care workers are succumbing to “ebola” daily.
- **Infra-structural Development** —The situation regarding the electricity, roads, bridges and affordable homes for the masses remain a national crisis. Progress and engagements in these areas have been brought to a halt because of “ebola”. For example, the hydro project is at a standstill; the foreign engineers left the country for fear of ebola. Our hope for hydro-generated electricity, by 2015, seems to be dashed.
- **Economic crisis** — Liberia’s already fragile economy will now be gravely affected because of the “ebola” crisis. For example, rural farming, the foundation of our agro-economy is sporadic or non-existing because of ebola. Other sectors like mining, logging, etc. are equally affected.

➤ **Leadership crisis** – The 14- years civil war and the lack of quality education that teaches loyalty, ethics, critical thinking and problem solving skills have posed a crisis for ethical, responsible and principle based leadership, in every branch of government and on every level and strata of the society. After this crisis, in order to build a vibrant decentralization program, **all civil servants** will need orientation and training in responsible, principle based leadership skills and ethics in management.

Changes are Necessary Responses to Crises:

The response to crisis always requires changes. To succeed in the face of crisis, there must be a change from negative attitude or mind set, change from unwholesome habits or practices, a change from wrong directions or old location. Actions are essential!

In 1989, when the civil crisis began, I responded by writing a letter to the Liberian people pleading with them that “two wrong will never make things right.” Trying to over throw President Samuel K. Doe was wrong, just as over throwing President William R. Tolbert, Jr. was wrong. In retrospect, it has become obvious that, the mind set and habit of over throwing government have resulted only in grave devastation and immeasurable national set-back.

Talking about actions, also in 2002, after monitoring the trends of the 14 years civil crises in Liberia, and learning about the national disaster on every sphere, particularly, the loss of over 200,000 lives and a disruption of every system in the society, I felt a compelling need to respond and take action. I resolved to become an agent of creative and positive change. This was when I compiled,

completed and published the book: “It Is Time For Change.” Twelve years thereafter, the current ebola crisis inspired the reproduction of the 2014 New Edition.

That same year, in 2002, in the spirit of CHANGE, I retired from serving for 16 years as a teacher at the International Community School of Abidjan (ICSA) and decided to move back home to Liberia. We, Laurence and I, with supporting partners, founded a humanitarian, educational, non-governmental organization (NGO) called **REAP, that stands for (Restoration of Educational Advancement Programs)**. Over the last 11 years, since REAP has operated in Liberia, it has impacted thousands of lives and has continued to foster creative and positive change in youth and young adults, particularly orphans and women, the most vulnerable during crises. REAP’s diversified programs are useful restoration strategies after crisis. The enlightenment and empowerment camps (EE CAMP) for orphans and disadvantaged youth and young adults, geared towards developing wholesome character traits, changing mind sets, teaching productive life skills are critical and vital for the post ebola crisis.

REAP also facilitates Pointman Leadership Institute (PLI) seminars on, **Responsible and Principle Based-Leadership and Ethics in Management** that have been and will be essential for civil servant and leaders on every level during and after the crisis. REAP supervises **the Project Hannah Women of Hope** radio programs that airs messages of hope, and organizes times for prayers, especially for women. These radio messages provide encouragement and often enlighten the listeners about preventing ebola and responding during the crisis. REAP operates a seminar calls: **“7 Step to Freedom in Christ”** that helps individuals resolve personal and spiritual conflicts. These will be useful during and after the crisis. REAP, with

Feed My Starving Children continues to provide food for orphanages, schools, churches and disadvantaged groups.

We are pleased that we have succeeded in developing a new youthful generation of leaders who can now replace us and assume the responsibilities of implementing the vision, mission and program of REAP. In January 2014, I turned over the position of Executive Director of REAP to Emmanuel Manneh, who began as an intern, rising to the position of executive secretary and Director of Leadership Develop. This act demonstrates our goal of fostering change and promoting our mission of empowering youth to be responsible leaders and agents of change.

The William R. Tolbert, Jr. Foundation, a Response to Crisis with Change:

On May 13, 2013, the Tolbert Family launched The William R. Tolbert, Jr. Foundation when they celebrated his 100th birth anniversary. Dr. Tolbert was indeed a devoted, patriotic, productive, loyal citizen of Liberia. He became the 20th President of the Republic of Liberia and received **The Family of Man Award in, October 31, 1974**. During his life time he served humanity in many capacities:

- Vice President, Republic of Liberia, 1956 – 1971
- President of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), 1965- 1970
- Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (AU) 1979 – 1980
- President, Liberia Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention (LBMEC) 1958 – 1989
- Pastor of Zion Praise Baptist Church, 1954 – 1980

In his life, he remained a loving Daddy, Grand-daddy, Uncle, Cousin and Friend.

