

ANNUAL MESSAGE
TO THE SECOND SESSION
OF THE
FIFTY-FOURTH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE
OF THE
REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

DELIVERED

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. GEORGE MANNEH WEAH

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

THE CAPITOL BUILDING
CAPITOL HILL
MONROVIA, LIBERIA

28 JANUARY 2019

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT AND PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE;

MR. SPEAKER;

MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE;

MADAM FIRST LADY

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE;

YOUR HONOR THE CHIEF JUSTICE, ASSOCIATE JUSTICES OF THE SUPREME COURT AND MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY;

THE DEAN AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET AND OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS;

THE DOYEN AND MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR CORPS;

HIS EXCELLENCY, THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN LIBERIA;

THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS;

**THE CHIEF OF STAFF AND MEN AND WOMEN OF
THE ARMED FORCES OF LIBERIA (AFL);**

OFFICIALS OF GOVERNMENT EMERITUS;

**TRADITIONAL LEADERS;
POLITICAL AND BUSINESS LEADERS;**

RELIGIOUS LEADERS;

**OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL BAR
ASSOCIATION;**

LABOR AND TRADE UNIONS;

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS;

YOUTH AND STUDENTS;

MEMBERS OF THE PRESS;

SPECIAL GUESTS;

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN;

FELLOW LIBERIANS:

Six days ago, through the Grace of the Almighty God, the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) was blessed to celebrate our first anniversary as an incumbent political party. On that day, we gave God the Glory, and also gave Him thanks and praise for His Guidance; His Goodness; and His Mercy; without which we would not have been here today, and would not have had the cause to rejoice.

And as we gather here in fulfillment of my Constitutional Mandate to deliver my Annual Message, may I ask you to rise for a moment of silence for the souls of all the faithful departed who are no longer within our midst, but who made the transition, from earthly labor to eternal rest, during the year under review.

[PAUSE FOR SILENT PRAYER]

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT-PRO TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

As you begin this 2nd Session of the 54th Legislature, let me remind you that, a little over a year ago, during my inauguration,

I took an oath before you, and before the Almighty God, to uphold our Constitution and to preside over this Government and this country to the best of my abilities.

This includes, among others, ensuring freedom of speech and, by extension, freedom of the press; freedom of assembly, revitalizing our economy, rebuilding our infrastructures, providing protection for our people, and ensuring respect for the rule of law.

On this auspicious occasion, I must be honest to admit that during the year of 2018, our democracy, society and economy were tested but our leadership rose above these challenges.

We stabilized our economy, protected the fundamental rights of our citizens and preserved our peace.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

I would like to thank you for your cooperation in passing into law several pieces of legislation relevant to the Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development during the period under review.

The records show that you passed 26 Bills into law during your First Session and submitted them for my approval.

These Bills include (among others):

- 1. An Act to Ratify the Financing Agreement to provide additional financing for the West African Power Pool.**
- 2. The amount of this additional financing Agreement is \$45.3 Million United States dollars, comprising a grant component of \$22.6 million United States dollars; and a loan component of \$22.7 million United States dollars.**

The objective is to support Government's effort in providing reduced and affordable cost of electricity, that will be efficient and reliable for the Liberian people in both the rural and urban areas. The West African Power Pool Project also seeks to strengthen Liberia's diplomatic ties and cooperation with our sub-regional counterparts, as the power line runs from Cote D'Ivoire to Liberia and goes to Sierra Leone and Guinea.

3. Two other cardinal legal instruments were passed, that are considered essential to the Government's Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development:

- a. The Local Government Act of 2018;**
- b. Act to Establish the Land Rights Law of 2018**

These two landmark legislations are in line with current national and international realities, and are important for the stability and development of our country.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE, we also appreciate your passing into law an ACT TO NAME BALI ISLAND AND THE MAHATMA GANDHI CONVENTION CENTER.

This has paved the way for the friendly Government of India, to assist the people of Liberia in their infrastructural development drive, by building a Modern Convention Center that will host conventions, conferences, and exhibitions, as well as serving as a major tourist attraction. We want to thank the Government and people of India for this kind gesture.

AN ACT TO RATIFY THE INVESTMENT INCENTIVE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA AND FOUTA CORPORATION.

Under the Fouta Agreement, the Investor will construct and develop a five hundred (500) tons per day cement plant, expandable to one thousand (1,000) tons per day.

This plant represents \$25 million United States dollars of new Foreign Direct Investment into our economy, and will provide additional support for our infrastructural development projects.

Thank you for also passing into law:

- 1. AN ACT RATIFYING THE AGREEMENT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EXPORT-IMPORT BANK (AFREXIMBANK);**
- 2. AN ACT TO AMEND THE REVENUE CODE OF LIBERIA, TO REFORM EXCISE TAX LAW (2018);**
- 3. AN ACT TO RATIFY THE PARIS AGREEMENT SIGNED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA;**
- 4. AN ACT TO RATIFY THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON MUTUAL ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE FOR THE PREVENTION, INVESTIGATION AND REPRESSION OF CUSTOMS OFFENCES;**

HONORABLE LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

You may recall that I have vetoed two Agreements that were forwarded for my approval, including:

- 1. AN ACT TO RATIFY THE MINERAL DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA AND HUMMINGBIRD RESOURCES (LIBERIA) INC.; AND**

- 2. AN ACT TO CREATE ZEYEAMA DISTRICT WITHIN LOFA COUNTY, REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA.**

In the case of the Hummingbird Agreement, I am of the firm conviction that we acted in the spirit of ensuring the passage of legislation that will yield the maximum benefits to our Country and People. With regard to the creation of a new district within Lofa County, after careful review and analysis, we came to the conclusion that new statutory districts should only be created after the conduct of a careful study based on the justification, structure, population density, revenue base and economic viability.

This process should also take into consideration the necessity for effective administration and the need to bring services closer to the people.

I also believe that the LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT will ensure that new statutory districts are not created solely for political purposes or would not impose undue burdens on the National Budget. I look forward to working closely with you to derive an efficient and effective process regarding these issues.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

During the year under review, we have submitted to you several Acts which remain pending and under your kind consideration.

These include:

1. AN ACT TO BE KNOWN AS THE KAMARA ABDULLAH KAMARA ACT OF PRESS FREEDOM.

This Bill protects people from crimes such as Criminal Libel against the President; Sedition and Criminal Malevolence.

