

Keynote Address By

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Theme: “Building the Future Together: Reconciliation, National Healing, Growth, and Prosperity”

Fellow Liberians,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

What an honor and delight to stand before you today at this historic gathering of Liberians in the Diaspora.

This conference has been in the making for a long time. I first introduced the idea during several of my speaking engagements with diverse members of the Diaspora community across the United States months before the elections and again in the weeks leading up to my inauguration. I believed then, as I do now, that formalizing this partnership is essential to the renewal and rebuilding of our country.

This conference is a dedicated platform for engagement, policy dialogue, and partnership. You will not be treated as observers, but as full stakeholders in Liberia’s future.

Given our national journey so far, the theme of this inaugural conference could not be more fitting.

But today, I would like to speak on “Renewing Liberia Together: Building a Future of Opportunity for All.”

The lingering question we all need to ask ourselves is: as an old country, why are we still groping in the dark, trying to find our bearings? Liberia’s founding 178 years ago was based on noble ideals of freedom, equality, and human dignity.

As the first independent Black Republic in Africa, our nation symbolized hope for returnees from slavery in America and everyone seeking self-determination.

However, the reality of our statehood has not always matched its founding ideals. The development of the Liberian state has been fraught with political exclusion, economic inequality, and social divisions, mainly due to poor leadership and systemic injustice.

For too long, we have prioritized building the state over building the nation. This has led to state exploitation, elite control of public institutions, persistent poverty, and limited opportunities for most people. We forgot that neglect of any in society can become an Achilles heel.

My Fellow Compatriots,

We have indeed come a long way, and if we are honest with ourselves, we inherited a country that was facing far more problems than we could resolve overnight. Institutions were operating below their optimal levels, the economy was faltering, security had broken down significantly, and the overall mood in the country was one of dismalness. But we believe the challenges we face as a country can be overcome when we are intentional in our resolve to reverse the past. By doing so, lyrics like this glorious land of liberty shall long be ours will become real.

## Rebranding Liberia: A National Imperative

Ladies and gentlemen,

While we recognize these historic shortcomings, we must also take responsibility for shaping our future. I genuinely believe that Liberia can be rebranded. With strong leadership and a people focused vision, we can create a country that embodies what we aspire to be as a nation.

And we are beginning to see change; Liberia was overwhelmingly elected to the Security Council; our independence celebration this year went global, thanks to the Liberian diaspora worldwide. These are just a few of the refreshing moments of renewal for our country this year. We have to restore our waning glory in the global community.

At home, our Government is taking steps to address the complex social and economic conditions we inherited. Through the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development, we are focused on six critical pillars that will promote development: Agriculture, Roads, Rule of Law, Education, Sanitation, Tourism, and Technology. This agenda is a response not only to current challenges but also aligns with our National Vision 2030 to transform Liberia into a lower middle-income country and build a capable, inclusive state.

What we are committed to is improving livelihoods and ensuring that every Liberian, both at home and abroad, can share in the growth and progress that our reform agenda and national development plan will bring.

Already, we have seen substantial progress in several areas, including healthcare, education, road and infrastructure development, agriculture, and sanitation. Progress has also been made in governance, the rule of law, and anti-corruption efforts. Despite these efforts, we acknowledge that challenges remain and that more should be done, and quickly, too.

I would however like to highlight three areas of this national transformation: governance reform, economic transformation, social inclusion and reconciliation. While these are key, they by themselves are not exhaustive.

Our greatest efforts must be to overcome and not to come over to greener pastures.

## Governance Reform

The crises Liberia faces today are deeply rooted in governance. It does not take much for an observer of Liberian society to see that many of the country's problems are fundamentally linked to governance. Governance should no longer be a privilege for a select few, but a responsibility for everyone. The days of benevolent leadership are gone. A small number of people unjustly and personally use the institutions of the state to amass and control wealth at the expense of the majority in society. We must continue to embark on reforms that give voice and power to citizens in all counties and communities.

And we must move beyond Monrovia focused decision making and embrace decentralized, participatory governance. This is why my administration is committed to fast tracking constitutional reforms including decentralization, local government empowerment, and improved service delivery.

Good governance requires accountability, transparency, and respect for the rule of law. It must lead to a strong, capable state that serves all its people without discrimination or favoritism. In this light, a key government initiative, the Performance Management and Compliance System, underscores the Government of Liberia's commitment to fostering a culture of accountability, transparency, and performance excellence in public service.

## Economic Transformation

With over a third of the population living in poverty and a long history of rural neglect despite abundant resources, it calls for a major rethinking of how we do business and

organize our society. Our economy must be inclusive and work for everyone. Liberia remains a predominantly agricultural society with vast natural resources. Yet, our development model has historically prioritized commodity extraction over inclusive growth. We need to reconsider the concession regime and focus on adding value, promoting local ownership, and investing in agriculture, where the majority of our people especially women and youth are actively engaged.

We must replace growth without development with growth that delivers development. The irony is that while commodity extraction has supported the economy over the years and contributed to increased growth, such growth has been unequal because we have not reinvested profits in development to benefit the majority of our people.

