

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE UNIVERSITY
IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

REMARKS

BY

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**ON THE OCCASION
OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE THIRTEENTH PRESIDENT
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LIBERIA**

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On this auspicious occasion marking the Inauguration of the Thirteenth President of the University of Liberia, I am pleased to respond to the request of the University that I speak, in fulfillment of my customary duty as the Visitor of the University of Liberia, on the significance of the University in national development.

In this respect, I would like to outline the significance of the University in our national development by tracing its origins, contributions, challenges and prospects for our national reconstruction, development and renewal.

As you can observe in the brief history of the University of Liberia in the back of this program, UL traces its origins to

Liberia College. Liberia College was incorporated by an Act of the Legislature of Liberia in December 1851. The University of Liberia, therefore, is the second oldest institution of higher learning in West Africa---- second in rank to Furah Bay College, now the University of Sierra Leone. The Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia laid the Cornerstone and financed the first building on January 25, 1858. Underlying this effort was the belief that: "The Republic of Liberia ought to have within itself the means of educating its citizens for all the duties of public and private life."

Professor Simon Greenleaf, the Harvard College law professor who drafted Liberia's Independence Constitution of 1847, led the effort to establish Liberia College.

In 1862, the first President of our Republic, Honorable Joseph Jenkins Roberts, was inaugurated as the first President of Liberia College. With Roberts and two professors--- the Revs. Alexander Cromwell and Professor Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden-- and seven students, Liberia College opened its doors in February 1863.

For most of the next 90 years, the college struggled with great obstacles to maintain its existence and integrity. As the sovereignty of the Liberian state remained challenged, so was uncertainty about the survival of Liberia College. The college was forced to close its doors on at least three separate occasions during this period. The Liberian State and the College managed to survive, however. Graduates were few, but

the role that the leadership of the college played in Liberian society was significant, as were the contributions of its graduates.

Philanthropists, beginning with the Trustees of Donation for Education in Liberia, provided a welcome, but limited resource for the College until the Tubman era (1943-71), when financial resources became available to the Liberia State, following the successful cultivation of rubber and the discovery of iron ore deposits in Liberia.

Favorable prices for these commodities in the 1950s raised Liberian public sector revenues more than eight fold in a decade.

The effects on the larger society of the resulting favorable terms of trade monetized a hitherto barter economy, leading to phenomenal public sector growth. That growth resulted in higher demand in the public sector for managerial and technical labor. Further, the need for capacity in the technical positions established in the new sectors caused the Liberian Government to appreciate the need for higher education through a national university.

Consequently, in 1951, the Legislature of the Republic chartered the University of Liberia.

Whereas Liberia College had been established to prepare the nation's Clergymen and public officials, the national

University among other goals, sought to become a: "...center of learning with high academic standards which is dedicated to the pursuit, promotion and dissemination of knowledge with emphasis on practical knowledge which is immediately useful to economic, social and cultural development needs."

Liberia College and the University of Liberia have made significant impact on the Liberian society. Leaders of the College were frequently the leaders of the nation. In the 1870s, the College's leadership was at the center of national political developments, a fact reflected in President Joseph Jenkins Roberts' retirement from the presidency of the College to assume the presidency of Liberia for the second time in 1876.

Other national leaders who served the College as President included Professor Dr. Edward W. Blyden, the erudite Pan-Africanist scholar, diplomat and political activist, who served as a Secretary of State of Liberia. Liberia's former president Garretson W. Gibson was also President of Liberia College. President Arthur Barclay, the first graduate of Liberia College in 1873, was president of his Alma mater from 1901 to 1902, and again from 1914 to 1917. Arthur Barclay succeeded J.J. Dossen, the future Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Liberia. At the conclusion of his term as President of the College, Barclay was succeeded by Charles D. B. King, who himself served as President of Liberia between 1920 and 1930.

President Charles D. B. King's Secretary of State, Edwin J. Barclay, a graduate of Liberia College in 1903, succeeded him as President of Liberia. Edwin Barclay, as King's Secretary of State, negotiated the Firestone Plantations Agreement of 1926.

Leaders, graduates and former students of the University of Liberia also contributed significantly to African development. University and College graduates, who served the nation, also served Africa and the larger international community. Prior to Ghana's independence in 1957, Liberia was the foremost activist promoting and financing the Africa independence movement. From Nmandi Azikwe to Sam Njoma; from Nelson Mandela to Robert Mugabe; from Julius Nyerere to Jomo Kenyatta; from Ahmed Ben Bella to Ahmed Sekou Toure;

from Hastings Kamuzu Banda, to Kwame Nkrumah and Sir Alhaji Abubakar Tafewa Belewa, each came to consult Liberian leaders; most enhanced their leadership through interaction with Liberia's former Secretary of State J. Rudolph Grimes (Alumnus of Liberia College Class of 1943) and William R. Tolbert (Class of 1934). Most of these leaders were initiated into the fraternity of the University of Liberia honoris causa honor society.