It promotes freedom of speech and expression which are important tenets of our democracy. It also promotes good governance, as well as the rule of law.

We therefore respectfully urge you to consider the timely passage of this Bill; as well as other Bills essential to our Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development that have been submitted to you, but remain under deliberations in your Committee Rooms.

We refer particularly, to the following:

- 1. THE DUAL CITIZENSHIP BILL**
- 2. THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT;**
- 3. AN ACT TO NAME CERTAIN ROADS AND BRIDGES WITHIN THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA ;**
- 4. AN ACT TO AMEND THE REVENUE CODE OF LIBERIA, TO ADOPT A MODERNIZED CUSTOMS CODE (2018);**
- 5. AN ACT PROHIBITING THE TENURE OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS WITHIN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT;**
- 6. THE ECOWAS CUSTOMS CODE;**

7. INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE SIMPLIFICATION AND HARMONIZATION OF CUSTOMS PROCEDURES;

8. THE NATIONAL LOTTERIES AMENDMENT ACT;

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

As we enter our second year of governance, we intend to submit several new bills for your consideration to enable our Administration deliver on its Pro-Poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity. These will include, among others:

- 1. AN ACT TO RATIFY AND AUTHORIZE THE PAYMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA OF TUITION FEES FOR ALL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN ALL PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES IN LIBERIA.**

- 2. THE NATIONAL YOUTH ACT**

- 3. LIBERIA TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMISSION ACT**

- 4. REVISED LIBERIAN BANK FOR DEVELOPMENT & INVESTMENT ACT**

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

During 2018, we issued one (1) Executive Order to address a national imperative: EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 93: EXTENSION OF EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 87 SUSPENSION OF TARIFF ON RICE.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

I was elected into Office upon the four pillars of our Party Manifesto, namely:

- 1. POWER TO THE PEOPLE:**
- 2. ECONOMY AND JOBS:**
- 3. SUSTAINING THE PEACE:**
- 4. GOVERNANCE AND TRANSPERANCY:**

These four pillars, which were the core embodiment of my last Annual Message and Legislative Agenda, are now developed into our National Plan, called the Pro-Poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity (PAPD) and was officially launched on 29th October 2018.

The overall objective of the PAPD, and its ultimate goal, is to lift our People from poverty to prosperity.

As a first step towards achieving this goal, it is our intention, and our determination, to reduce poverty by 23% percent by the end of 2023, by providing greater income security for an additional one million Liberians who now live below the poverty line.

Secondly, the PAPD seeks to build more capable state institutions for efficient and effective service delivery. These will require collective efforts toward the pragmatic implementations of programs and projects under the four pillars of our Pro-Poor Agenda.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

The Constitution of the Republic of Liberia mandates the government to provide education for all Liberians.

During the period under review, we undertook new measures and mechanisms for transforming and sustaining an educational system that is adequate to ensure that the constitutional obligation of the Government is met.

The government, through the Ministry of Education, firstly carried out a review process that included: evaluation of the existing legal and administrative framework; nationwide visits to all schools throughout the country; and the hosting of a national stakeholder's summit. As a result of this process, several activities were implemented in a bid to enhance efficiency in the education sector.

These activities include:

- 1. Completion of Curricular revision from early grades through high school. The new curriculum places emphasis on skills delivery, early career pathway and addressing deficiencies in literacy and numeracy.**
- 2. Payroll Cleaning Exercise which netted savings of \$2 Million United States dollars as of November 2018.**

The savings enabled the government to enroll nearly one thousand one hundred (1,100) out of three thousand seven hundred and sixty-four (3,764) teachers who for nearly nine (9) years have been paid irregularly and substantially below salaries earned by other civil servants.

- 3. Increase the number of scholarships awarded to more than one thousand one hundred and sixty-five (1,165) students, which included one hundred and twenty-nine (129) foreign scholarships, costing the Government a total of \$2.5 Million United States dollars. The Government of China and Morocco, and several other countries, awarded bilateral scholarships to nearly one hundred (100) Liberians to pursue studies in those countries.**

4. This amounts to a total of one hundred and sixty-three (163) students in foreign countries and one thousand three hundred (1,300) on local scholarships in all universities across Liberia. In 2018 the Government also awarded foreign sponsorship to the seven (7) best-performing students on the 2017/2018 WASSCE Examinations.

5. Tuition Waiver for All Public Universities and Colleges

6. Under the 2018 / 2019 Public Sector Investment Project appropriation, the Ministry of Education was allocated \$4 Million United States dollars for infrastructure improvement and expansion, including the renovation of thirty-three (33) public schools and the refurbishment of fifteen (15) science laboratories in public secondary schools. In addition, seventy-eight thousand (78,000) pieces of modern chairs were purchased for public schools across the country.

7. WASSCE Intervention Program. The government of Liberia paid the WASSCE fees for all thirty-three thousand nine hundred and thirty-one (33,931) 12th graders, and seventeen thousand six hundred and seventy-nine (17,679) 9th graders; amounting to the sum of \$2.03 million United States dollars and \$41.5 million Liberian dollars respectively, as a means of relieving parents and students of the financial burden associated with the exams, and improve performance.

8. Additionally, to reduce mass failures among 12th graders in the 2017/2018 WASSCE examinations, the Ministry of Education with support from the national government, launched in November 2018 the “WASSCE Intervention Project”, aimed to improve Liberian students’ performance on the 2018/2019 examinations. The project provides Saturday tutorials for all 12th graders in the country, free of charge. The cost of the project is a little over three hundred and fifty thousand (\$350,000) United States dollars.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE, in addition to the interventions made by the government to shift the paradigm for a better education system, we also received strong support from our international partners to the Education component of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity & Development (PAPD).

- a. The World Bank IDA made a grant/loan of \$25 Million United States dollars for investment in Public Secondary Schools, including construction, rehabilitation, setting up of laboratories, provision of teachers' residences in rural school communities, girls retention through secondary school, and a host of other interventions helpful for secondary school children.

- b. THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION MADE AN INITIAL INVESTMENT OF \$11.1 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS intervention in Early Childhood Development initially covering six counties. A secondary grant of \$5.9 million United States dollars was also provided to top up

the initial amount, making a total of \$17 million United States dollars, all of which have been dedicated to the development of Early Grade Schools.

