

STATEMENT

BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY DR. GEORGE MANNEH WEAH
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA**

DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE

OF THE

SEVENTY-FOURTH (74th) REGULAR SESSION

OF THE

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS

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WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2019

Mr. President;

Mr. Secretary General;

Excellencies, Heads of State and Government;

Heads of Delegations;

Ambassadors;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to address this 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, on behalf of the Government and People of Liberia.

Before I begin my address, I would like to ask you to kindly join me to observe a moment of silence for the deaths of 28 young scholars who died last week in a tragic fire in Liberia.

[MOMENT OF SILENCE]

Thank you. May Their Souls Rest in Perfect Peace.

I would also like to thank the large number of you who shared our grief and loss by sending us condolences through personal telephone calls and social media. God bless you for your compassion.

YOUR EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Allow me, first of all, to congratulate His Excellency Professor Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, on his election as President of the Seventy-fourth (74TH) Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. President, your election is not only an honor to you and the Government and People of Nigeria; it is also an honor for West Africa and the African continent at large. We are convinced that you will lead this august body successfully, and fulfill the expectations and the confidence reposed in you.

I wish to assure you of Liberia's fullest support in the discharge of your duty. Permit me also to congratulate your predecessor, Her Excellency Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcês, for the astute manner in which she administered the affairs of the 73rd Session of the General Assembly.

Let me also pay special tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, for his enthusiasm and personal dedication to the work of the United Nations, and for ably steering its affairs. Your far-sighted leadership qualities continue to keep the United Nations focused on its objectives in the face of daunting challenges.

MR. PRESIDENT, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

As I have acknowledged on many occasions, Liberia is a UN success story. After being devastated by a brutal civil conflict that lasted for 14 years, peace was restored and maintained by what was then the largest peace-keeping force in the history of this organization. Under the auspices of the UNMIL peace-keepers, Liberians enjoyed sixteen (16) years of unbroken peace.

Mr. President, we are pleased and grateful for the efforts and sacrifices made by them to secure our peace. When the peace-keeping force was withdrawn two years ago, the responsibility for maintaining peace in Liberia was passed on to the Liberian Government.

This is a responsibility to which I attach the greatest importance, because without peace, our world will be difficult. We are all aware of the terrible destruction of lives and properties caused by civil war.

However, long after the guns have been silenced, the survivors have to live with the collateral damage of the war-wounded, the shattered families, the displaced populations, the resettlement of refugees, and all the other negative consequences of a national socio-economic fabric that has been torn apart.

Since I assumed the leadership of my country almost two years now, I have remained focused on my charge to ensure that peace prevails in Liberia. At that time, we committed ourselves to upholding our constitutional mandate, which is to ensure that all the democratic rights of our citizens would be guaranteed and protected.

I am proud to say that I have kept this promise; and our country is today a beacon of democracy in Africa, where freedom of the press, freedom of expression, freedom of association and other political and democratic rights are respected, under the rule of law.

The political environment remains vibrant, with political actors and parties freely exercising their franchise and participating in various elections. Mr. President, I am delighted to report that there are no political prisoners in Liberia, and existing laws that hindered or threatened press freedom have been de-criminalized.

Several protests have taken place from time to time, all of which have ended peacefully, and have been welcomed by my Government, as a positive manifestation of our democratic maturity.

This is the democracy for which our country has yearned; this is the freedom for which our people have struggled and suffered; and this is the emancipation for which many of our citizens have paid the ultimate price.

However, we are beginning to witness the emergence of a creeping threat to our democratic space, and to our hard-won peace and stability. Some individuals, within and out of our country, particularly those who have lost democratically-held elections,

have resorted to incitement, threats of violence, misuse of social media, and hate speech, with the aim and objective of achieving power through undemocratic means.

This is unacceptable, and must not be encouraged by those who would wish Liberia well. For democracy to thrive, all Liberians, including both the ruling parties and the opposition parties, must respect the rule of law, and abide by the procedures and regulations prescribed therein.

As the leading opposition party in Liberia during the past 12 years, our Party, the Congress for Democratic Change, accepted the disputed results of the two previous Presidential Elections, in 2005 and 2011, in the interest of peace.

Nevertheless, throughout those two terms, we continued to engage the government of the day in a constructive manner, even accepting to serve as Peace Ambassador when called upon to assist them to maintain the peace under their regime.

We must all learn to respect the mandates of the electorates, even when that mandate is not in our favor, and not be selective in our support for democracy only when we win.

PRESIDENT, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The Liberian civil conflict came to an end when all parties and warring factions signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, Ghana, in August, 2003.

The Accord called for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), to provide a forum that would address issues of impunity, as well as an opportunity for both the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to share their experiences, in order to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation.

The TRC was duly established, concluded its hearings, and produced a final report in 2009. Among other things, the report called for the establishment of an extraordinary

criminal tribunal to prosecute those identified as having committed gross violations of human rights and economic crimes between 1979 and 2003.

