

**ANNUAL MESSAGE DELIVERED BY H.E JOSEPH NYUMA BOAKAI, SR
PRESIDENT OF LIBERIA**

To the 55th Legislature
Monday, January 27, 2025

“Rescue to Development: Implementing the ARREST Agenda”

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, and Members of the House of Representatives,
Madam Pro Tempore, and Members of the Senate
Associate Justices, and Members of the Judiciary,
Madam Kartumu Y. Boakai, First Lady of the Republic of Liberia
Madam Dean and members of the Cabinet,
Mr. Doyen and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Heads and Officials of Political Parties,
Prelates and Members of Religious Organizations,
Our International and Local Partners,
Traditional Leaders, Chiefs, Elders,
My Fellow Liberians, Distinguished Ladies, and Gentlemen.

We thank God Almighty, the Preserver of our Nation, and are grateful for His blessings upon us over the past 12 months and nearly two centuries of nationhood.

As our world continues to confront vexing challenges, some existential, we must strive for a better, more peaceful, sustainable, and inclusive global community.

Permit me to take this moment to express profound thanks and heartfelt gratitude to you, the people of Liberia, for your unwavering commitment to the peace and stability of our beloved country. Your dedication to keeping the peace reflects our conviction that progress must be grounded in unity and national solidarity.

Similarly, I once more extend my deepest gratitude for the trust you have placed in me by electing me to serve as your President. As I carry the weight of your confidence, and I do not take this responsibility lightly. With your

continued support, we will work together to create the conditions necessary to sustain peace and enhance the well-being of all Liberians.

Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members of the Legislature, we are here today in keeping with Article 58 of the Liberian Constitution, which mandates the President to deliver an annual message outlining the legislative agenda, report on the state of the economy, and the general affairs of the Republic.

A year ago, we addressed the citizens of this republic through you, following an epoch-defining transition that captivated the democratic world.

At that time, we stood within the revered walls of the Capitol Building, an enduring symbol of our democracy bestowed upon us by our forebears.

Now, a year after that historic transition, we face a MOMENT OF TRUTH that our democracy can be threatened by those who oppose our steady progress. However, the fact that we are reporting on our stewardship, here today, on the grounds of the People's House —recently damaged by fire—highlights the resilience of the Liberian people.

I assure you that the security of the state and the sanctity of our Republic, though may be assailed, may be threatened; however, it can never be broken. It will be preserved.

Likewise, the sacrifices made by generations who have worked tirelessly to preserve our democracy for nearly two centuries will not go in vain.

No one's personal ambition can ever outweigh the importance of our peace and security! This rescue train is moving, and I urge those harboring mental reservations to hop on board and let us proceed with the business of the Liberian people together.

Compatriots, when we assumed leadership, we did so with a clear agenda, fully aware that the journey ahead would not be easy. We started with a 100-day plan to implement immediate measures aimed at addressing the people's needs and aspirations, providing relief from years of hardship and uncertainty.

Even with limited resources, we made real progress in many areas after the first quarter of last year. We improved public sector accountability and worked on road infrastructure while addressing issues in agriculture, health, education, technology, and drug abuse, alongside key legislation.

We recognize the immense challenges that lie before us, and though many problems persist, our country stands in a better place today than when we first began. I have dedicated countless hours to the welfare of the Liberian people, and with your unwavering support, we remain optimistic about the future promise of our nation. It is our faith in that promise that drives our vision for progress

The Legislative Agenda

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, Madam President Pro-Tempore, and esteemed members of the Fifty-Fifth Legislature,

As we come to fulfill our constitutional duty, I commend each of you for your hard work, particularly in passing eleven legislations and one joint resolution.

The passage of the Act authorizing the government to spend \$41.3 million in February 2024, pending the approval of the budget, demonstrates your commitment to addressing urgent needs and funding development across all sectors.

However, we must act swiftly on the outstanding proposals before us—the Presidential Transition Bill, the National Tourism Bill, and the Local Government Bill, among others.

We also urge your prompt attention to the Bank-Financial Institutions and Bank-Financial Holding Companies Act of 2024 and the new Zoning Law, that will impact the national budget, six financing agreements to support economic growth, and two bills aimed at improving education and the tax system.

To empower our young people and equip them with the skills necessary to meet national needs, we propose the Liberia Youth Service Program (LYSEP)

and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Commission Act of 2024.

Looking ahead, I will be submitting new legislative proposals, including the Amended Payment Systems Act, the Liberia Insurance Regulatory Commission Act, and the Revised Code of Conduct for Public Officials. Additionally, we will propose reforms for state-owned enterprises through the establishment of the State-Owned Enterprises Authority of Liberia (SEAL).

These proposals are designed to improve governance, foster growth, promote transparency, and empower our citizens, paving the way for a better future for all. Delays in acting on them could jeopardize the success of ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID).

In the year under review, we also issued 14 Executive Orders addressing the urgent needs of the government, including those establishing the Office of War and Economic Crimes Courts (WECC) and the National Railway Authority.

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, Madam President Pro-Tempore, and members of the Fifty-Fifth Legislature, Article 3 of our constitution describes our government as a Republican with three separate and coordinate branches. We must strengthen cooperation and dialogue across all branches of government with transparency and mutual respect. We must work together as partners in governance, united by our common goal of improving the lives of the Liberian people.