- c. THE EUROPEAN UNION MADE AN INVESTMENT OF 20 MILLION EUROS, dedicated to the development of Technical Vocational Education in Liberia. The project will benefit all youth, whether enrolled in school or out of school, through the Ministries of Education and Youth & Sports. An additional 12.5 million Euros, previously set aside by the European Union for Out-of-School Youth, is being requested by the Ministry of Education to expand and continue the investment in vocational education (formal & informal). That application, when approved and finalized, will bring to 32 million Euros which will be targeting vocational education in several counties.

- d. The Swedish Government has also committed itself to investing approximately 5 Million Euros for Vocational and Skills Education in Liberia, designated specifically for reconstructing and equipping the Voinjama Multilateral High School which was destroyed during the war.
- e. The current commitment of the USAID to Education aggregates to \$60.9 Million United States dollars. The USAID investment comprises \$27million United States dollars for the READ LIBERIA PROJECT, and \$33.9 Million United States dollars for the ACCELERATED QUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAM.

These two amounts, separately designated for education development by USAID, are designed to enhance early grade reading, particularly for Grades 1 & 2, and enrolling out-of-school children into learning programs, which is estimated to benefit forty-eight thousand (48,000) children residing in six (6) counties.

f. INVESTMENT OF \$30 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS IN SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMS FOR 5 YEARS. The School Feeding Program which is ongoing as of 2018, is expected to benefit over one hundred thousand (100,000) school children in 240 primary schools situated in four (4) counties, primarily in the South-Eastern counties of Liberia, because of their special situation.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

Our government recognizes that the young people of Liberia, as the largest component of our population, hold the ultimate key for the development and prosperity of Liberia.

We recognize that youth unemployment and the lack of opportunities are not only hindrances to economic development and transformation, but are also potential threats to national security.

Therefore, the Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Youth & Sports, sees the provision of skills and sustainable employment to young people as matters of strategic importance for transformation of Liberia and placing the country on a path to sustained peace.

We have therefore focused on several key strategic interventions to alleviate some of the issues in Youth Employment and Empowerment and Sports Development.

We have completed the recruitment of young people who are to be beneficiaries of youth empowerment and employment activities under our YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT PROJECT, YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES PROJECT, and the NATIONAL CADET PROGRAM. About fifteen thousand (15,000) individuals and households are expected to benefit from these programs, collectively.

The Youth Opportunities Project has to date benefited one hundred and twenty-nine (129) communities in all 15 counties.

Twenty-eight (28) farming groups comprising a total of three thousand six hundred and twelve (3,612) youths have received the first tranche of labor subsidy cash payments of one hundred and fifty (\$150) United States dollars per youth, to assist with some of their needs while on the farms.

Under the HOUSEHOLD ENTERPRISE component, one hundred (100) business groups consisting of 8 members in 10 communities across the country have completed their business plans.

These are now being reviewed, and accounts have been opened for each business group to received two thousand four hundred (\$2,400) United States dollars for business start-up.

Under the Productive Public Works component of Youth Opportunities Project, an additional three thousand six hundred and twelve (3,612) youths in 128 communities have been recruited across the country for Round Two implementation. The Youth Opportunities Project is also expected to receive additional financing of 3.5 Million Euros from the Swedish Government and 5 Million Euros from French Government.

The first batch of 110 cadets under the National Cadet Program were deployed to various Governmental and private institutions to afford them an opportunity to gain some work experience.

In addition, over five thousand (5,000) young people have benefitted from our Sexual Reproductive Health Education and Treatment initiatives. Recognizing the importance of literacy in empowerment, the Youth Literacy Program has been revamped and launched in several communities.

Because of the importance of sustaining peace in Liberia, the Ministry continues to engage youth and their communities through the Youth Empowerment and Engagement through Social Cohesion program. Under this program, Community Peace Councils dedicated to teaching and practicing conflict resolution and prevention were formed in several communities in Bong, Cape Mount Margibi and Nimba Counties. The Councils conducted community peace dialogues that are meant to enhance the skills of youth, religious and traditional leaders in conflict resolution and the avoidance of negative values.

The Government, with support from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) rolled out the YOUTHCONNEKT Liberia Program. This is a socio-entrepreneur youth development program that seeks to develop young Liberians into productive citizens. The program supports youth in innovation, ICT, volunteerism, entrepreneurship, advocacy and leadership.

As part of the activities of the rollout, the Ministry of Youth and Sports dedicated a modern multi-purpose Innovation Lab and Digital Learning Room at the S.K.D Sport Complex. The facility is equipped with computers, projectors, and internet connectivity, and serves as a resource center that provides the space for online learning, peer mentorship, networking and training for youth within Montserrado County and its environs. Plans are being worked out by the Ministry and her partners to replicate similar facilities at our youth and community centers across the country.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

Capacity development for our young people remains a matter of high priority for the government. Our TVET institutions graduated about three thousand (3,000) students, with the Monrovia Vocational Training Centre accounting for two thousand seven hundred and nine (2,709) graduates. This was the first graduation since the Ebola crisis.

Also, the government have successfully completed negotiations with the European Union on the terms of a 20 million Euro grant, which is meant for the modernization of seven (7) TVET institutions in the country. The execution of this program has begun with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization as implementing partner.

The Ministry of Youth & Sports has completed assessments for the re-opening of the other TVET institutions – Tumutu Agriculture and Vocational Training Center in Bong County; Klay Agriculture and Vocational Training Center in Bomi County; and Youth Agriculture Training Center in Montserrado County. We are currently partnering with different organizations to improve and enhance TVET delivery across the country.

Under these partnerships, The Tumutu Agriculture Training Center, Youth Agriculture Training Center and Klay Agriculture Training Center will be beginning major activities within the next couple of months.

The ADEA, a working group on education management and policy support, has a five-year project for the development of the oil palm industry in Liberia, with emphasis in nursery development. Thirty (30) young Liberians from the western region of the Country are to benefit from the three-month intensive training in nursery development for the pilot phase of the project to be carried out in Klay Agriculture Vocational Training Center in Bomi County.

