

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

BY

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

31ST GRADUATION CEREMONY

OF

THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION UNIVERSITY (AMEZU)

THE PO RIVER CAMPUS  
VINCENT TOWN  
BOMI COUNTY, LIBERIA

JUNE 9, 2022

The Speaker, President Pro-Tempore, and Members of the 54th Legislature, here present;

The Dean and Members of the Cabinet;

Other Officials of Government, here present;

The Doyen and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Bishop Hilliard D. Dogbe, Chairman, and Members of the Board of Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion University;

Dr. Benjamin Dorme Lartey, President of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion University;

Presidents and Special Representatives of the Association of Liberian Universities and Colleges;

Former Presidents of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion University, here present;

Members of the Faculty, Senate and Council of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion University;

Administrators, Staff, and Students of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion University;

The President and Members of the Students Council;

The President, Officers, and Members of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion University Alumni Association;

Officiating Prelates and Clergy;

Special Guests and their Spouses;

Members of "Kamba Wa Ma", the Graduating Class of 2022;

Parents, Relatives, Friends, and Well-Wishers;

Students;

Members of the Fourth Estate;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very pleased to be here today to participate in this 31st Graduation Ceremony of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion University as your Commencement Speaker.

First of all, I have the honor to be addressing you today as an alumnus, because it was from this University that I received my first ever honorary doctorate degree, 23 years ago. According to the Citation which was presented to me during that ceremony, the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters (Honoris Causa) was being conferred upon me in recognition of my efforts, achievements, and humanitarian gestures as a philanthropist and a world class athlete. I want you to know that I seriously cherish this Degree, and it has been given pride of place among all of the many others that I have received since then.

Secondly, I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to you, the administration and students of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion University, especially the members of the graduating class of 2022, for the patience and understanding you have shown by TWICE postponing the date of your graduation to accommodate my schedule, which was constantly changing due to unforeseen official duties, both on the national and international stages.

This is indicative of the highest respect accorded not only to me personally, but to the high Office which I am privileged to hold in service to you. Let me apologize to you for every inconvenience that these postponements have most certainly caused. We are proud of your patriotism, and grateful for your forbearance.

Thirdly, I have learned with great sadness that the Reverend Frederick Umoja, who served as the first President of this University, is undergoing various challenges to his health.

Rev. Umoja was an inspiration and a mentor to me during my youthful days, and will always hold a special place in my heart. I ask that you join me in keeping him in your thoughts and prayers for a speedy recovery.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Every commencement ceremony is historic in its own right for those that take part in it, including the graduating class and their families and friends, as well as the faculty, administrators, and staff that take justifiable credit and pride in the process that transforms students into graduates.

Graduation programs are especially important because this is when we get to recognize and reward those of you who have worked extremely hard during the period of your study here. I am always delighted to participate in such programs, because they give me yet another opportunity to meet face to face with the young people of this country, who are so dear to my heart.

I also look forward to my interaction with the dedicated professionals who provide our young men and women with the education and skills-sets that will enable them to become productive members of society.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I am very impressed by the development that I see here today, and I must commend you for taking this bold and progressive initiative to re-locate the University from Benson Street in Monrovia to a modern, purpose-built, spacious, and functional campus. Let me congratulate the leadership of this Institution for your vision and dedication to the high purpose and noble cause of education. In the words of Nelson Mandela, and I quote:

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Unquote

I am informed that you were established as a co-educational institution to provide quality education within a Christian and humane environment, intended to meet the spiritual, intellectual and professional needs of our nation and people everywhere, and that you cherish values, attitudes, and behavior within a religious, educational, economic and cultural context within the academic community in Liberia and beyond.

I am further informed that your current enrollment is 3,000 students, and that you have matriculated over 10,000 graduates since your founding. I am told that this year's graduating class consists of 225 males and 131 females, for a total of 356 students, in various disciplines, including Divinity, Education, Criminal Justice, Business, Agriculture, and Liberal Arts. This should give your graduates great opportunities ahead as they enter the Liberian economy and engage in the reconstruction of a new Liberia in this 21st century, whether as employees or entrepreneurs.