We must, therefore, remain focused on our shared goal of progress and prosperity for the Republic.

The State of the Economy

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, Madam President Pro-Tempore, and esteemed members of the Legislature;

Allow me to give you some perspectives to further understand where we are today. We inherited an economy in steep decline, with Liberians facing

unprecedented hardships including rising unemployment, inflation, and growing inequality.

Before our administration, growth had slowed to just 4.6 percent, while inflation surged to double digits at 10.1 percent, driven largely by rising food and fuel prices.

The current account deficit (at the time), had worsened to 26.4 percent of GDP, international reserves were dangerously low at just 2.1 months of import cover, and our debt burden had ballooned to \$2.5 billion, or 54.6 percent of GDP. Civil servants were facing extreme hardship due to pay “harmonization” and delayed salary payments, leaving them vulnerable to payday lenders and informal financial schemes like Susu clubs.

We simply did not just recognize these challenges and their impact on our citizens; we took decisive action to increase salary of health workers, the police, and teachers. We have taken steps necessary to restore economic stability; and have made good progress.

In 2024, our economy demonstrated resilience and steady growth, with a revised real GDP growth rate of 5.1%. Key sectors driving this growth include mining, agriculture, fisheries, and services. Strategic investments in infrastructure and energy development, supported by international partners such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the European Union, and USAID, further bolster this expansion.

We have managed inflation prudently, reducing it to 7.7% by the end of 2024, down from 10.1% in 2023, thanks to sound fiscal and monetary policies. We expect inflation to decrease further to 6.0% in 2025.

The country's international reserves have improved to US\$458.9 million, and the Liberian dollar has appreciated by 4.7% against the US dollar. The Central Bank has reduced the monetary policy rate from 20% to 17%, boosting confidence in the financial system. As a result, private sector credit has increased by 9.1%.

Efforts to strengthen financial governance are underway, focusing on reducing operational costs and addressing audit recommendations. Our

participation in the IMF's Extended Credit Facility (ECF) program will help rebuild reserves, strengthen fiscal policy, and enhance domestic revenue through improved tax collection and streamlined exemptions.

We have also made progress in modernizing financial systems, improving access to finance for micro, small, and medium enterprises (SMEs), and increasing financial inclusion, which now covers 52% of the adult population.

Implementing the National Electronic Payment Switch (NEPS) and the transition to a cashless economy further demonstrate our commitment to a stable, inclusive, and resilient economy.

The insurance sector is also being strengthened, with reforms underway to establish an independent Insurance Commission.

The establishment of Special Economic Zones will further diversify the economy, promote job creation, and foster inclusive development.

Honorable Legislators, over the past year, my administration has focused on transforming Liberia's investment climate. We are implementing policy changes to attract investment, including simplifying regulations, reducing red tape, and strengthening legal frameworks while ensuring social protection and local empowerment.

We have engaged both domestic and international investors, showcasing Liberia as a land of untapped opportunities. While some key agreements are still pending, I am pleased to report that we are actively negotiating with major multinational companies in energy, mining, agriculture, infrastructure, and technology. Once finalized, these negotiations are expected to bring over \$3 billion in investments to our economy.

Looking ahead, we anticipate a promising medium-term outlook, with expected growth rates of 5.8% in 2025.

We successfully passed the 2025 national budget in the amount of US\$880.7 million before the start of the fiscal year—the first time this has happened in the post-war period. Passage of the budget before the start of the fiscal year

will also make the execution of the national budget more predictable and efficient.

For many years, the government neglected to remit County Development and Social Development Funds to the counties, depriving citizens of essential resources for local governance and development. However, we have begun reversing this trend by ensuring that these funds allocations for 2024 were duly disbursed to the counties.

Moving forward, we will continue to ensure that counties receive these vital resources to improve the well-being of their citizens.

Also, for the first time in years, the government remitted to the Road Fund all road fund-related revenues deposited in the Consolidated Fund, thus enabling the implementation of several road rehabilitation and maintenance works during the year.

The Government's ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID), together with the County Development Agendas, will help propel these efforts forward.

Fellow citizens, while we have yet to reach optimal levels, our ongoing efforts will improve the livelihoods of all Liberians.

Despite global trends affecting commodity supply and prices, we have seen consistent declines in the costs of essential commodities, including rice and petroleum products. The price of 25kg IR64 parboiled rice was reduced within the first two months of our leadership.

In addition, we successfully implemented measures to reduce pump prices, lowering the price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) by 12.53%, from \$4.47 in January to \$3.91 in December 2024.

In FY 2024, in the face of global challenges, Liberia made remarkable progress in domestic revenue mobilization.

We collected just over \$734 million in total revenue, out of which, domestic revenue collection stood at an impressive \$695.3 million, a 12% growth over

the previous year. This achievement marks the highest domestic revenue collection in our nation's history.

On the expenditure side, we spent a total of US\$661.4 million to execute the government's functions and projects

To strengthen progress, we have implemented needed tax reforms, introducing the Value-Added Tax (VAT) in April 2024 to replace the outdated Goods and Services Tax (GST).

We are also investing in digital tax administration and building a state-of-the-art customs inspection facility at the Freeport of Monrovia to increase efficiency and expand our tax base.

These interventions and reforms align with regional standards, improve tax compliance, and are expected to create a more stable revenue stream for the future.