Under Chinese Assistance 2018, the Shandong Foreign Trade Vocational College of China, as part of its Overseas Foreign Aid Training Program, is conducting training focused on electricity, auto repair and construction. This intermediate training is expected to benefit 100 youths.

The government continues to champion the use of Sports as a tool for youth development and the promotion of social cohesion.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

It is important to mention that the broken economy inherited by our administration, caused by the risk associated with the democratic transition in 2017, collapse of the country's major export commodities prices on the global market, the UNMIL withdrawal, and the effect of the Ebola Virus Disease in 2014, is still in a struggling state.

Despite these peculiar adverse economic circumstances, growth in real gross domestic product (GDP) recovered at 2.5 percent in 2017 and was projected to rise to 3 percent at the end of 2018. By 2023, we expect the economy to grow by a further 4.7 percent, on account of further expansion in commercial gold production, growth in the agricultural and forestry sectors, formation of Special Economic Zones, and other economic reforms envisage under the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development.

Even with these optimistic recovery forecasts, our projected growth rates are still below the pre-Ebola period, when the economy grew on average by 7.5 percent annually.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

During the period under review, the Liberian Dollar performed poorly against the United State Dollar.

The average Liberian-dollar exchange rate with reference to the United States dollar, depreciated from L\$117 Liberian dollars to \$1.00 United States dollar in 2017; to L\$157.8 Liberian dollars to \$1.00 United States dollar at the end of 2018. At its lowest value before the government intervention, \$1.00 United States dollar was being exchange at L\$180 Liberia dollars.

This massive depreciation of the Liberian was primarily driven by the deterioration of the country's terms of trade, and an increase in demand for United States dollars to service imports. Other factors were the legacy of the UNMIL drawdown and the lingering adverse impact of the EBOLA crisis.

To help stabilize the situation, I delivered an economic speech in which I mandated the economic management team and the Central Bank of Liberia to find solutions to exchange rate and other macro-economic problems.

As a short-term quick fix, the Government approved \$25 million United States dollars to enable the Central Bank to intervene in the foreign exchange market. As of December 2018, a total of \$17 million United States dollars was used for the intervention, which significantly contributed to the general stability in the exchange rate for the past six months (July to December 2018). The balance \$8 million United States dollars is reserved by the CBL as a precautionary intervention fund.

As a sustainable remedy to the exchange rate problems, the Central Bank is concluding arrangements on the use of various monetary policy instruments, including the introduction of a Standing Deposit Facility, a Standing Credit Facility, and CBL indexed Bills and Notes, to ensure a more stable macroeconomic environment in 2019.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

Liberia's trade deficit stood at \$561.8 million United States dollars for the period January to November 2018.

Although this represents a 17.1 percent improvement, as compared to \$677.3 million for the same period in 2017, it is important to note that the weak performance of the real economy has for so long been characterized by low export earnings as compared to payments for imports.

Though there has been improvement in the trade balance in 2018, the Liberian dollar still remains under pressure. Performance of two of our key commodities (iron ore and rubber) showed some level of improvements during the period under review.

Receipts from iron ore exports almost doubled, from \$57.8 million United States dollars, to \$106.5 million United States dollars, while rubber exports grew slightly from \$67 million United States dollars to \$68.9 million United States dollars, compared to the same period in 2017.

In order to improve the external sector of the economy, there is an urgent need to support domestic production, which requires a major structural transformation of our economy. In this regard, under the Pro-Poor Agenda, agriculture has been considered a matter of priority to achieve this structural reform.

The GROSS FOREIGN RESERVES at the end of November 2018 was \$410.2 million United States dollars, reflecting a slight decline of 1.7 percent compared to the end of December 2017. This slight decline in Gross Foreign Reserves can be largely attributed to low export earnings.

Despite the challenges faced in the economy, the banking system remained resilient during the year under review. The banking system further experienced improvement in aggregate assets, deposits, loans and capitalization.

However, the stock of non-performing loans remains a major challenge for the banking system. The Central Bank is taking steps, including establishing a robust credit reference system, to address the issue of non-performing loans.

At the same time, the Government is working to improve the legal and policy environment to improve access to credit and to resolve other challenges in the private sector.

Nevertheless, the banking sector continues to play a significant role in providing credit to the economy. Credit to the private sector, which serves as the main engine of growth, rose by over 36.8 percent at the end of October 2018.

In addition, total credit as a percentage of GDP increased from 13.1 percent (2017) to 13.4 percent (2018), largely as a result of growth in loans to all major sectors, especially, the extractive sector, oil & gas sector, and the manufacturing sector.

We like to assure members of the banking sector that the Government of Liberia is committed to settling Government debt owed to banks from the previous administration.

Regarding the insurance sector, the Central Bank and the Government remain focused on implementing reform of the sector. The measures taken to bring stability to the sector has led to some improvement in the regulatory landscape and the sector.

Liberia has made progress in deepening the financial system through the national payments system and digital financial space. There has been an uptake in the use of mobile money services across the country as well as the automatic tellers' machines (ATMs), which has helped to increase access to payment.

The Government continues to pay civil servants through this mechanism, and there are efforts underway to use such digital platforms for Government revenue collection. These efforts are part of the Government's vision to digitize the Liberian economy and transition to a cash-less society.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR SPEAKER AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE

During the year under review, the news media in Liberia was saturated with stories alleging that containers of Liberian dollars imported by the Central Bank were missing.

Given the gravity of the allegations, our administration took several actions in response, including setting up a Special Presidential Technical Committee to investigate.

In addition, the Government requested the assistance of the European Union, the African Union, the United States Government and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to help in conducting a separate external investigation into the alleged missing money. With the assistance and support of USAID, an audit team from Kroll of London, England, was invited to independently investigate and report findings.

The Report from the Kroll Audit Team is expected at the end of February 2019, and will be released to the public by USAID.

If it is established that there has been any willful act of criminality, negligence, or malfeasance by anyone implicated in the reports, the full weight of the law will be brought to bear.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE:

I am pleased to report that, despite the challenges to the economy, our robustness in revenue policy and administration and the support of donor partners resulted into greater revenue receipts in 2018 as compared to 2017.

REVENUE COLLECTION FOR 2018, INCLUDING GRANTS, WAS \$480.6 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS, AS COMPARED TO \$454 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS IN 2017, WHICH REPRESENTS GROWTH OF 5.7 PERCENT.

