

**Tribute by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
In Memoriam: Dr. William Richard Tolbert, Jr.
Civil Servant, Politician, Farmer, Businessman & Minister of the Gospel
(May 13, 1913 - May 13, 2013)**

Today, May 13, 2013, marks the 100th birth anniversary of Dr. William Richard Tolbert, Jr., Liberia's 19th President, who served from July 23, 1971, to April 12, 1980.

President Tolbert was not merely a leader of the country, and a father to many Liberians, but also a symbol of our national development during his lifetime. Trained as a civil servant, he was attracted to politics and won in 1943, a seat in the House of Representatives on the ticket of the True Whig Party, then the country's only legal political party. He was later elected Vice President to William V.S. Tubman, in 1955, and served in that position for 19 years until President Tubman's death in 1971.

Assuming the presidency, President Tolbert inherited a country with a single political party controlled by a minority of the population; a modern economy almost totally in the hands of foreign investors; and the majority of the indigenous population ostracized from both areas. President Tolbert, conversely, shocked many and demonstrated enthusiasm not many had expected, and which before long earned him the nickname "Speedy."

Recognizing that Liberia was far behind and needed to catch up with the rest of the world, Dr. Tolbert ushered in a new day with a resonating call for speedy development, self-reliance, self-sufficiency for the upliftment of the Liberian people, while ensuring integrity, patriotism, diligence, dignity, and hard work.

In his foreign policy, President Tolbert adopted a more non-aligned posture, focused on promoting Liberia's political independence. He established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, Cuba, and several Eastern Bloc countries. During the Yom Kipper War, in October 1973, President Tolbert severed Liberia's ties with Israel and called for recognizing the national rights of the Palestinian people.

In the area of foreign relations, President Tolbert broke away from his predecessor's pro-Western doctrine. He also pointed out that the benefits of foreign investments were unevenly divided, and he gradually re-negotiated concession agreements that had granted foreign investors important tax and other privileges. He declared this concept "Humanistic Capitalism."

A proponent of regional integration, President Tolbert was a signatory to the establishment of the Mano River Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the African Development Bank. He hosted the OAU Summit in Liberia and was elected its chairman.

To improve the living conditions of the majority of the Liberian population, President Tolbert advocated equity, justice and equal opportunity through such themes as: “Total Involvement for Higher Heights,” “Rally Time,” and “From Mat to Mattress” – all aimed at creating “a Wholesome Functioning Society” and success in the “War against Ignorance, Disease and Poverty.”

During his tenure as Liberia’s 19th President, Dr. Tolbert opened the political space by allowing the registration of opposition political parties in the country, lowering the voting age and bringing more indigenous persons into government.

Through progressive policies, he expanded the educational and health systems; commence low-cost housing for the needy; established strategic specialized financial institutions in the agricultural, housing and priority development sectors.

Since his death, 33 years ago, continuing efforts have been made to put the past behind us, to reconcile and unite the Liberian people. In so doing, we memorialize his life and his contribution to our country as politician, successful farmer and businessman, and a devout minister of the gospel.

As we celebrate his 100th centenary under the theme: ***“Glorifying God, while celebrating the legacy of Dr. William R. Tolbert, Jr.,”*** let us demonstrate all that he stood for - patriotism, nationalism and respect for humanity. Let us pledge to live and work together to rebuild our nation as he tried to do.

The Almighty God has brought us this far. May God continue to bless us and direct us as we begin a new page in our nation’s history reflecting on the works and deeds of President William Richard Tolbert, Jr. God bless Liberia!