Liberia is on a path toward greater self-reliance, ensuring the sustainability of our core programs for years to come.

The Roberts International Airport, a vital gateway to Liberia and a potential driver of economic development has faced operational challenges. However, under this administration, we have charted a new course, making significant strides to unlock its promise as a regional hub.

To enhance safety and operations at the airport, we have invested in additional fire trucks, backup generators, and navigational aids. Ongoing engagements with developers are focused on expanding the airport and improving its infrastructure and management. These initiatives instill confidence among global airline operators and travelers, reflecting our commitment to positioning Liberia as an attractive destination for global business and travel.

Recently, we welcomed Ethiopian Airlines, which connects Liberia to over 150 global destinations and reduces air travel costs to key markets, including the USA, Europe, and Dubai. We are also in advanced discussions with carriers like Qatar Airways to establish an air service agreement.

Economic Relations with Bilateral and Multilateral Partners

My Government has worked tirelessly to rebuild trust with international financial institutions and the donor community. In 2024, we secured a US \$210 million financing package from the IMF's Extended Credit Facility (ECF) to address macroeconomic imbalances and improve debt sustainability from 2024 to 2027.

Our inclusion in the ECF has unlocked support from both multilateral and bilateral partners. The World Bank provided \$60 million in support, US\$40 million of which was budget support and the balance of US\$20 million went to a Special Disaster Fund for Liberia to be administered by Liberia.

The World Bank has also pledged \$40 million in budget support for this year and 2026. We secured a \$60 million grant from the European Union for 2025-2027, while the African Development Bank provided \$40 million for road projects.

During the period under review, Liberia also received \$398.2 million in off-budget Official Development Assistance for critical sectors such as health, agriculture, and infrastructure.

I am pleased to inform you that our bilateral relations have secured a commitment from the Government of the United States for Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact eligibility. This is a significant achievement as it potentially exposes Liberia to substantial financial support in its development when completed in a couple of years.

This milestone reflects confidence in the steps we are taking as a nation, particularly in promoting transparency, making sound economic decisions, and strengthening governance.

National Development Plan

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, and Members of the Legislature, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Liberia’s developmental challenges are historical, yet our current national circumstances dictate urgent action. Upon coming to office, my Government immediately began forming a new national development plan and County Development Agendas (CDAs) for the next five years.

I am pleased to report that the plan and fifteen County Agendas have been meticulously developed and validated by stakeholders across the country. They received strong endorsement from the Cabinet, the National Steering Committee, and our international partners, leading to a successful launch on January 15, 2025. This initiative, known as the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID), is built on the foundations of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development and the Agenda for Transformation.

The AAID is set to cap Vision 2030, Liberia’s ambitious goal of becoming a more capable and developmental state, ultimately achieving lower-middle-income status.

The ARREST Agenda aims to drive economic transformation through diversification, focusing on agriculture, road development, and infrastructure. It emphasizes the rule of law, improved governance, and anti-corruption. The Agenda also seeks to invest in human capital by transforming the education system, fostering technology and innovation, prioritizing public health and sanitation, and promoting tourism and environmental sustainability.

The total estimated cost of this transformative development plan is \$8.4 billion. Of this total, 60 percent of the funding will come from the government and international donors, with the remaining from private investment.

The success of the AAID and the County Development Agendas will also depend on the active participation of our youth. We are dedicated to making available what they need, including the opportunities necessary to unlock their full potential.

The State of the Republic

Sector Challenges and Interventions: Advancing Social and Economic Development for Improved Livelihoods

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, Madam President Pro-Tempore, esteemed members of the Legislature, Associate Justices, and fellow Liberians,

When we took office a year ago, we were given the mandate by the Liberian people to steer the nation toward progress and development. It is often said Liberia's challenges stem from the state of its institutions, and that our country's crisis is fundamentally a crisis of governance.

We cannot speak about the state of the Republic only in terms of the material conditions of the people—the so-called “bread and butter” issues. We must go beyond policy to address the deeper social and political dynamics that affect us; the undercurrent issues that run deep in our society, including addressing historical social cleavages that tend to divide us and create tensions.

We are one people with a common destiny as a nation, and therefore old cleavages based on political, economic, social, and cultural lines, and other stereotypes are adversarial to the values of an equitable society. This means divisions based on religion, social status, literacy and illiteracy, gender, and politics must not be allowed to divide us and determine how we live as a people.

Having come from a difficult past, we must seek to reconcile as a people and embark on nation-building, with a common national aspiration to serve as guardrails against social tensions and conflicts.

In this regard, I call on our friends on the other side of the political divide, including the opposition parties to join us in fostering a government of inclusion. Our democracy should not be defined by elections where the winner is perceived to have taken all. Instead, our path should not be about the next election but the next generation. We must embrace genuine unity and reconciliation.

Today, I am pleased and proud to report that, despite the challenges we inherited, we have made meaningful progress in key sectors.

Agriculture: A Path to Prosperity

As an agrarian economy with vast resources, Liberia has immense potential for large-scale agriculture that will create jobs, feed our people, and strengthen our economy. However, this vital sector has not received the attention it deserves.

Over the past year, we have taken significant steps to advance agriculture and enhance self-sufficiency. To help reduce our reliance on rice imports, we cultivated over 4,000 hectares of rice. This year, we aim to double our efforts by cultivating an additional 6,000 hectares.

