

**Remarks by Vice President Joseph N. Boakai at the 31st Gala
Anniversary of the Bible Way Mission School
Held in the School's Chapel
Sunday, May 20, 2007**

The Administrator, Bible Way Mission;
Distinguished Prelates;
Officials of Government here present;
Parents Teachers Association;
Faculty, Staff and Student body of the Bible Way Mission School;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me first thank God for giving us the strength, to be at this program, because as His word says, we must thank Him in all things, good or bad.

I am indeed gratified to have been invited to be part of your 31st Gala Anniversary celebration and this fund-raising program. I feel obliged to attend programs of this nature because in all my life, I have put Youth empowerment and education at the heart of my agenda. Besides, I have special relationship with Bible Way.

Yes, I have always prioritized youth issues because without an enlightened, educated Youth, any nation is doomed. This is because without an adequately prepared Youth, no nation can boast of the much-needed reservoir of enlightened workforce that will take over from the current generation of civil servants, doctors, engineers, journalists, scientists, teachers and other professionals who are needed to move the country from the doldrums of under-development, poverty, disease and illiteracy, to the high plain of development, growth and progress. Indeed, without a well prepared cadre of future leaders, our nation's future would be uncertain.

Against this backdrop, preparing Youth for future leadership roles cannot be over-emphasized. To be assured of citizens adequately prepared to take over from us when we exit the stage, we must empower our youth. Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people, including youths and adults.

Following years of mayhem and devastation, all Liberians are now looking up to the government headed by Africa's first elected female President, to bring about the much needed change and development. Against this background, I crave your indulgence to reflect with me on your theme: "It is time to rebuild".

The rebuilding and renewal process in a country like Liberia where everything, from infrastructure to social, economic and political foundations were destroyed, is mammoth. Restoring the economy to its old self, when Liberia's per capita income was comparable to that of Japan and when the budget stood at US\$600 Million, is a huge challenge.

We should brace ourselves to rebuild schools, health centers, water system, electricity and our road network to facilitate the much needed development. We should also accept the challenge of building a nation founded on good governance, accountability, transparency and other democratic tenets, so that we will not be considered a pariah state or outcast in the community of nations founded on democracy. Above all, we should rise to the challenge of reconciling ethnic groups and sections that were polarized as a result of the excesses of our war. We must bring together Mandingoes, Gios and Manos on the one hand, Mandingoes and Lormas and Gios and Krahn on the other, who have been at daggers drawn for nearly two decades.

These are challenges we have to grapple with, and they will not be realized by mere rhetoric, but by consciously taking the necessary actions. Liberians from all walks of life, from all political persuasions, or social strata, must join the Unity Party-led Government in attaining these goals.

Mindless criticisms, unwarranted strikes and other negative tendencies will not help us attain the unity we yearn for. Rather, they will only serve to divert our attention from these lofty goals.

What I have realized about the mindset of Liberians is that feel that once we belong to the opposition, we should not only criticize the government always, but stand aloof and lend no hand as the Government struggles to grapple with the countless problems it inherited. Such attitude does not build a nation.

To you students, I daresay high school education is the cornerstone of any educational process, because without a sound secondary education, no one can move either into university, trade school or other tertiary institutions.

This is why I want to urge you to place premium on your studies and endeavor to obtain the best secondary education available.

The quality of secondary education offered by any nation will determine the quality of doctors, civil and electrical engineers, economists, political scientists and other professionals a nation can boast of. This is why I wish to use this occasion to remind our students to endeavor to acquire education the hard way, so that they can be fully prepared to withstand the rigors of university and other tertiary education. The best learning is not acquired through buying grades or bribing one's way through high school.

The best learning is one we obtain by burning the candle until the wee-wee hours reading textbooks, and not by pretending before our parents to be studious, when all we do is play and think about movies we have watched or other trivial things. Children, the best high school graduate is not one who cheats in the WAEC Exams. If a student cheats his way through high school, this will show when he enters university or trade school. Teachers and lecturers will begin to wonder why a student who made an impressive pass in the WAEC exams cannot cope with his or her university courses.

It is against this backdrop that we as a Government roundly condemn what transpired during this year's WAEC exams. We condemn the leakage of the exams, and support the decision by WAEC and Education Ministry officials to cancel the exams. We also welcome the probe instituted into the leakage and hope punitive measures would be meted out to those responsible. This is because we cannot build a sound educational system, and hence rebuild our nation on the foundation of cheating. Cheating is also corruption, and corrupt students make corrupt leaders.

I accordingly wish to call on our Youth to put their educational pursuits first and foremost in their lives, work hard and forget about obtaining grades through bribery, spying or other short-cut means. Like all good things, education cannot come on a silver platter, but rather through the hard way.

To you our teachers let me congratulate you for your sacrificial services to our nation. We must always bear in mind that as teachers, we are playing a very crucial role in nation building: molding people who will be entrusted with the nation's destiny. If our future leaders are not well prepared, our nation will feel the brunt of your negligence. Above all, in preparing our future leaders, we must also instill in them the virtues of good leadership such as honesty, transparency and accountability, because if you don't, you will be bringing up clever devils. Indeed, we cannot bring up honest, just, accountable and transparent leaders when we teach them how to cheat to pass their exams or bribe their teachers for grades. If you as teachers who are entrusted with molding our future leaders begin to accept bribes or "Flexibility Fees" from them, then you are doing a disservice to the nation. By accepting bribes from our future leaders, or teaching them to cheat in exams, you are teaching them to become corrupt Government officials.

We understand that the national economy has been ruined by the protracted civil conflict, and that because of this, teachers' take home pay can hardly take them home. This notwithstanding, teachers must realize that they have a sacred responsibility to mould our future leaders, and hence must instill in them the virtues of honesty, accountability and transparency. At the same time, I also wish to admonish administrators to improve salaries and benefits of their teachers.

Having said this, I wish to use this opportunity to commend faith-based institutions like the Bibleway Mission for the crucial role they continue to play in Liberia's educational system. I sometimes wonder what things would have been like had the Catholic, Episcopal, Baptist, Assemblies of God, Pentecostal and other Churches had not seen the need to invest in the

education of our Youth. Faith-based institutions have forged a strong partnership with central Government in making education affordable to all.

Because of faith-based institutions' involvement in education, schools are today found in all parts of the country, and even when our senseless conflict was raging, Churches kept the doors of their educational institutions open for the most part.

Indeed, it is anybody's guess what the percentage of illiteracy would have been today, in the absence of Church-run institutions. Today, we congratulate you for keeping your doors open to students and even displaced people for the past 31 years.

May God bless you all and keep our nation safe.

I Thank You!