A Foundation in his honor is a definite response to CRISIS. The Foundation noble mission is to undertake constructive engagements while implementing programs designed to tackle systemic crises or enemies that deter Liberia's growth and development. These long standing enemies include: ignorance, poverty, corruption and disease. Its activities will promote Liberia national legacy of courage, wisdom, diligence, loyalty, the foundational principles that determine a nation's destiny. It will operate the WRT, Jr. Presidential Library, Museum and Research Center, that will collect and disseminate research documents, speeches, papers, audio-visual photographs, all chronicling the life, career and administration of President Tolbert and other noble national leaders on every sphere and eminent citizens of the society.

Today's event, at Sagamore Institute, celebrates the first strategic partnership between Sagamore and the Foundation. This partnership is based on mutual appreciation and commitment to teach these values and principles like: **Respect for Life and authority, Freedom, Truth, Integrity, Wisdom, Diligence, Loyalty, Conviction, Self-discipline, Justice, Faith, Hope and Love.** These are the foundational blocks on which our nation was established and upon which the nation will be rebuilt.

The Book Entitled: "It Is Time For Change"- a Valuable Resource for Creative Change in the Face of the "ebola" Crisis:

Today's event also celebrates the book entitled: **"It Is Time for Change."** It is being used as a self-reliant initiative, (using what was in my hand). I republished the book, after 12 years, and have begun an initiative in response to the

ebola crisis in Liberia. The book contains 12 carefully, selected speeches of Dr. William R. Tolbert, Jr. delivered during his lifetime, from 1934 at age 21 until 1980 at age 67, the year he was assassinated on April 12. **These speeches offer much enlightenment, lessons, inspirations, solutions and principles regarding the need for CHANGE in the face CRISIS, in Liberia, Africa and the World.** I find these lessons and principles very relevant in the face of today's national and global crises, especially the "ebola" crisis.

Since its republication, we have had the opportunities to be hosted at "book signing" events, where support have been raised for REAP and Bentol City, Liberia, where I serve as mayor. The initiative endeavors to create awareness about the vulnerability of Liberia, the historical values and the sustaining principles upon which Liberia was established. We further use such occasions to encourage interdependent and collaborative actions essential for responding to CRISES and to promote changes needed to bridge gaps and build bridges in Liberia and in the world.

Today, we invite you to purchase hard or electronic copies of "It Is time for Change" and become a partner with the WRT, JR Foundation and the Sagamore Institute in their shared mission of the **Liberian Initiative** to fight the enemies of growth and development in the nation which include: **ignorance, poverty, corruption and disease in Africa, ebola being the prevailing one.**

Actions for Change in Response to the "ebola" Crisis:

- Encourage the collaboration, cooperation and the total involvement of all Liberians in Liberia and in the diaspora, even the youth and younger generation need to be mobilized in responding to the crisis

- Generate and disseminate data bases with individuals and organizations engaged in outreach and services in the fight against ebola
- Operate a website for sharing information, challenges and success stories for dealing with the ebola
- Operate a **“think tank”** group that entertain questions, answers, suggestions, discussions and sharing of ideas
- On the ground, in Liberia, it would be helpful to have swifter responses from the authority or persons responsible for specific ebola response actions such as: establishing quarantine units in communities; picking up the sick or collecting dead bodies in a timely manner
- Support of backyard gardening of vegetables and fruits and production of poultry, rabbits or snails in homes, schools, churches
- Change the mindset of some sector of the society, that are advocating for a change or overthrow of government. I have the conviction that, since government is about people, it seemed expedient to change people’s negative attitudes and habits: greed, selfishness, deception, laziness, killing, stealing. Such mind sets foster corruption and are counter- productive
- Encourage some **“out of the box”** ideas to handle critical issues:
 - Using electronic devices, solar-run radio / computers / telephones to provide distant learning opportunities to cope with the educational crisis
 - Operating entrepreneur and income generating programs at churches, schools, orphanages, and communities to empower the youth and deal with the economic and unemployment crisis

- Encouraging students to engage in debates, contests, reading, writing of stories, articles poems, painting, drawing, carving
- **I believe that it is time to change the constitutional position regarding dual- citizenship.** Liberia could gain from the needed man power and human resources it has always lacked since its founding.

In closing, I declare the faith that ebola will also pass away and it will be then when the real struggle to rebuild the nation will begin. Like George Washington, Harriett Tubman, Ghandi, Mandela, Martin Luther King or John F. Kennedy, this battle will be fought and won with Truth and not deception; with the Pen and not with the Sword, with peaceful means and not violent or rebellious ways. It is indeed “Time for Change”. It will take a Total Involvement of all, the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the national and international to take responsible creative actions in the fight. It is indeed time to use what’s in your hands. I commit the book “It Is time for Change” as a resource to support the WRT, Jr. Foundation, as well as to promote essential values and principles that are the foundation for the growth and development of Liberia, **“This Home of Glorious Liberty by God’s Command.”**