We are constructing five mechanization centers in Bong, Lofa, Margibi, Montserrado, and Nimba counties to enable farmers to access essential machinery for improved production. Progress is underway in mechanizing cassava cultivation, aimed at both consumption and starch export.

We have directed substantial support towards cocoa and oil palm production, resulting in over 10,000 hectares of cocoa cultivation and investments in palm oil agribusiness. We are also in the process of establishing a palm and vegetable oil refinery to meet the demands of commercial production.

My Administration has increased the agricultural budget by over 200% compared to previous years. Our national agriculture plan highlights the value chain, with dedicated funding to enhance agribusiness and create jobs.

To combat food insecurity and support vulnerable populations, our agriculture policy emphasizes humanitarian efforts through the Food Security and Nutrition Cluster. We have launched the Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey to assess food security in our communities.

To foster innovation and growth in the agricultural sector, we successfully hosted the National Agriculture Fair in Kakata, Margibi County, which will now be reactivated as an annual event, with the next one scheduled in Nimba County in 2025.

Road Infrastructure Development

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, and Members of the Legislature, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A top priority for my Administration is the development of our road infrastructure, essential for convenient travel, access to services, and boosting commerce. The poor state of our roads has long contributed to rural neglect and stunted our development. It is unacceptable that, out of 13,000 kilometers of the proposed road network, only 1,600 kilometers are paved.

Improving road connectivity is a cornerstone of our development agenda.

In the past year, we delivered on our promise to recondition and maintain major road corridors within the first 100 days. We have continued to maintain 783 kilometers of major roads nationwide, making key routes such as Brewerville to Bopolu, Voinjama to Foya, Foya to Mendikorma, and Zwedru to Kanweaken passable, resulting in reduced commodity prices.

Since January 2024, we expanded the RIA Road Project from 8 to 20 kilometers of paved roadway. The Sanniquellie to Logatuo Road Project is now 85% complete, with 42 kilometers paved, while the Saclepea to Tappita Road Project has reached 50% completion.

With financing from the World Bank's Rural Economic Transformation Project (RETRAP), we completed the biodiversity study on the Tappita to Zwedru corridor, including Toe Town to Zwedru. We have also secured financing and finalized designs for key corridors including Zwedru to John Davies Town, Putuken to Kelipo, and Barclayville to Sasstown to Klowne.

In addition, we are happy to announce that paving of the Medina to Robertsport road will commence in March of this year.

To enhance safety and vibrancy in Monrovia, we have expanded public spaces by creating alleys, clearing drainage ditches, and installing solar streetlights.

In this first quarter of 2025, we anticipate progress on the Tubman Boulevard overpass bridge project.

Looking ahead, we plan new bridge works and civil constructions on major corridors, ensuring further connectivity and infrastructure development across Liberia.

Mines and Energy

Our natural resources should be a source of inclusive development.

We have taken decisive actions to combat illicit mining, address environmental degradation, and rebuild public confidence.

Honorable Speaker and distinguished members of the 55th Legislature, I am pleased to report that we have received a mineral resource survey report from the Government of the People's Republic of China. This report provides new insights into Liberia's mineral resource potential and represents the most comprehensive scientific investigation conducted in over five decades. We extend our gratitude to the People's Republic of China for funding this important project.

The Ministry of Mines and Energy has already analyzed the data from this survey, and the results indicate a significant shift away from the country's previous sole focus on iron ore, diamonds, and gold. We have discovered lithium, neodymium, silver, nickel, zinc, uranium, chromium, lead, tin, cobalt, niobium (coltan), tantalum, manganese, copper, zirconium, and monazite, amongst others.

I have instructed the Ministry of Justice to act lawfully and promptly to address claims concerning the Mount Blei Iron Ore deposit in Nimba County.

The Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC) has been returned to its statutory structure. The Corporation successfully negotiated additional electricity imports from Cote d'Ivoire and reduced electricity tariffs for Bong and Nimba Counties.

Construction of a 20-megawatt solar power plant in Harrisburg, Montserrado County, began in 2024. This project is expected to be completed by October 2025.

Our plan is to electrify 100,000 households every year using both grid and renewable energy sources. Our goal is to achieve a 75% access rate by 2030 and eliminate the existing urban-rural disparity. We believe that energy access is essential for unlocking opportunities in agriculture, roads, education, healthcare, and tourism.

The Oil & Gas Sector

We are encouraged by significant oil and gas discoveries in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire in 2021, 2023, and 2024, where substantial deposits were found in geological formations similar to those in Liberia's Harper Basins. Seismic data from our basins have been licensed to major players like Total Energies, Petrobras, and mid-tier companies such as Murphy. The interest from these global energy giants boosts our optimism for oil and gas exploration in Liberia.

Also, Liberia is collaborating with neighboring countries to complete the Africa Atlantic Gas Pipeline. My Government is committed to facilitating its passage through our territory, integrating Liberia's energy infrastructure with renewable sources to meet domestic and export needs, and advancing cleaner energy solutions for our country.

Telecommunication, Connectivity, and Digital Transformation

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislature,

In today's globalized world, advancements in telecommunications and digitization offer endless opportunities for social and economic benefits.

Recognizing this, my Government is committed to expanding access to affordable, quality digital infrastructure and telecommunication services to drive economic growth.

