

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

By

Honorable Chief Dr. Jewel Howard-Taylor

Vice President of the Republic of Liberia

at

Program Marking the Official Opening

of the

Vocational and Skills Training Of One Hundred Young Liberians

under the

China Assistance in 2018

Monday, November 5, 2018

MVTC Campus

Paynesville, Liberia

Honorable Members of the National Legislature Present;

Honorable D. Zeogar Wilson, Minister of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Youth and Sports Family;

Other Members of the Cabinet and Government Officials;

His Excellency Fu Jijun, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China;

The Administrator and Officials of the MVTC;

Platform Guests;

Members of the Incoming Training Class;

Parents and Well-wishers;

Members of the Fourth Estate;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honor to be here this morning; one that I do not take for granted. As one of the nation's Leaders; I find it beneficial not only for me to get a glimpse of some of the activities taking place in this sector, but it also provides me with the opportunity to join my faith with yours as we together strive for the rebuilding of our beloved Nation.

Each of us must keep in mind that the rebuilding process is exactly that - a process which requires the full commitment of all players; keeping in mind that it is only by doing so, can we construct a secure future for ourselves, our families and our nation.

Permit me at this juncture to extend, our depth of gratitude to our friends and partners from the People's Republic of China who continue to teach our people how to fish. Our Government and people are grateful for this and many other opportunities being provided. ***SHI SHAY!***

Minister Wilson, I am grateful for the invitation extended me to be a part of this exercise; especially seeing that yours is an awesome task to ensure that our young people obtain the necessary skills for youth empowerment and capacity building.

I appreciate the dedication with which you and the members of the Ministry are putting in place institutions for vocational and skill training programs. As you engage our partners, please remember that there are other youth training centers and other multilateral institutions that also need rehabilitation and furnishing. I applaud your for the work already underway at TUMUTU. Other centers also must be brought on line quickly; for clearly if we waited for the MVCT facility to be our only fully functional institution to train all of the young people across our nation, our development will remain at a snail's pace.

The sights of our people are set on the horizon, wishing and praying that this type of institution be available at least in every county for accessibility. I wished that today would have been the beginning of this year's term of study for all TVET institutions across Liberia and that at every institution our young people would have been gathering to begin a period of training which would be providing untold opportunities for their future.

What we do here today, and the opportunities the new one hundred students will take advantage of in their course of study, will make for a good step towards this expectation. As a nation, we have long been at this task of enhancing the potentials and capacity of our youth.

Incrementally, from one administration to the next, attention has been given to the great anomaly we find in our nation—the gap between the needs of industry for specific training and skills, on the one hand, and the availability of trained young people to be employed to meet those needs on the other.

We should thus find pride in the newly unfurled Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development which, in its very first Pillar, charges us to empower the people. Empowerment in this instance means providing the relevant opportunities which our youth can harness which will enable them to seize available and profitable ventures. This is a cause for which we all must give our greatest attention. It is a battle worth fighting; for its positive implications are as far reaching as they are overarching.

It is in this light that the first line of attack of this Administration, courageously steered by His Excellency President George Manneh Weah—focuses on the onerous move, as enshrined in our Agenda, ***"to empower Liberians with the tools to gain control of their lives thru more equitable provision of opportunities in education, health, youth development, and social protection."***

If we are to leapfrog the development drive of this nation, both the public and private sector actors must fetch inspiration from the message of our President, conveyed in his Special Statement recently in Ganta, Nimba County, as he officially launched our new 5-year National Development Plan.

The President stressed, with no equivocation that, ***"More importantly, we will invest in training our people, particularly in EDUCATION, in a deliberate attempt to ending widespread vulnerability."***

History tells us that Liberia's most recent comprehensive National Policy on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), along with its 5-year Operational Plan, was launched back in May of 2015. Today, we are on track with the full implementation of this National Plan, making sure it is kept practical and well suited to the trajectory of our economic pursuits as well as the demands of industry.

As I often times optimistically declare, with all hands on deck—all of us (public, private, and community working together to encourage our youth to take advantage of skills training)—we can be assured that the natural talents of young Liberians will be properly harnessed.

And, in my estimation, this should kick off a process through which job availability and the need for trained workers will be harmonized, thus achieving a two-prong objective of reducing the high rate of unemployed youth, while at the same time quenching the thirst of industry for the relevant trained manpower to spur production and profitability.

And to you the new cohort of 100 young people, who have been firstly privileged to be accepted from amongst thousands, and are about to start this training process today, let me repeat the critical challenge I threw out to peers of yours who were embarking upon a similar TVET training venture at the top notch training center at the Arcelor-Mittal facilities in Yekepa, Nimba County recently.

I reminded them, that the opportunities the facility provides is a unique way to take hold of your future and make it what you want it to be. The processes laid down and its benefits are self-evident and secure a sustainable future.

The choice however is yours—to either use it as a stepping stone in your march to a secured future or—God forbid—to miss the opportunities it provides and thus remain in the seemingly endless cycle of poverty and despair. The choice is yours, as only you can make this decision.

My presence here is only to paint a picture of the opportunities which will exist if you take hold of the future being provided and urge you passionately to take hold of it and rise to the zenith of your potential.

For the truth is clear, that the future you want for yourselves and the future you hope for your children, begins and ends with you. You must build it as you want it to be. There can be no more excuses and shifting blame on others.

As you begin this process, there is a blank canvass before you; and the beautiful colors of paint and brushes will be put in your hands - I URGE YOU TO PAINT A BEAUTIFUL LIBERIA—THE LIBERIA IN WHICH YOU WANT TO LIVE AND THEN LEAVE FOR THE BENEFITS OF YOUR CHILDREN.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me close by reminding firstly: The parents and guardians of these students; that your work is not yet done; till you ensure that your wards arrive at the destinations they have dreamed.

So don't get weary, just keep pushing them to reach their fullest potential, for they are your old age providers.

To our friends and partners, I pray that you will see this as just one step in our journey for the total empowerment of our young people. Though the emphasis here today is on this Institution, I plead with you to keep helping us make functional other TVET institutions across our Nation.

To the Ministry of Youth and Sports Family and the faculty and staff of the Monrovia Vocational Training Center, I say bravo and thank you for working in concert to keep the torch of enlightenment burning here.

May you be rewarded by seeing a new corps of patriotic men and women, marching together to rebuild our beloved Liberia.

Permit me to leave each of us with a quotation from one of Africa's best Sons – the all-time great MADIBA- NELSON MANDELA: ***"EDUCATION IS THE BEST TOOL WITH WHICH TO CHANGE THE WORLD."***

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

May God bless us and revive our Nation.