It is important to note that the TRC report also recommended the use of a conflict-resolution mechanism that has been traditionally used in Liberia, called the “Palava Hut” mechanism, whereby, in various district meetings conducted by community elders, perpetrators could publicly request forgiveness from their victims, and where the aims of restorative justice could be served.

When I spoke before you last September, after my first nine (9) months in office, I indicated a preference for dialogue as a conflict-resolution mechanism, so that as a Government and People, we could together focus our efforts on poverty-reduction, growth, and economic development, rather than on retribution.

However, since that time, there has been a rising chorus of voices from many quarters, calling for the establishment of an Economic and War Crimes Court. These voices include not only thousands of war victims, but also some of the alleged perpetrators, who seem to wish to either clear their names or their conscience.

Support for the establishment of the Court has also been voiced by many international organizations, as well as some of our international partners.

Mr. President, we are at a loss to understand why the clamor for the establishment of the Court is now being made, almost a full decade after it was first called for, and during which time no such pressure was brought to bear on the government that grew out of the Accra Peace Accord.

Nevertheless, our Government is a listening Administration, and we have been paying keen attention to the voices of our people. What I have discerned from their cries is that it is important to bring closure to the wounds from the 14 years of Liberia’s brutal civil war, and that we need to agree on a mechanism that would guarantee the sustenance

of peace, stability, justice, and reconciliation, as well as enhance our prospects for economic recovery.

Considering the importance of this matter, I have already begun consultations with our National Legislature – the representatives of our people - and we intend to have a broader engagement with the Liberia Judicial System, and with our strategic International Partners and Organizations, in order to determine pertinent issues such as legal framework, timing, venue, and funding, among others.

It is my hope that at the end of this consultative process, a National Consensus will evolve, that will determine the pathway to resolving this issue. I therefore ask for your unflinching support, as we embark upon this important national endeavor.

EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

We are gathered here today at a time of uncertainty and heightened tension in global politics, security, and trade. The global economy is also under undue stress, security tension is on the rise in many parts of the world, trade protectionism and climate change both are having unintended consequences especially on developing countries.

Yet, we strongly believe in the ability of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security, foster friendly relations among nations, and promote social progress, better living standards, and human rights. We continue to have faith and confidence in the United Nations as the best universal institution to guide the nations of the world in peaceful and harmonious interactions.

The theme of this 74th General Assembly, “**Galvanizing Multilateral Efforts for Poverty Eradication, Quality Education, Climate Action and Inclusion**” certainly reminds us about our responsibility to focus on achieving the purpose of the United Nations in principle and practice. My Government has developed and is implementing a national development plan which supports this theme.

Our “Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) is intended to serve as our compass for reconstruction, development, and modernization. While it gives priority to poverty reduction, it is also intended to support the efforts of middle- and upper-income Liberians to grow and prosper.

It is equally centered on infrastructure development, road construction, road connectivity, and agriculture. Indeed, the PAPD also emphasizes women and youth empowerment, as well as qualitative education and good healthcare delivery.

However, at this juncture we are beginning to face significant implementation challenges, due to the continued decline in prices of our major exports, revenue shortfalls, and structural imbalances. Increasing inflation and currency depreciation tend to reduce the purchasing power of our citizens, thus placing further burdens on their standard of living.

We have exercised our best efforts as a Government to address these challenges, and will continue to do so. Yet, many of them persist, and are claiming our fullest attention in finding practical solutions to resolve them.

Mr. President, we therefore want to appeal to you for your continuous assistance and expertise. My administration has recently developed a new investment framework of incentives and tax reliefs that will directly benefit the private sector, and we hereby invite the investment community to take advantage of this new opportunity.

We have also taken several other initiatives to address these challenges. For example, we are presently engaged in talks with the IMF with the aim of entering into a program with that Institution.

We are also involved in re-organizing the leadership and the management of our Central Bank to make it more efficient, independent, and responsive to the issues of monetary policy formulation and supervision.

As part of our efforts to ensure an inclusive and participatory dialogue on the problems confronting our economy, including the urgent need to proffer appropriate solutions, we recently initiated a National Economic Dialogue, comprising of all local and international stakeholders. We have taken due note of their recommendations, and have already begun to implement those that are most urgent and pertinent.

MR. PRESIDENT, EXCELLENCIES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Let me assure you, that Liberia will remain engaged as a responsible member of the international community, on all bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels.

We will continue to work with the United Nations and its organizations to foster peace, security, and harmony among the Nations and Peoples of the world.

To my fellow Liberians, both at home and abroad, let me say that without peace, there can be no progress or development. All Liberians, therefore, have a responsibility to maintain the peace that we now enjoy, especially those of you who desire to be future leader of Liberia; remember, it was the love of liberty that established us as a country. It was our unity that made us the First Independent African Republic, and it will take our joint efforts to sustain the peace, develop and reconcile our nation and gain economic stability.

I THANK YOU.