During the past year, the Government made significant progress in reforming Liberia's telecom sector. For the first time, we have implemented regulations that provide clarity and transparency for mobile network services, including mobile money and value-added innovations.

We are also on the verge of enabling interconnectivity between mobile money providers, allowing citizens to transfer funds across networks. These measures promote fair competition and enhance consumer protection.

Last year, we launched a Digital Transformation initiative focused on digital literacy programs to train young Liberians in various skills. I am pleased to announce that we have trained over 10,000 young people across all 15 counties and empowered 50 teams with seed funding to start digital businesses. We also awarded four-year degree scholarships to 15 participants, each representing a county.

In the next five years, the private sector plans to invest over \$300 million in the telecom sector to enhance services and foster innovation as part of Liberia's Digital Transformation agenda.

Two operators are being licensed for cross-border connectivity and roaming agreements with Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Ghana, which will lower telecommunications costs for travelers.

Additionally, the recently approved Starlink services will provide universal internet access to rural and underserved communities, protecting them from disruptions like previous ACE cable failures that caused significant economic losses.

I am declaring 2025 the Year of Digital Transformation for Liberia to further our progress. In so doing, we aim to develop a knowledge-based economy that transforms agriculture, education, health, e-commerce, and governance, ultimately enhancing livelihoods and contributing to a broader digital economy.

Education

Mr. Vice President, Honorable Members of the Legislature,

We cannot reach our ambitious development goals without properly preparing our citizens, especially the youth, through access to quality education. Liberia, once celebrated for its educational system, has seen

standards decline, depriving many of a fundamental right—education is not a privilege.

In 2024, we inherited an educational sector faced with significant challenges: \$2 million in scholarship arrears, poorly qualified teachers, and inadequate infrastructure. Many public schools had deteriorated, with several projects delayed or abandoned.

To address these issues, we committed \$1 million to clear scholarship arrears, including West African Senior School Examination (WASSCE) fees, with over half a million already paid. We assessed 14 counties, validated the teaching workforce, and are transitioning qualified volunteer teachers into the system.

We launched a \$75 million foundational learning project with USAID, focusing on reading and math for third graders, and equipped 156 public schools with digital learning platforms and solar power.

New policies, such as the National School Quality Standards and the Center for Excellence, will ensure high educational standards.

At the primary level, we are launching the "One Child, One Chair" initiative to address the shortage of chairs for schoolchildren nationwide.

At the tertiary level, we have assessed the need for renovating the University of Liberia's facilities and initiated transformational leadership efforts to build the university's endowment, enhancing its national and global effectiveness as a center of academic excellence in the coming years.

We have taken deliberate steps to combat hunger and food insecurity in schools by allocating one million United States dollars to the school feeding program for primary schools.

Our government's interventions and investment in the education sector in the coming year, will enhance education delivery, giving our children the opportunities they deserve for a brighter future.

Health

Mr. Vice President, Honorable Members of the Legislature,

Health and sanitation are central to my Administration's priorities, forming a key part of the ARREST Agenda. In my first annual message, we committed to addressing both historical and emerging challenges in the health sector, ensuring access to quality healthcare for our people.

Despite significant hurdles, we have made notable progress. Today, we are pleased to report that public health centers in all 15 counties have received essential medicines, and the Community Pharmacy initiative is being piloted nationwide.

Maternal and child mortality rates have decreased, with child vaccination rates rising from 64.9% to 73% in 2024. We have also seen improvements in the tuberculosis treatment success rate.

However, drug and substance abuse remains an epidemic. As a result of the danger and wide-ranging impact on our society, we declared drug and substance abuse as a health emergency and a threat to national security.

To date, we have made steady progress in raising awareness and preventing drug abuse. To demonstrate our commitment, my Vice President and I led by example by undergoing drug tests.

Several at-risk youth have completed rehabilitation and reintegrated into society. Notably, we acquired 50 acres in Bensonville, Montserrado County, where preconstruction activities have begun for a Neuropsychiatric Hospital to treat mental health and substance use disorders.

A Regional Diagnostic Center is under development in Gbalatuah, Bong County, with 38.7 acres secured and preconstruction underway. This center will enhance diagnostic services, particularly in rural Liberia. We intend to establish three additional regional diagnostic centers across the country.

We are advancing several health infrastructure projects, including eight of fifteen staff housing units in Zwedru nearing completion. There are 23 ongoing infrastructure projects such as the construction and renovation of

hospitals and health centers in Zwedru, Barclayville and other parts of the country. In addition, six oxygen plants have been commissioned in Montserrado (at JFK), Lofa, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, and Grand Kru.

We are pleased to announce that, with the support of the Chinese Government, we have broken ground for the construction of a \$16 million National Clinical and Diagnostic Laboratory at the 14-Military Hospital in Margibi County.

On sustainable health financing, we are making progress with the National Social Health Insurance Scheme, and a bill to create the National Health Equity Fund for Universal Health Coverage will soon be submitted for your consideration.

As part of a groundbreaking health initiative, we are addressing cardiovascular issues in Liberia. In collaboration with the University of Ghana Medical Centre (UGMC), we are establishing a state-of-the-art Cardiothoracic Center at John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital (JFK). This partnership emphasizes cross-training medical professionals, equipping advanced facilities, and performing life-saving surgeries.

