

Liberian Links: The Role of the International Community in Rebuilding Liberia

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored tonight that the School of Management here at Boston University has invited me to speak on the topic *Liberian Links: the Role of the International Community in Rebuilding Liberia*. Since my appointment by APARC as the Balfour African President-in-Residence, I have continued to enjoy the distinguished privilege of addressing various audiences on issues of political, economic and social importance to Africa in general and Liberia in particular. My focus has included issues of nation building in relationship to Liberia and countries recovering from conflict. This occasion affords me yet another opportunity to continue the performance of this duty.

Liberia is slowly but surely emerging from the darkest period of her national history. My country has been burdened with fourteen years of almost non-stop civil war that killed, hurt and displaced close to 1 million of Liberia's population and completely destroyed the basic infrastructure of the country. This destruction was never conceived in the imagination of the Liberian people when the first shots of the rebel invasion of the country were fired on Christmas Eve, 1989. Unfortunately, wars are never meant to construct but destroy. This is exactly what fourteen years of civil war has done to Liberia. The country's infrastructure, as well as its political, economic, educational, and health sectors have all been affected. Nonetheless, Liberia is rebuilding itself. The country is at a critical point in history.

The scale of destruction in Liberia is so massive that minds reel at thoughts of the economy of the task required to reconstruct the country. The educational sector of the country was one of the worst affected. The two major institutions of higher learning in Liberia, the University of Liberia and Cutting ton University College were not spared. They were both completely stripped bare, and both schools are having a difficult time getting themselves fully operational again. Except for Monrovia, the capital city, schools in other parts of the country generally remain closed due to insecurity and the lack of facilities to resume normal school activities.

The health sector is also in a very deplorable state. Again, the nation's two largest referral hospitals, the John F. Kennedy Medical Center in Monrovia and the Phoebe Hospital located in Shako, Bong County rural Liberia, were ravaged by armed men and other looters.

These conditions make the delivery of effective health care to the people of Liberia very difficult, to say the least. It is especially worse in the rural areas, where the people have no access to any form of medical care, either because the health facilities are destroyed or no medical personnel and drugs are available. Only God knows how many people die daily from illnesses in these rural parts of the country occupied by rebel forces and shut off from Monrovia.

My specific mention of the state of the educational and health sectors in Liberia was intended only to give you an idea of what has happened to Liberia and why it would require far more than the national efforts of Liberians themselves to rebuild the country. The rebuilding of Liberia does require the active and sustained participation of the international community.

The first priority for Liberia as we prepare to rebuild our country is peace and stability. The international community, including the United States, the European Union, the African Union, and all peace-loving countries of the world, is needed to support the United Nation and the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS). This support is needed to ensure a complete cessation of hostilities between armed groups in Liberia by contributing additional peacekeeping troops, logistics, and funds to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations peacekeeping troops on the ground to 15,000.

Secondly, the international community will have a greater impact on the peace process in Liberia by providing funding and technical support for the rehabilitation, reintegration and resettlement of the more than 45,000 combatants of the warring parties in Liberia. The non-implementation of this critical aspect of the Abuja Accord is one of the major contributing factors for the resumption of the civil war in Liberia after the 1997 presidential elections. The Abuja Accord was the thirteenth peace agreement of the civil war signed by warring factions in Abuja, Nigeria in August 1995. In addition to providing for a new council of state and national elections, the Accord provided for the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants.

This time around, combatants must not only be completely disarmed but also assisted to reintegrate and resettle in society through the provision of vocational training, academic education, funding for small business enterprises, trauma healing and counseling services, and general health services to empower them to lead normal lives again.

Thirdly, the international community should assist Liberia in training and restructuring her national security apparatus. In the past, the armed forces of Liberia the national police force, and other security forces were often used by suppressive governments against the people. The training and restructuring of the security forces should therefore include civic and human rights education, as well as provisions for the retirement of those personnel who might not be required for further service.

Fourthly, Liberia needs international assistance to restore electricity and pipe-borne water supply to Monrovia and to extend these services to other parts of the

country especially the rural areas. The rehabilitation and expansion of the Mount Coffee Hydroelectric and water treatment facilities, which before the civil war provided electricity and drinking water for Monrovia and its environs, would prove very vital to this effort. Both installations were destroyed during the war. These facilities were originally constructed through funding and expertise provided by the international community.