In pursuit and fulfilment of your stated mission, you have now given these students an intellectual foundation, molding their character, and challenging and shaping their minds to equip them with skills that will enable them to function and perform in a modern society, and compete on equal terms with their counterparts anywhere in the world.

All of this is in conformity with the objectives of the Educational Pillar of our national development plan, the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PADP). We want to encourage the AME Zion Church, which operates this University, to continue to complement the efforts of Government in the educational sector, which is of primary importance to the future growth and development of Liberia.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I would now like to speak directly to the Graduating Class. Will the members of the Class of 2022, please stand and remain standing. Let us first of all give them a big round of applause.

PAUSE FOR APPLAUSE.

YOU MAY TAKE YOUR SEATS.

CONGRATULATIONS!!! YOU HAVE DONE IT!!!

To the family members, friends, and supporters of these graduates, I also say congratulations to you. If you have supported a member of today's graduating class in getting to this point in their matriculation, then the celebration today is also about you.

SO GIVE YOURSELVES A ROUND OF APPLAUSE ALSO!!

I am told that the Class of 2022 has chosen the name "Kamba Wa Ma", which means "God Did It", in the Vai language.

Kamba Wa Ma!!!

Indeed, God has done it for you!

Today, by graduating from this prestigious Institute of Higher Learning, you have acquired many skills and a broad knowledge-base that will give you a competitive advantage over those who have not been as fortunate as you. However, success will not come to you if you rest on your laurels and wait for it to find you. In my experience, after adequate preparation, success will only come to those who are dedicated and disciplined enough to do the work that will make it happen.

Kamba Wa Ma!!!

I want to encourage you to dream, and to dream big dreams. But then, I advise you not to make dreams your master, but to wake up from the sleep of dreams and go to work to make it happen. Most dreams will not come true without hard work, struggle, and sacrifice.

Kamba Wa Ma!!!

I want you graduates to know that failure is a crucial part of success. Failure teaches you a lesson that you must be willing to learn, and only when you learn that lesson, will you benefit from your failure.

In my own career, there were many failures along the way. In the beginning of my soccer career, for example, I was benched many times before I became a regular member of the starting teams.

But I used my time on the bench to study the game and the other players, and learn from their mistakes, so that each time I got the opportunity to play, I tried to make sure that I made a positive difference to the game.

And you are all aware that in my political career, I ran for President and was deprived twice, but I did not give up. Each time, I took stock of my journey, and I went back to where I had left my dream, and recalibrated, and continued my journey. Eventually, I applied those lessons to develop a winning formula. And here we are today.

As Drake would say: We started from the bottom, now we here!!!

You too have started from the bottom in so many ways,  
NOW YOU HERE!!!

There was a time when you could not find school fees;  
NOW YOU HERE!!!

There was a time when you could not find transportation;  
NOW YOU HERE!!!

There was a time when you did not know how you would pay your graduation fee;  
NOW YOU HERE!!!

And finally, there was a time when you were not sure that you would make it to graduate;  
NOW YOU HERE!!!

Kamba Wa Ma!!! God did it!!!

I want to tell you that without hard work and perseverance, dreams will not easily become a reality. I heard a saying once that if you do what you love, you will never work a day in your life.

I am sure you may have also heard that, but I want to challenge you not to believe it, because it

has been my experience that if you do what you truly love, you will have to work harder than you could ever imagine to make it worth your while. The fulfilment of your dreams will call for that kind of commitment.

Kamba Wa Ma!!!

Graduating Class, I want to admonish you to appreciate all the instructors in your life. Not just your teachers and professors, but your family members, mentors, bosses, and even your peers. Instructors will be with you and around you all of your life. I am in my 50s and I am still meeting instructors. Anyone who comes into your life, anyone who comes to teach you something, to bring value, those people are your instructors.

And so as you now go forth from these academic halls to begin your new lives, careers, and businesses, remember that it may take a while for you to turn your dreams into reality. But this is your life, so do not be afraid to chart your own way. Don't be afraid to walk your own path and make your own footprints. At the end of the day, you will be able to look back with pride, and say

Kamba Wa Ma!!! GOD DID IT!!!

God Bless you all!!

I thank you.