A notable success is the open-heart surgery performed on 64-year-old Mr. Forkpa Korvah at UGMC, with all expenses covered by my administration. By the Grace of God, Mr. Korvah is here today to share this moment of triumph. (Mr. Korvah, please stand to be acknowledged). **Thank you!**

By mid-2025, our goal is to perform some of these critical surgeries locally at JFK, significantly improving access to cardiac care for all Liberians.

Sanitation

Poor sanitation, inadequate clean water supply, and aging infrastructure, especially in Monrovia and other cities, have long posed challenges. Forty-two percent of our population still lacks basic toilet facilities. Addressing these public health concerns is a key priority in our development agenda, and significant progress has been made in the past year.

We successfully repaired the 1-million-gallon city reservoir in Central Monrovia with support from the World Bank, restoring water supply for the first time in 10 years. Improvements include a new chlorine dosing unit at the White Plains Water Treatment Plant, rehabilitation of the Caldwell Booster to enhance supply in multiple areas, and the expansion of water systems in Bushrod Island, Rock Hill, Soul Clinic, and New Georgia.

We are replacing the 36-inch pipe on the main transmission line from White Plains to Monrovia with a 48-inch pipe. A new water system is under construction in Bopolu City, set for dedication in February. We plan to connect an additional 3,000 homes in Monrovia and Paynesville this year.

With USAID support, we are conducting the feasibility of rehabilitating the Kakata and Buchanan water systems. This year, we will construct water systems for Pleebo and Greenville and rehabilitate the Zwedru system. Additionally, over 1,700 new and reconnected customers have benefited from ongoing sewerage improvements.

Social Protection: Gender and Children

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, Madam President Pro-Tempore, and esteemed members of the Legislature, Associate Justices, and fellow Liberians,

Our country is fortunate to have many qualified and capable women who have challenged traditional job roles. Gender sensitivity and inclusion are high priorities in my administration. Currently, women hold 39% of ministerial positions and 31% of deputy minister positions. This trend continues at the superintendent level, where women make up 40% of all appointments.

While we celebrate these achievements, we must also address the serious issues facing children and battered women in our country. In 2024, our government made significant strides in promoting women's empowerment and protecting children. We launched a National 116 GBV Call Center, which provides a confidential 24/7 platform for survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) to report incidents and access vital services, including counseling and legal assistance.

We also allocated US\$1.8 million to PLAN International for the Liberia Women Empowerment Project, which, with assistance from the World Bank, aims to enhance women's economic empowerment through small business support and address harmful social norms in over 700 communities. The project benefits 36,000 women across several counties.

Regarding social protection, nearly 4,000 impoverished households in Grand Bassa and Grand Kru counties received cash transfers from the Recovery of Economic Activity for Liberia's Informal Sector Employment (REALISE) Project.

The Government disbursed a total amount of LD110,812,770.00 (One Hundred and Ten Million, Eight Hundred Twelve Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy dollars) to vulnerable households. We thank the World Bank for providing a loan for this scheme, as well as the French and other friendly governments.

For children's welfare, we launched the "Support a Child, Save the Future" project after discovering that over 366,000 children were living on the streets. With the help of various partners, we identified more than 5,000 children in Montserrado County for assistance, connecting over 4,000 to financial support for schooling.

Additionally, more than 600 children are enrolled in family strengthening programs, and 702 have been placed in 19 public schools, receiving livelihood support for their caregivers.

Transparency and Accountability

Honorable Members of the Legislature,

A year ago, as we began our stewardship, we declared that the "business-as-usual" approach to governance would be a thing of the past. We remain committed to promoting openness, transparency, and accountability across our government.

In line with this commitment, we have supported the independence of integrity institutions. The General Auditing Commission (GAC) has published results for 60 out of 80 audits, including those conducted before my administration.

Key institutions audited include the Executive Protection Service, the Central Bank, the GoL Consolidated Fund, and the Liberia Telecommunications Authority. Some audits conducted before my tenure revealed serious system weaknesses and millions in unaccounted public funds. My government will continue working closely with the GAC, the National Legislature, and the Ministry of Justice to prevent theft, waste, and abuse.

Unprecedented audits of the Office of the President, the Judiciary, the Office of the Chief Justice, and the Senate demonstrate our collective determination to promote accountability.

Similarly, the Independent Auditing Agency has embedded internal auditors in 91 of 131 spending entities to ensure accountability for public funds. We have appointed the Ombudsman after years of delay and introduced a Performance Management and Compliance System. Cabinet members and agency heads now sign codes of conduct and performance contracts with the President, along with asset declarations. The Vice President and I have declared and published our assets as well as signed the code of conduct.

Mr. Vice President, Madam Senate Pro Tempore, Mr. Speaker, distinguished guests,

Let us address a pressing concern that affects every facet of our society: integrity in governance.

Last year, I spoke candidly about how systemic corruption undermines trust, hinders progress, and tarnishes our reputation. A new beginning is needed—a Liberia where transparency and accountability are the cornerstones of governance. While corruption remains a formidable adversary, we must recognize the progress we have made.

Our determination has led to more transparent systems, established accountability measures, and fostered ethical practices. Citizens are

increasingly aware and willing to speak out against corruption, while leaders are committing to integrity.