This strong performance was driven by higher receipts of tax and non-tax revenues.

To this end, our government is especially grateful to our partners for contributing approximately ten (10) times more in budget support grants in 2018 than in 2017 (\$38 million United States dollars in 2018, as compared to \$4.8 million in 2017) Tax revenue increased from \$384.9 million United States dollars in 2017, to \$387.6 million United States dollars in 2018. Non-tax revenue increased from \$55 million United States dollars in 2017, to \$64.7 million in 2018, mainly on account of active collection of the Road Fund Levy.

CORRESPONDINGLY, EXPENDITURE FOR 2018 AMOUNTED TO \$502 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS, COMPARED TO \$434.3 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS AT THE END OF NOVEMBER 2017. The increase in government expenditures consistently reminds us about the desire of the Liberian people for meaningful developments, which are in line with our Change for Hope mandate.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR SPEAKER AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE

When we came to power, we inherited a debt of \$878.2 million United States dollars at the end of 2017.

The debt stock now stands at \$987.8 million in 2018 at the end of 2018. The increase in the debt stock of \$109.6 million during the period under review is mainly on account of disbursements from borrowing external loan portfolios, including the World Bank, African Development Bank, BADEA and Saudi Arabia, which were ratified in 2017.

To date, my administration has not added to the debt stock but that does not mean we will not increase the stock of debt. In the interest of our people, we are working on this.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE

Our administration remains grateful to our development partners for the level of assistance we have received since my ascendency as President of the Republic of Liberia. Total official development assistance received from January up to September 2018 is about \$399 million United States dollars in support of various programs and activities under our Pro-Poor Agenda.

To our partners, we say thank you, merci and obligado!

Of this amount, approximately \$279.2 million United States dollars, represents seventy percent (70%) in grants; while the remaining \$120 million United States dollars represents thirty percent (30%) received as concessional loans.

This reflects the commitment of our partners and the international community to support the dream and aspiration of the Liberian people, and their confidence in our fiscal discipline.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE, it is my singular honor to request this honorable body to join me in expressing our sincere thanks and profound appreciation to our donor partners.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE

As the world's second largest shipping registry, we have carried out several programs and activities to strengthen, consolidate and expand our maritime program in the face of competition from new and emerging registries.

During the period under review, the Governments of Liberia and the People's Republic of China renewed the favored-nation Maritime Transport Agreement for another five (5) years, thus preserving our access to a vast market in the Far East. Additionally, discussions are in the final stages to conclude a MARITIME TRANSPORT AGREEMENT WITH THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA.

The government will continue to explore further opportunities to ensure that the competitive advantage we have as a world class maritime nation is increased to the benefit of the Liberian people.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT MR. SPEAKER AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE

In my Inaugural Address, I stated that my greatest contribution to this country as President may not lie in the eloquence of my speeches, but will definitely lie in the quality of the decisions that I will make over the next six years to advance the lives of Liberians. And, as I have often said, “I am a man of action”.

It is against this backdrop that I have set my eyes on Roads as my administration’s path to delivering a better living condition for the Liberian people.

Good road connectivity will enhance our economic development, our agriculture productivity and reduce travel times to schools and hospitals.

In fulfillment of the goal of the PAPD to connect every county to our commercial capital of Monrovia, we have targeted five hundred and seventeen kilometers (517 km) of paved primary roads. At the same time, we are creating community connectivity through the pavement of Community Roads throughout the country.

The Government of Liberia is working with the Ecowas Bank Investment and Development, the African Development, the World Bank and the provide sector to identify and scale up financing for the Coastal Highway.

During the period under review, three (3) new segments of primary road projects were initiated: the SANNIQUELLIE – LOGATUO ROAD project of forty-seven kilometers (47 km) with funding from the African Development Bank and the European Union; the GANTA – TAPPITTA - ZWEDRU ROAD project of two hundred and twenty-five kilometers (225 km) with funding from the Liberia Reconstruction Trust Fund.

Similarly, the German Government has contributed \$16 Million United States dollars and the World Bank has also contributed \$29 Million United States dollars to the Ganta – Tappitta - Zwedru Road project and the Gbarnga – Salayea Road project of eighty-one kilometers (81 km) is expected with funding from the Arab Banks.

In addition to these gains, the Government of Liberia has secured funding from the Arab Banks, led by the Kuwaiti Fund, for the ongoing Gbarnga to Salayea Road corridor to be extended to Voinjama via Konia in Lofa County, totaling one hundred and ninety-five kilometers (195 km).

Our concessionaire, ARCELORMITTAL, has started the GANTA – YEKEPA Road Project of sixty-seven kilometers (67 km), and the World Bank has finalized funding for six kilometers (6 km) of paved road from Coca Cola Factory to ELWA Junction.

It is also worthy to mention, that with support from the World Bank, the Government has successfully completed the National Road Inventory, which includes updated data on the current state of the road network in country.

The Government is undertaking a total of one hundred and fifty kilometers (150) km of Community Roads in fifty-seven (57) communities in Monrovia and its environs, as well as in Gbarnga, Bong County and in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County. These roads are being paved with funding from domestic revenues generated from taxes.

I am pleased to inform you that more than sixty-five percent (65%) of community roads are near completion. DOE COMMUNITY TO CLARA TOWN road and CHUGBOR ROAD are completed and dedicated.

Other gains in the road sector during the period under review include a road maintenance funding grant. Projects phase completion includes:

- 300,000 Euros provided by the German Government through GIZ;**
- People's Republic of China for the Construction of 2 ultra-modern overpass bridges to be constructed at the SKD Boulevard and Ministerial Complex Intersections respectively on Tubman Boulevard;**
- The Japanese Government thirteen point two kilometers (13.2km) Somalia Drive Road Phase I completion and Phase II commencement;**
- The Liberian Swedish 400 km Feeder Road Project;**

- **The Government of India 144 Million commitment to build a conference center named in honor of Mahatma Gandhi to be built on Bali Island.**

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

As the Liberia Electricity Cooperation (LEC) has been able to increase its supply out, the demand for electricity also increased. Insufficient transformers and overload led to several communities physically demanding service, sometimes resulting in demonstrations in some communities. The able technicians of LEC were able to mitigate some of the problems by introducing new transformers where needed and replacing damaged overload transformers.

