

**Keynote Address by His Excellency Joseph N. Boakai
Vice President of Liberia, at the Formal Opening of the 58th Annual Council
Meeting of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), Tuesday, March
23, 2010
Centennial Memorial Pavilion, Ashmun Street, Monrovia**

**Mr. Chairman;
Officers and Members of the West African Examinations Council;
Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Stakeholders and International Partners here present;
Students and Teachers;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

I am very delighted to formally welcome you to Monrovia, as Liberia once again plays host to the 58th Annual Council Meeting of Member Countries of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). Despite the bruising 14-year civil war and its immediate aftermath, Liberia was able to host the Council in 2005, a clear indication of the country's commitment to the organization, which proudly still continues to this day. We are very thankful that Liberia is now a nation at peace which provides the enabling environment for us to convene here, and this achievement would not have been possible without the huge sacrifices in lives and resources of our brothers and sisters from Africa, especially West Africa. For this, Liberians remain eternally grateful.

I bring warm greetings from Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who earlier met with some of you, and has asked that I convey to you her best wishes for a successful outcome of your deliberations. She is addressing the ECOWAS Conference in Monrovia on "Two Decades of Peace Processes in West Africa: Achievements, Failures and Lessons," with Liberia as a focus.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The five Member Countries of WAEC, all represented here today, are united by our common belief in the fundamental importance of education. We know that education can change a child's life; can be the doorway to a better future not only for that child, but for their family, their community, and their country.

We share the belief that we must do all we can to educate our citizens, equipping them with the tools they need to make a better life not only for themselves but for the advancement of the sub-region, and the continent at large. It is important that our children learn and demonstrate to others, including employers and universities, that they can make meaningful impact on society, and it is for that reason that WAEC is so important.

When it was established in 1952, WAEC's mission called for it to be West Africa's foremost examining body; to develop and maintain internationally accepted procedures in examinations; to provide qualitative and reliable educational assessment; to encourage academic and moral excellence among the youth; and to promote sustainable human resource development, mutual understanding and international cooperation. Great contributions have been made by WAEC in advancing the social development of society, through trained manpower and human resource development. You can attest to the transformation taking place in West African countries, a testimony that WAEC is making a great impact because the drivers of the success stories one way or the other experienced WAEC.

**Distinguished Guests;
Fellow Liberians;
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

Liberia finds itself at a critical juncture as we embark on an ambitious national reconstruction agenda. That agenda encompasses our relationship to the West African sub-region, and how we play our role in maintaining peace and stability with our brothers and sisters within and outside the region. As a government and people, we have already concluded that education, especially the education of our youth, plays a fundamental part in ensuring the success of our endeavors. As part of the process, we have identified three important institutions that play a crucial role in shaping the life of every child, his or her outlook, and future prospects. These include the family, the school, and the community (including the religious entities). Together, these institutions educate, train, and shape the young, both formally and informally, into valuable adults. They inculcate values and norms, and help ensure the child has his/her anchor deeply planted in the virtues that build a strong society. All of us, therefore, are products of our society. If we are successful in life, we owe that success to our families, schools and society. If we are failures, our society must take a certain amount of blame for that.

There is no educational system in the world that is culturally, politically and ideologically neutral. Every educational system in every country must serve the philosophical, economic and social needs of its society.

Education is one social institution without whose mention any talk about nation building would be meaningless. In a sense, education constitutes the first point in the conveyer belt of our belief systems and values. It teaches you who you are and what you should not be. A correct environment of peace and security is needed if we are to move ahead with the transformation of our society, but such environment can be created if, and only if, the society is to carry out its social and religious mandate of bringing up our young people through constant education in a way that they will not depart from it. Otherwise, the society might bring forth products that may later degenerate into social misfits. For all of those reasons and

more, Distinguished Delegates, the Government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has maintained a premium on education.

Mr. Chairman and Madam Registrar, you will recall that during your visit with President Sirleaf in July 2008, you informed the Government that Liberia was not taking the International Examination, which is the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). We indicated that all should be done by WAEC and the Ministry of Education to put the Liberian student on par with counterparts in the other four countries in the shortest possible time, as we found it totally unacceptable that Liberian students were not being held to the same standards as others students in the sub-region. I hope that you will inform us during, or at the end of your meeting, of the status report on Liberia.