By reinvesting revenue into infrastructure, health, education, and job creation, we can reduce poverty and build a more equitable society.

## Social Inclusion and National Reconciliation

Inequality in Liberia is not just economic it is social, historical, and structural. From settler indigenous divisions to ethnic favoritism and generational exclusion, these cleavages have long undermined national unity.

Our system, as it were, has contributed in a way to many of the inequalities in the country, thus depriving many of our people of a voice in their own affairs and of the opportunities for a better and dignified livelihood. We must confront them honestly and dismantle them systematically.

Overlooking impurity and expecting peaceful co-existence is like plaiting hair without first picking the louse. My Government is committed to promoting peace and reconciliation. Since peace was restored in 2003, we have been on a long and difficult journey to rebuild ourselves, to restore broken trust, to reconnect detached communities, and to define, or better yet, redefine our identity. To come together, confront our difficult past, and begin to build a future rooted in truth, justice, and compassion.

For too long, many of our fellow citizens have carried their pain in silence, with little space for dialogue or closure. But we must note we are embarking on a journey of justice reconciliation, not just for the atrocities and violence during the war, but equally for historical wrongs. By acknowledging the past together, we begin the journey of national restoration together.

As the diaspora community, you must lend your voice to reconciliation and national healing, just as you participated in the TRC process. We may build the infrastructure and the superstructures, but without true reconciliation and healing, all those will come crashing down under the weight of divisions and conflicts.

### The Role of the Liberian Diaspora: A Global Partnership for National Renewal

Let me now speak directly to you as the diaspora community. The Liberian Diaspora remains a vital force in our collective effort to build a more equitable, inclusive, and prosperous Liberia. The 2025 Diaspora Conference brings together Liberians from across the globe North America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Caribbean, and beyond demonstrating the strength, diversity, and global reach of our people abroad.

Your remittances have kept families fed, children in school, and homes together. They are lifelines of love and sacrifice. So now that you have given fish, teach us to fish.

For decades, you have played a crucial role in our national journey, and as we now stand at the threshold of a new era of renewal and transformation, your continued engagement is more vital than ever.

Rebranding Liberia and transforming our society cannot be done by the government alone; it requires your active, sustained, and intentional involvement.

As the saying goes, “You must put your money where your mouth is.” This means going beyond sentiment and stepping into action by lending your skills, networks, knowledge, and resources to drive change at home. You have built wealth, contributed to the countries you currently reside in, and some of you have planted your feet in corporate America and

the corporate world at large. We need you to apply that experience and knowledge back home in Liberia as well. Engage and grow the private sector to drive productivity and growth.

We also understand that partnership is a two-way street. You have legitimate concerns about security, infrastructure, healthcare, education, utilities, and other essential services. I assure you that my Administration is committed to creating an enabling environment that is transparent, accountable, and inclusive, one that welcomes your return, provides opportunities, including collaboration on the establishment of a Diaspora Investment Fund, and protects your investment.

Together, let us seize this moment and build a future where all Liberians, whether at home or abroad, can proudly and equally share in the promise, dignity, and opportunity of our nation.

### Strengthening Our Relationship with the United States

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we are hosting this conference in a country with the largest Liberian diaspora community and historical ties to our nation, I would like to share a few thoughts on our relationship with the United States. Liberia's historical connection to the U.S. is well known. But after 178 years of independence, we need to ask: how are we using this relationship to change our country for the better?

While we expect more from our traditional partner, we must also be honest with ourselves. We cannot ask others to invest in us if we mismanage our own resources. We must demonstrate that we are worthy of partnership by upholding the rule of law, fighting corruption, and delivering for our people.

We look forward to working with the United States on common priorities: democratic consolidation, economic cooperation, global security issues, climate action, and many

more. We must strengthen the relationship in ways that work for both countries for the benefit of our peoples.

## The Road Ahead: Our Collective Responsibility

My Compatriots,

The road ahead will not be easy. The problems we face are real and daunting. But with collective resolve, they are not insurmountable.

I have always believed that Liberia is not a poor country. Liberia's progress has been held back by the lack of sustained, inclusive, and forward-looking leadership necessary to unlock its potential and foster long-term development. That is what I am committed to providing. But no president, no government, no party can achieve this alone. We must work together, citizens at home and abroad, to build a functional and inclusive society.

One of the key objectives of engaging the Diaspora community through this Conference is to provide a platform for you to join your compatriots at home on this national journey.

Your views, ideas, expertise, networks, and resources are critical to rebuilding our dear country not just for today, but for succeeding generations of Liberians.

## Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our country is at a crossroads. Liberia holds so much promise, but that promise, as envisioned originally by the founders, has faced many stumbling blocks.

Together, we can build a country with a vision that aims to create a functional and fair society for future generations.

I invite you, Liberians in the Diaspora, to join me on this journey. Your country needs you now more than ever. In the words of former US President John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

As we gather here at this first historic Diaspora Conference, let us renew our national commitment to Think Liberia, Love Liberia, and Build Liberia.

I wish you the very best as you deliberate in the next few days about the future of our country, and I look forward to your ideas, knowledge, and wisdom on how we move forward as a country.

May God bless you all and save our country.

Thank you.