Our integrity institutions have unfettered access to the Presidency, reflecting strong political will. Payroll audits across several ministries have removed thousands of ghost names, saving millions. Our actions will not stop at the past; we will institute audits of our expenditures over the past year and address any violations of public trust. Liberians yearn for decisive action against this national menace, and I vow to deliver!

We call on the National Legislature and Judiciary to join us as allies on this patriotic journey. Acting on audit reports and fast-tracking corruption cases will restore public confidence in government.

The Civil Service

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, Madam President Pro-Tempore, and esteemed members of the Legislature, Associate Justices, and fellow Liberians;

In 2024, public service underwent significant reforms focused on increasing accountability and efficiency.

The Employee Status Regularization Project improved payroll integrity and saved over \$8 million. We also introduced National Policy Guidelines for Recruiting Independent Consultants, reducing their numbers from nearly 1,000 to 94 and cutting costs from \$6.1 million to \$1.4 million, saving an additional \$4.7 million. These initiatives foster transparency and enhance public service efficiency.

We conducted a workforce analysis that revealed a skills gap, an aging workforce, and a 31% underrepresentation of women, guiding targeted initiatives for a more diverse and capable workforce.

Key reforms also included reconstituting the Civil Service Board of Appeal, launching a National Civil Service Testing Center, reviewing wage disparities, and improving retirement and pension processes.

In view of this, we call on you, members of the Legislature, to consider the timely passage of the draft bill to fully operationalize the Civil Service Commission in keeping with Article 89 of the Constitution.

Mass Media

On the communication front, the Liberia Broadcasting System is making significant progress on the construction of a new Television and Radio Expansion Complex, which is ahead of schedule. This \$5.5 million project, funded by the People's Republic of China through China Aid, includes a complete refurbishment of the existing infrastructure and the introduction of modern advanced equipment.

Once completed, LBS's radio and television networks will experience a substantial improvement in their ability to inform, educate, and entertain the public.

My Government is dedicated to promoting freedom of the press and fostering an environment where the media can thrive. To support this commitment, operational licenses were issued to 45 new print and electronic media institutions during the review period.

In an age where information is more accessible than ever and social media shapes our agenda, the importance of a responsible press cannot be overstated. As citizens, we must encourage ethical journalism that prioritizes truth and accuracy over sensationalism, as the role of a responsible press in preserving our democracy is indispensable.

Climate Change

As we face the daunting challenges of climate change and global warming, Liberia remains steadfast in advancing environmental sustainability. In 2024, we developed regulations to conserve air, water, and soil. With international climate financing, we are constructing coastal defenses to protect vulnerable areas such as Westpoint and Greenville City from sea erosion.

We have enhanced climate reporting by establishing a meteorological center and a climate-smart lab at the University of Liberia. Our commitment extends

to enforcing environmental laws and signing international agreements to mitigate climate impacts.

Liberia's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are ambitious, aiming for a 64% reduction in emissions by 2030. We are expanding our NDCs to encompass freshwater ecosystems, land rights, and youth involvement, reinforcing Liberia's leadership in the global climate fight.

Positioned to benefit from the carbon market, with over 42% of the Upper Guinean Rainforest under our stewardship, we are developing a legal framework to facilitate participation in these markets. The National Climate Change Steering Committee is leading these efforts with support from key international partners.

Land Governance

Honorable members of the Legislature,

As we address the people today, we focus on the critical issue of land governance. Beyond our citizens, land is one of our most vital resources—a gift from God and our forefathers that offers opportunities for livelihood and economic development through investments. However, Liberia faces escalating land conflicts. Our court systems are overwhelmed with land cases, and headlines highlight disputes between investors and communities, alongside powerful individuals grabbing land from the vulnerable.

Land conflicts in Liberia are rooted in historical grievances, poor governance, and emerging market forces that are increasing pressure on land use. I assure you that we are taking bold steps toward change, ensuring our people receive justice and, more importantly, providing them with the opportunity to make productive use of land and resources.

In 2024, we issued deeds to 24 land-owning communities, securing almost one million acres and benefiting more than 200,000 Liberians. We also imposed a moratorium on public land sales to curb speculative grabs, which will be lifted only after guidelines are established. These efforts aim to enhance tenure security, resolve conflicts, and promote sustainable land

investment throughout Liberia. We will continue to prioritize this crucial effort.

Restoring Liberia's Image: Rebranding and Rebuilding International Relations

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, and Members of the House of Representatives,

Madam Pro Tempore, and Members of the Senate
Associate Justices, and Members of the Judiciary,
Madam Dean and members of the Cabinet,

My Government has given Liberia's standing in the world a top priority following reputational setbacks in the last few years. In the past year, Liberia's foreign policy and external relations have seen many shifts that have lifted the country's image internationally. These steps have begun to restore the country's reputation, repositioning us as a respected actor both regionally and globally.

During the year, we stepped up efforts to establish new bilateral relations while engaging with others to deepen existing relations. Key initiatives have raised Liberia's profile and reinforced our commitment to stability, peace, and economic development.

I am pleased to announce that we established diplomatic relations with six (6) new countries — Barbados, Bahrain, Uzbekistan, Croatia, El Salvador, and Bolivia. We also signed nine (9) new bilateral cooperation agreements with our eastern neighbor Cote d'Ivoire; and signed fifteen (15) new agreements with Morocco in the areas of trade, agriculture, education and cultural exchange, mining, and natural resource governance among others.