There are more than 8000 new household connections, 324 new commercial connections, with 80 new large users added and in the process of being added. However, revenue collected accounts for about 40% of generated load, while power theft accounts for about 49% and technical losses accounts for 12%. There has not been a change in Tariff and that may not change until the problem of power theft is addressed through a policy reform.

Statistics showed that 10 % of power theft will cost the Liberia Electricity Corporation \$8 million United States dollars. Today, because of the increase in illegal connections, the LEC is losing in excess of \$35 million United States dollars per year to electricity theft.

This huge loss is preventing LEC from extending supply to many areas of the country where citizens are crying out for electricity. It is also preventing LEC from offering connections to many businesses, who in turn could offer much-needed employment opportunities to many Liberians.

Power Theft is ILLEGAL, AND SABOTAGES THE ECONOMY OF OUR COUNTRY. I appeal to you, my fellow Liberians, to stop this behavior of power theft NOW!!

Let us work together to put an end to this dangerous crime and help LEC generate more revenue to expand its services to other communities and connect more citizens for the greater good of Liberia.

Government has already taken the following measures:

- 1. Provided the Ministry of Justice with additional funding to work in coordination with the Judiciary to fast track power theft cases.**

2. **Drafted a Bill to be forwarded to the Legislature that would make power theft an economic crime.**
3. **Began a rigorous implementation of mass disconnections of illegal connections and encouraging homes to legitimize their connections.**
4. **LEC enhanced community outreach as Joint Stakeholders to protect against illegal connections which result in damage transformers.**

Much work has been done, but we acknowledge that there is still more to do.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

We made a solemn commitment to protect and uphold the rights and freedoms of our citizens. During the period under review, the government maintained an enabling environment for the exercise of press freedom and freedom of speech.

The Liberia media remains vibrant and unfettered. Currently, there are more than seventy privately owned (70) radio and television stations with over 40 newspapers operating in the country. The media is a fundamental pillar of our democracy. While we applaud the plurality of the media, we have also engaged the Press Union of Liberia to devise ways of enhancing professionalism.

Because we have an obligation to provide factual information about the development agenda to our citizens, we have ramped up the efficiency and capacity of the government's own national media outlets. The national broadcaster, Liberia Broadcasting Corporation (ELBC & ELTV) has extended its coverage to leeward counties. In an effort to further disseminate information to the populace, the government has signed a \$10 million United States dollar Grant Agreement with the Government of the People's Republic of China as support to the LBS decentralization program.

The State-owned media, including the New Liberia publication and the Liberia News Agency, have become a premier disseminator of news and information from all around the country. We as a government will continue to rely on the independent media to compliment the effort of the state-owned media to keep the Liberian people engaged and informed of the activities of the government.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

Liberia is a beautiful country with huge tourism potential. Our Government will continue to work to improve the tourism potential.

Tourism is largely a private-sector driven industry, but the government, in keeping with our own responsibility, has undertaken to craft the proper regulatory and administrative framework for the sector to thrive, within the framework of National Tourism Trade Export Strategy.

We are reviewing the option of seeking legislation to set up an independent national tourism board to regulate the sector and to attract investment in the sector.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

I would like to reiterate to you today, what I said at the United Nation General Assembly last year: a nation which has experienced civil war must never take peace for granted, or forget the long shadow that years of conflict still cast over people's lives.

We must realize and appreciate that ours is still a fragile peace. As we strive to reconcile our people and consolidate all our resources toward a future of prosperity, we must uphold the rule of law to enable us forge a sustainable peace.

The peace that we enjoy today was bestowed upon us with the blood and resources of other countries; its sustainability is now our responsibility. We are constitutionally responsible under the law to protect our hard-won peace.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

The Ministry of National Defense continues to ensure professional military training for soldiers and is working with international partners in restructuring a credible defense sector that would maintain the peace and provide the enabling environment for the implementation of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD).

During the period under review several local and international training opportunities were provided by our partners including The United States of America, The People's Republic of China, The Government of Bangladesh, The Republic of Ghana, The Republic of Sierra Leone, and the Federal Republic of Nigeria to improve the administrative, tactical, and operational capabilities of the men and women of the AFL.

The Armed Forces of Liberia continues to play significant role in the quest for peace and stability in Mali under the auspices of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Mission in Mali.

In February of 2018, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) conducted two successive rotation exercises to reach a total of five rotations since the beginning of the Mission.

A total of one hundred personnel have been deployed, bringing the present strength of our troops to 105 personnel. During the period under review, the AFL Engineering Command collaborated with the Ministry of Public Works to undertake numerous road construction projects aimed at improving its civil-military relationship by engaging in civil works. In 2017, the Engineering Command completed the reconditioning of more than 300 kilometers of feeder roads in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works.

As part of post-conflict security sector reforms, the Liberian National Defense Act of 2008 included provisions to re-establish the Liberian Coast Guard. With assistance from the United States government, the Liberian Coast Guard was fully reactivated and partially equipped to conduct maritime security and safety operations.

**MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-
TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:**

In an effort to take government closer to the people, The Ministry of Internal Affairs launched the National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance. The central goal of this new approach is to provide basic social services to our people.

The newly-enacted Local Government Act of 2018 will now guide the national progress of decentralization of power, whereby authority, functions, and responsibilities will shift from central government to local governments.

**MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-
TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:**

Liberia continues to foster friendly and mutually beneficial ties with her traditional partners as well as explore new relations with countries sharing similar world views based on friendship, peace and cooperation in pursuit of her national interest.

Liberia continues to pursue a foreign policy objective based on the principles of sovereignty, equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. The cultivation of friendly ties with member states of the international organizations and the settlement of disputes through dialogue and negotiations took center stage in the international arena.

During the period under review, I made Official and State visits to several countries in the interest of Liberia, and consulted with my colleagues on a number of issues of importance to Africa, notably the resolution of conflicts on the African continent and elsewhere.

Most notable among my travels were the following:

January 28 - 30, 2018: I attended the 30th ordinary summit of Heads of State of the African Union in Addis Abba, Ethiopia. This was my first official travel as President of Liberia and my first attendance at the African Union.