The WEAC Office in Monrovia informed the nation a couple of months ago that the general performance of candidates in the May 2009 Liberia Senior High School Certificate Examination was "fairly good." While we welcome this improvement in the performance of our students, we are not satisfied with "fairly good." Our educational system has taken up the challenge to significantly raise the standard of performance of the Liberian School System and bring same on par with their peers in the sub-region.

Our inability to sit this internationally recognized examination places Liberian students at a huge disadvantage when competing with their peers with respect to educational advancement and employment in Member Countries. Let me cite a specific example. Recently, an advertisement for scholarships by the West African Regional Maritime Institute, which ran in a local paper, indicated that applicants for certain categories of the scholarships had to be holders of the WASSCE or the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). Liberians seeing this announcement no doubt concluded that they were ineligible, because the name of the national examination administered in this country, the Liberia Senior High School Certificate Examination, or LSHSCE, was not mentioned.

We believe that everything must be done by WAEC and our Ministry of Education to put Liberian students on par with their counterparts in the other four Member Countries in the shortest possible time. In that connection, we have received assurances that WAEC is working with the Education Ministry to administer the WASSCE in Liberia in 2011. Twenty-five schools, located in Montserrado, Margibi, Grand Bassa, Bong and Nimba Counties, have been identified as pilot schools because they meet the criteria in terms of infrastructure, qualification of teachers, the availability of instructional materials, and a venue for administering the examination. This is a good start, but we want to see the trend continue so that the day will come when all high schools that sit the LSHSCE will be able to take the WASSCE.

At the same time, we must admit to ourselves that our current curriculum does not reflect the scope recommended by WAEC. It covers only nine academic subjects, a far cry from the academic, vocational and technical subjects in which WASSCE candidates are tested. Because of our system, Liberian students attending trade and technical schools are not tested in the areas in which they excel. In other words, we lack the wide range of options and the diversified curriculum available in other WAEC Member Countries. This, too, must change. To create a level playing field, Liberian students must have access to a diversified education in which they can be tested and receive credit for their talents and saleable skills.

It is time for Liberia to get on board to create the necessary education environment to enable it to fully benefit from its association with the WAEC. We, therefore, look to the Council to partner with us in carrying out the needed education reform that will represent the interest of the learner and be relevant to the needs of the country. Reform of the current system will produce a diversified curriculum – of academic, vocational, technical and specialized training – that will accommodate all of our children. Such a curriculum will fit our Poverty Reduction Strategy to “Lift Liberia,” and will better prepare Liberian students to sit international examinations conducted by the Council.

Once we achieve that level, we will be able to declare that Liberia is enjoying the full benefit of its membership in the WAEC. Our country will then be in a position to participate in the International Excellence/Merit Awards by producing outstanding students such as the three being honored here today. I congratulate them, and wish them well in achieving their future aspirations.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I return to the question of whether the West African Examinations Council is fulfilling its mission to its Members. Reports from the sub-region continually cite instances of cheating and other forms of examination malpractice in the conduct of the Council’s examinations. We call upon WAEC to ensure that credible examinations are administered in Member Countries, so that the certificates it issues will be internationally accepted. Liberia wants to benefit from its WAEC membership, but we also want the certificates our students receive to have credibility abroad.

At the same time, schools and parents must inculcate in students the virtue of honesty. Honest students grow up to be honest public servants who contribute to the development of their country, not to defrauding it. Education must therefore play a crucial role in producing good citizens with high moral authority. This means that all stakeholders in education must ensure that cheating, and the selling and buying of grades, should be totally eradicated in the schools.

On the matter of financing, we are mindful of our annual contribution to the funds of the Council's Headquarters, and are also endeavoring to eliminate our arrears to the organization. As to our financial responsibility for the upkeep of the WAEC Liberia National Office, our Budget Bureau has requested WAEC Liberia to prepare a separate budget and to defend it. That process is under way, and our Government will meet our obligations, especially now that the impact of the global economic crisis, which hit us hard in 2009, appears to be over.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, let me wish you success in your deliberations this week. We look forward to hearing about the status report on Liberia with respect to the WASSCE. Furthermore, we look to the day when Liberia can take full advantage of its membership in the Council. We therefore challenge WAEC to ensure that Liberia enjoys its full membership by participating in all educational reforms that are common to the Member Countries and are relevant to our national development agenda.

I now have the honor to formally declare open this 58th Annual Council Meeting of the West African Examinations Council, and to wish all of you well.

I thank you.