Let me also mention a few of the most important roles Liberian leaders - graduates of the College or the University -played in African affairs. William R. Tolbert, Jr. (Class of '34), as Tubman's special Envoy, was pivotal in ending the Biafran War when his shuttle diplomacy resulted in the famous

meeting in Monrovia between Dr. Azikwe and General Yakubu Gowan. Rocheforte L. Weeks (Liberia College Class of 1944 and President of the University of Liberia from 1959 to 1972) and foreign Minister of Liberia (1972), was a member of Liberia's legal team who appeared before the International Court of Justice in the case against South Africa's illegal occupation of the then Southwest Africa (Now Namibia).

W. Oliver Bright (Liberia College Class of 1956) and D. Franklin Neal (Class of 1952), under Secretary of State Grimes' leadership and supervision, drafted the Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU, now known as the African Union). An unsolicited draft of the Charter submitted as a working document, inspired the proponents, thus ending the fractious division between the Monrovia and Casablanca Powers. Neal also supervised the drafting of the Treaty of League, the agreement that created the Economic Community of West African States, (ECOWAS). A former dean of the

College Business and Public Administration of the University of Liberia, A. Romeo Horton, who became the first Managing Director of the ECOWAS Fund, formed part of the small group that drafted the instrument for establishment of the African Development Bank.

The significant contribution of this institution to national life has continued unabated. During the Liberian civil war, a large number of graduates of the University continued to accept the call to national service.

Many of its alumni, former professors and deans, assumed pivotal roles in the Liberian peace process, including Professors Amos C. Sawyer, and the late Professor Wilton Sankawulo, who served as Interim Heads of State of the Republic.

The civil war has reduced the capacity of the University of Liberia to respond adequately to the production of competitive human resources that can generate and manage sustainable social, economic development activities in Liberia.

The University also experienced extensive damage to its physical plant and facilities during the period of war and civil unrest in the country.

For example, more than 90% of the University's facilities, including computers, books, and typewriters were looted and pillaged. More than three-fourths of its library collections of about 2 million volumes of texts, periodicals and rare books were ruined. 70% of the Main campus's science complex and 50% of the medical dormitories were damaged. The percentage of damaged facilities was as high as 80% in many buildings on the medical campuses while the Fendall campus, where the University had relocated before the war, was

destroyed, the minimum damage done to any single building more than 85%. The University's cadre of 1,400 teaching, research and administrative staff, including 500 internationally trained faculty, substantially dissipated in number to about 307 as a result of the brain drain.

The challenges to restore the University to a quality institution of higher learning are daunting but it must be done. Although we have destroyed and limited facilities we must respond to enrollment that has increased from pre-war level of 9,500 to about 18,000 today.

To address these problems, coupled with our concern for the significance of the University in post-conflict development, I pledge my Administration's support in restoring fully the training and research activities at the University. To complement our support, I invite the thousands of UL alumni at home and abroad, private sector, the diplomatic corps, and

other development stakeholders, to join our effort in rebuilding University of Liberia. We will be counting on their generous and humanitarian support to the University.

In return, I expect the University to be able to assume a leadership role in providing research and analytical inputs to our post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts under the “Lift Liberia Program” otherwise known as the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

In these days of global economic meltdown, and the resulting national budgetary constraints, I advise the Board of Trustees and the University Administration to remain steadfast in the capital campaign started by the previous administration. I understand the University now has US\$2.3 million in its

Endowment fund that is managed in the United States by the Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia.

Let me thank the Trustees for this and other fund raising support to the University.

At the same time, I would like to thank the over fifteen cooperating universities, other institutions and Governments in Africa, Europe, Asia and the United States that are helping the University's resource mobilization and training.

The Government of the People's Republic of China stands out with its contribution of US\$22 million grant that is now financing the construction of a new University campus at

Fendell. This was a clear decision made by this Administration in keeping with the commitment to improve higher education.

This was a clear decision despite other alternative claims such as the renovation of the Executive Mansion. At the same time, the Chinese Government has already constructed an engineering lab, a soil-testing lab and a computer lab at the UL Fendall Campus.

The US Government in a spirit of cooperation, is preparing and equipping the Engineering Building at Fendall for which we are very grateful.

We also welcome the 4 million Euros grant of the Government of Italy, which will be used to assist with the reconstruction of the A. M. Dogliotti College of Medicine of the University of Liberia.

The University today is rebuilding after a civil crisis, although it remains understandably, a shadow of its most recent past. However, new hopes have been awakened by its new Strategic and Endowment Plans and its new leadership.

Let us all do our part – students, professors, administrators, leaders in ensuring that the University of Liberia produce graduates who can compete professionally anywhere in the world, and who are ready to join in the building and management of our nation.

I thank you!