February 14 -17, 2018: I paid a State Visit to the Republic of Senegal. This landmark visit to the President of Senegal reinvigorated the bilateral relations between Liberia and Senegal. My counterpart, President Macky Sall, and I discussed various areas of bilateral cooperation, particularly in the areas of fisheries, medicine, carpentry training, investment promotion, as well as Senegalese experience in the implementation of economic and social development programs.

February 16 – 20, 2018: I made an Official Visit to the Republic of France where the French President committed a grant of Ten million Euros to Liberia for road maintenance. I was also given the opportunity, along with President Macron, to serve as a co-founder of Sports for Development. Modalities are being worked out for a more comprehensive and sustainable development assistance to Liberia.

June 1 – 7, 2018: I attended the 12th edition of the European Development Forum on International Cooperation and Development held in Brussels, Belgium.

July 29 - August 1, 2018: I attended the 53rd Summit of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS in Lomé, Togo.

August 27 - September 6, 2018: I led a high-powered delegation to attend the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit in Beijing, China. During this visit, the Government of Liberia and China signed a \$54 million United States dollar grant to Liberia to aid the construction of two overhead bridges to ease traffic movement at the Ministerial Complex and the SKD Boulevard respectively.

I would like to inform this August body that Liberia has signed a Memorandum of Understanding enabling us to become a member of the One Belt One Road Initiative.

All of these indicate the strength of Liberia-China Relations. In this spirit, we reconfirm our commitment to upholding the One China Policy which governs our relations.

September 18 - October 4, 2018: I attended the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly for the first time as President of the Republic of Liberia. I had the opportunity to address the General Assembly and also attended a high-level meeting on the world drug problem that was chaired by President Donald Trump of the United States. I also attended a high-level plenary meeting on global peace in honor of the 100th birth anniversary of Nelson Mandela.

November 9 – 15, 2018: At the invitation of the President of France, I paid an Official Visit to the Republic of France to attend the Paris Peace Forum which brought together more than Seventy (70) world leaders. During the occasion, had the opportunity to meet other world leaders.

While in France, I was invited to attend the Internet Governance Forum organized by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a Guest of Honor.

In my submission I highlighted the significance of Internet in bridging communication gaps in the world, as well as called attention to the dangers of the misuse of this new technology for both countries and their citizens.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE

It is noteworthy to report that Liberia's relation with the United States is cordial, harmonious and mutually fruitful. Both countries enjoy strong relationship which is characterized by mutual respect. America is a traditional ally of Liberia and both countries continue to collaborate at the bilateral and multilateral levels, which led to a recent and significant signing of a \$120 Million United States dollars grant between USAID and Government.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

During the reporting period, several officials, former officials of Government and prominent citizens ended their earthly journey for eternal rest. Among those for whom official Gazettes were issued were:

1. Hon. Lemuel E. A. Reeves, Sr.

Former Commissioner General, Acting Commissioner General and Deputy Commissioner for Naturalization, respectively, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, now Liberia Immigration Service

2. Hon. Jacob Hilary Mason Sr. - Former Deputy Minister for Administration, Ministry of Agriculture

3. Amb. Famatta Rose OSODE

Former Minister and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Minister Counselor, Counselor, Deputy Permanent Representative/Minister Plenipotentiary, Charge d' Affaires

4. Hon Jackson E. Doe

Former Minister of Post and Telecommunications, Transport and Presidential Affairs

5. Hon. Sandei A. Cooper, Sr.

Former Deputy Governor, Central Bank of Liberia; Senior Vice President for Operation, Erstwhile Citi Bank; Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer respectively.

6. Cllr. Francis Y S. M. Garlawolu

Former Minister and Attorney General, Ministry of Justice, Republic of Liberia; Dean and Former Senator of Bong County

7. Hon. A. Francis Kpangbai

**Former Representative, 51st Legislature, Bong County;
Procurement Officer, Peace Corps; Land Commissioner,
Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy, Bong County**

8. Chief. Joseph T. K. Vonleh

**Former Paramount Chief, Chief Elder, Clan Chief,
Respectively; Ministry of Internal Affairs, Republic of Liberia**

9. Hon. Alfred Boimah Anderson, Jr.

**Former Superintendent, Bomi County; Former Board Member,
Bomi Community, College and Radio Bomi, respectively,
Educator, Humanitarian, Prominent Citizen**

10. Rev. Dr. Emmanuel W. Johnson

**Superintendent, Monrovia Consolidated School System,
President, Cuttington College and Divinity School.**

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT AND PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

Long before the drafting and completion of the PAPD, our administration started immediate implementation with the Recast Fiscal Year 17/18 National Budget. With the re-balancing, we were able to generate \$9.6 million United States dollars in savings through expenditure cuts, including reductions in the salaries of all top-level government officials.

These included cabinet ministers, deputy and assistant ministers, heads of autonomous agencies and their deputies and assistants.

I am pleased to inform you, Honorable Members of the 54th Legislature, that today, no member of my cabinet makes above US\$7,200 monthly as compared to monthly earnings of US\$15,000 to US\$20,000 in the past.

With your approval as Members of the National Legislature, we used these savings wisely to fund Thirteen (13) Pro-Poor Projects. Today, I am pleased to inform you that most of these deliverables, consisting of our first Pro-Poor programs and projects, have now been successfully completed.

Some of the major successful programs and projects include: digitizing the University of Liberia registration system; sending medical doctors abroad to specialize; feasibility study of the 14th Military Hospital; upgrade of JFK and provision of the roads maintenance and the payment of the Resettlement Action Plan. Additionally, a new Presidential Lounge is being constructed at RIA to accommodate visiting Heads of State.

In addition, three (3) new dedicated jetty lines were installed at the Petroleum Storage Terminal (PST) on Bushrod Island. Another major milestone in the PST rehabilitation and expansion project was achieved with the completion of Three (3) new storage tanks.

These tanks enable the Government to store more petroleum products.

In the face of rising global prices, the government has been able to reduce the basic prices of fuel on the Liberian market. Fuel prices have been reduced as follows: Gas: 3.70 reduce to 3.30 and AGO has been reduced from 3.95 cents to 3.70. Likewise, the price of an ordinary passport has been reduced by 10%, from \$50 to \$45.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT AND PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

As we kick start the infrastructure portion of the PADP through road construction, we also want to place a new emphasis on agriculture.