Fifthly, Liberia needs international assistance to stimulate economic activity and growth in the country once again. Many foreign investors particularly from the United States, Europe, Asia and other parts of Africa understandably fled Liberia to escape the civil war. As peace and stability return, the home countries of these investors can once again continue to play a significant role in the economic development of Liberia by encouraging their citizens to return or to explore investment opportunities in the country. Liberia's investment opportunities include natural resources such as iron ore, gold, diamonds, timber, rubber and crude oil. Tourism is another area of investment in Liberia worth international attention. Coastal and rural locations such as Marshall, Cape Palmas, Robert sport and national wildlife reserves in the southeastern part of the country offer many natural and scenic attractions.

Additionally, the international community particularly national and international lending institutions to which Liberia is indebted, could significantly impact economic viability in Liberia by reviewing all of Liberia's foreign debts with an eye to waiving most, if not all of the three billion dollars Liberia owes them and by removing currently imposed restrictions to facilitate the country's eligibility for new loans to finance her national reconstruction programs. The United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, ECOWAS, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United States should all be involved in a coordinated approach to making this a reality.

Sixthly, Liberia further needs the assistance of the international community to recover all funds illegally taken away from the national coffers by individuals or groups, including unscrupulous business establishments, who took advantage of the chaotic state of affairs in Liberia before and during the civil war to rob the country. The bank accounts and the assets of such individuals and businesses should be frozen until a just settlement for Liberia is reached and effected through the supervision and facilitation of the international community.

Seventhly, Liberia needs international assistance to reconstruct roads, clinics, hospitals, schools, and public buildings. The road networks of Liberia have received very little attention since 1989 when the civil war began. Indeed, travel to many parts of the country, especially the rural areas is virtually impossible or dangerous, not only because of the presence of rebel forces but also because the roads are impassable due to years of neglect. It is important to know that less than 400 miles of all of Liberia's roads are paved. An improved road network throughout the country will help boost economic activity, as rural farmers are enabled to transport their produce to markets in the urban areas and goods and services from the urban areas are in turn delivered to rural areas.

Additionally, clinics, hospitals and schools need repair equipment and supplies to make them functional again. At the moment, it is mainly private medical facilities and educational institutions that are operating, but their fees are so exorbitant that most Liberians cannot afford them. For example, tuition per child for a school year in some of these schools is equivalent to an average Liberian family income for three years.

Eighthly, Liberia needs the support and assistance of the international community for the holding of a national conference on the future of Liberia and the conduct of a national census of the population before the elections are held. The national conference initiative by Liberians for Liberians will serve to create a strategic

plan for our nation to move from its recent state of civil conflict to a stable, prosperous nation. The conference should involve the totality of Liberia's population, including all of our ethnic groups, women, men, and our youth.

A national census will enable us to determine the accurate number of eligible voters, as well as provide an opportunity for realistic planning and implementation of nation-wide development programs and projects.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, there is no doubt that the international community has been an outstanding and faithful partner of Liberia. We Liberians are very grateful to the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, the African Union, ECOWAS, and all friendly countries of the world for their assistance to our country over the years. More recently, the genuine commitment of the international community to the peace, stability and progress of Liberia was further demonstrated when the United Nations and donor countries pledged \$520 million dollars for the reconstruction of Liberia. The people of Liberia thank you very much.

Notwithstanding, Liberia still looks forward to more international assistance for national reconstruction. It would be of a more permanent value if all assistance to Liberia could be given from the perspective of empowering the country to become economically and politically sustainable. Liberia must not forever be dependent on outside help. I, therefore, propose that the international community consider assisting Liberia to fully develop the capacity of her human resources to actively participate in a drive to make Liberia a viably strong, productive, and less dependent state. In the Diaspora are hundreds of thousands of highly skilled Liberia professionals who could immensely contribute to the reconstruction and the achievement of self-sustainability for Liberia. The international community would be helping Liberia take a giant step forward in the march to practical independence if it could, through the United Nations, consider facilitating the repatriation to and resettlement of willing Liberian professionals in their home country.

In closing, let us all as one great human family continue to unite our efforts to reach out in assistance to needy and troubled members of our family, but, more significantly, let us always render assistance with a view to helping members of our family not only to survive but also to thrive.

I thank you very much.