Our engagement with the European Union has resulted in a 108 million euros (about 110 million United States dollars) budget envelope, reflecting the international community's confidence in Liberia's future.

Focusing on our home region, Liberia took a leadership role in revitalizing the Mano River Union (MRU) by convening a meeting of ministers of Foreign

Affairs, Finance, and Defense in Monrovia. Subsequently, Liberia negotiated a roadmap with Morocco on behalf of the Subregional Union, leading to an agreement that included funding for the construction of a new MRU Secretariat office.

Within ECOWAS, Liberia has supported efforts to preserve the unity of the Community by behind-the-scenes engagement with the Alliance of Sahel States (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger). These efforts continue.

Since 1961 when Liberia served a half term on the UN Security Council, and 1970 when Liberia's Angie Brooks Randolph served her one-year term as President of the UN General Assembly, Liberia has not held any comparable global governance leadership role. We hope to change this with the launch, at the General Assembly in September 2024, of Liberia's bid for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council 2026-2027 term. I am proud to report that Liberia has secured key endorsements for its candidacy, receiving support from both the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS.

Liberia stood with Ukraine in protecting its sovereignty and has supported a ceasefire in Gaza as well as a return of the UN Agency for Palestine to serve the humanitarian needs of the people in Gaza.

Additionally, we believe our global standing has been enhanced through the reform of our passport system. In a bid to ensure the integrity and international acceptance of our passports, we have canceled and recalled all privileged passports issued over the past six years, a measure that is now being adopted by neighboring countries. This measure ensures that Liberia's passport system is secured, reliable, and trusted worldwide. Furthermore, we have improved the efficiency of passport services for timely and accessible processing for all citizens.

These actions, along with new interim security and screening protocols, have improved the application and processing system. This has resulted in a 60% decrease in passport processing time, safeguarding the integrity of our passport as a reliable global identity for our citizens.

In view of this, I call on all Liberians to join us in making 2025 a year to regain Liberia's global prominence.

The Liberian Diaspora

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, and members of the legislature, My government believes the Liberian Diaspora community is potentially one of the country's important development assets. The diaspora is an extension of our citizenry, having left the homeland in large numbers in the aftermath of the bloody 1980 military coup d'état and the devastating civil war that ensued. When we addressed this body in January last year, we made it clear that "Liberians in the Diaspora have a stake in the future of their country, and my administration will ensure that their contributions to Liberia are institutionalized and fully harnessed."

It is in recognition of this that we have instituted policies and have engaged members of the Diasporan community in the past year across all facets of national life and development. A new program styled the "Annual Year of Return" was designed to organize the yearly visits of Liberians to the motherland in ways that make their stay not only welcoming but also a means to explore opportunities to bond with their compatriots and invest in the development of their country.

As my government proposed last year, a highlight of this engagement will be the holding of the first Liberia Diaspora Conference on National Development in April 2025 in Washington, DC. This conference will provide a platform to discuss, re-engage, and participate in their country's development.

Once again, I would like to commend the Legislature and the previous administration for their work to eliminate the unjust barriers imposed on citizens who have chosen to seek opportunities abroad. I am pleased that the slogan "Once a Liberian, always a Liberian" now holds genuine significance.

Necrology

During the year in review, the nation mourned the loss of some of its prominent citizens. Among the many who transitioned include former Vice

President Bennie D. Warner, former interim Vice President Senator John D. Gray, former Nimba County Senator Prince Y. Johnson, former Montserrado County Senator Joyce Musu Freeman Sumo, former Lofa County Senator Sumo G. Kupee, former Grand Kru County Senator and former President Pro-Tempore of the Liberian Senate Cletus Segbe Wortorson, and esteemed elder Alhaji Amadu Sheriff, among many others. A fuller list will be published.

Conclusion

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, and Members of the House of Representatives,
Madam Pro Tempore, and Members of the Senate
Associate Justices, and Members of the Judiciary,
Madam Dean and members of the Cabinet,

Before I conclude this address, let me invoke another MOMENT OF TRUTH in the supreme interest of our country. Beyond my assessment of the challenges we face, certain intangibles impel my actions as follows:

1. I will propose an action plan to address the state of our national unity.
2. I will propose a review of our Constitution to address shortcomings in our Organic Law
3. We will propose comprehensive electoral reforms to strengthen our electoral process and democratic credentials
4. I will initiate plans for the proper burial of former presidents William R. Tolbert and Samuel K. Doe
5. We will propose a plan to recognize ECOWAS for their vital contributions to maintaining peace and stability during crucial times in Liberia's history
6. We will convene a National Conference on Post-War Infrastructure to address the rebuilding and development of our post-war infrastructure.

We started this journey together with the faith that we can face and address our difficulties, course correct and set a path for a transformed future. Let us with compassion continue to stand united as we move forward, hand in hand, toward a prosperous and inclusive future for our nation. After one year in office, we can confidently say that the STATE OF OUR NATION is better than when we began. Our progress in twelve productive months is just the beginning, and prospects are encouraging.

As we begin to implement and achieve the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development goals this year and in the coming years, we move decidedly and resolutely forward, Thinking Liberia, Loving Liberia, and Building Liberia together.

May God Bless us all and save our Republic.