Our International Partners will agree with me that endless national and foreign resources have been and continue to be poured into Agriculture, yet returns on these investments are almost negligible.

THIS WILL HAVE TO CHANGE!!

Just as I am doing with the roads, I will directly get involved in the programs and practical implementation of agriculture development.

The sector accounts for more than seventy percent (70%) of household earnings.

Therefore, our Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development can only be sustainably achieved through agriculture. We will craft new practical and realistic agriculture policies, incentivize the sector by providing access to credit, reducing tariffs on agriculture implements, and provide small machines, modern seeds and fertilizers.

As I said before, and continue to say, Liberia is open for business. Under this administration the private sector will be prioritized. With the passage of the new Special Economic Zone Law, we will create one-stop shop business zones for the private sector.

We have for long spoken about adding value to various raw materials to create more jobs, income and livelihood for our citizens. It is time we take practical action to make it happen.

As part of our strategies to begin value addition, especially for light manufacturing and processing.

Survey of the Buchanan port has already begun on land that is allocated for the establishment of an SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE, and in this fiscal year we work with our international partners to complete the feasibility studies.

While we try to roll out these new business opportunities, we will get directly involved in improving the business climate in Liberia.

I would like to take this time to thank all the foreign businesses operating in the country. In spite of various constraints, they continue to positively contribute to the economy in terms of revenue generations and job creations.

As part of this exercise Government will continue to address constraints and challenges faced by our business community and the private sector. In so doing, we intend to explore the possibility of the following:

We will shortly place before you, the Legislature, a proposed amendment to extend the time required to renew Resident Permits. In Liberia we have business people who have lived here for 30 to 50 years but have to renew resident permit every year. THIS WILL HAVE TO CHANGE! People who have already resided in Liberia for five years or more, without a criminal record, will be eligible.

The amendment will also propose that resident permit holders will no longer be required to obtain permits to re-enter the country.

We will also look into revising the requirement for annual renewal of work permits for a longer period.

Additionally, we will implement a Visa-upon-Arrival program, as well as the issuance of Tourist Visas.

MADAME VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL LEGISLATURE, MEMBERS OF THE CABINET, MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY, DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY, OUR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS HERE PRESENT, MEMBERS OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, MEMBERS OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY, OUR TRADITIONAL LEADERS, MEMBERS OF THE FOURTH ESTATE, OFFICIALS AND OTHER MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT HERE PRESENT, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MY FELLOW LIBERIANS:

As I conclude this Report to you on the current State of the Nation, I want to again give thanks and praise to the Almighty God for the many blessings and protection He has accorded us during our first year of service to our People and Nation.

Let me use this occasion to commend all of our Cabinet Ministers and their Deputies, Heads of autonomous agencies and their Deputies, the technicians at the various ministries and autonomous agencies, our security forces, Honorable Members of the National Legislature, the Judiciary; and our traditional leaders, for your tireless efforts and support in bringing us thus far.

I applaud your great works and I am deeply grateful for all of your sacrifices and immense contribution to our Nation. As we embark upon this new journey of the second year of our tenure, I am looking forward to your total commitment, unflinching support, and unwavering efforts; as we work collectively in transforming the lives of our people for the better.

It will be remiss of me, if I did not recognize and commend our International and Development Partners, for their immense support and contributions to our Government during our first year of leadership.

We applaud them for standing with us; and we look forward to a renewed and strengthened partnership in moving our country to higher heights.

FELLOW CITIZENS,

It is a little over a year since we took on the mantle of leadership to transform your lives for the better. It was a journey of profound opportunities and endless possibilities. At the same time, it was a Herculean task filled with challenges. But I am grateful that we were able to sail safely through difficult times in our first year of Service to our people. Certainly, this could not have been possible without the help and guidance of the Almighty; but also due to your patience, sacrifices, collaboration and cooperation.

When we accepted the challenge to serve our People about a year ago, not only was it the dawn of a new era for our Nation; but an opportunity to right the wrongs, address the plights of our people, heal their wounds; and confront every challenge and obstacle that stood in the way of transforming the lives of the Liberian people for the better. Today, I can state with understandable pride, that we did not disappoint our people; neither did we fail them.

With the support from our two other branches of Government and our International Partners during the course of our first year in office, I can confidently state that Liberia is far better today under our leadership, than it was twelve months ago when we were entrusted with the mandate to serve our people. This is also because of the diligence and tenacity that we brought to the process. We were resolved for change, and we remained committed to that cause during our first year of service to our people.

**AND SO TODAY, I STAND BEFORE YOU WITH CONFIDENCE, AND
DECLARE THAT THE STATE OF OUR NATION IS STRONG,
PEACEFUL, UNITED, STABLE, AND PROMISING, WITH GREAT
PROSPECTS FOR A BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL!!**

Fellow Citizens:

Despite all of these achievements during our first year, we are not oblivious of the many challenges that lie ahead, neither are we concluding that we have reached our peak in addressing the issues that confront your livelihood. But I can assure you that we are more energetic and motivated than we have ever been.

We are committed to changing your lives and to leading this Country to a prosperous future of countless opportunities.

And that is why we have started our second year with a new mindset...a patriotic mindset geared towards total development, economic growth and empowerment.

WE WILL NOT REST UNTIL WE REACH OUR ZENITH.

**WE WILL NOT REST UNTIL WE PAVE THAT LAST ROAD LEADING
TO THE REMOTEST PART OF OUR COUNTRY.**

**We will not rest until prices of basic commodities are made
affordable; and the equitable distribution of our national wealth is
achieved.**

**We will not rest until we see improvements in every sector of our
society.**

**FELLOW LIBERIANS, thank you for standing with us! Thank you for
your prayers and support!**

In closing, permit me to quote the immortal words of our beloved National Anthem:

In Union Strong, Success is Sure.

We cannot fail!!!

With God above, our rights to prove,

We will, over all, prevail

With heart, and hand, our Country's cause defending,

We'll meet the foe, with valor unpretending.

LONG LIVE LIBERIA, HAPPY LAND!!

A home of Glorious Liberty, By God's command.

A home of Glorious Liberty, By God's command.

MAY GOD BLESS THE WORKS OF OUR HANDS, AND SAVE THE STATE.

I THANK YOU.