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Dr. Sawyer Addresses Nigeria's 2016 Annual National Political Summit

Dr. Amos Sawyer, on Monday January 25, 2016 addressed Nigeria's 2016 Annual National



Political Summit, discussing the theme “**Building Positive Political Culture for Sustaining Democracy in Africa: The Case of Nigeria**”. The Summit was graced by three West African Presidents including that of Nigeria - Muhammad Buhari, President John Dramani Mahama of Ghana and Chair of the Summit, and President Allassane Ouattara of Cote d'Ivoire as Special Guests of Honor. Other Summit attendees

include Nigeria's former Presidents Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, and Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, former Nigerian Head of State General Abdulsalami Abubakar, Nigeria's Vice President Yemi Osinbanjo, President of the Senate- Senator Bukola Saraki, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Keynote Speaker Yakubu Dogara among others. The Summit was held in Abuja Nigeria.

Dr. Sawyer observed that Nigeria has made remarkable progress in democratic consolidation and development since its return to democratic rule in May 1999, and commended that country for making significant strides in electoral reforms, including the management of its elections. The holding of free and fair democratic elections and the strengthening of democratic institutions are crucial to assuring good governance and sustained culture of democracy. Nigeria in 2015 (between March 28 – April 11), held its general elections in the midst of terrorism attacks and abductions of peaceful citizens by Boko Haram yet it defied predictions of post-election violence.

Speaking as one who observed the general elections, Dr. Sawyer described it as historic and a “game changer” in that it rekindled good prospects for entrenching a culture of democracy in that country. He observed that after a frenzied period of campaigning and fears of a possible outbreak of massive electoral violence, Nigerians went to the polls, cast their votes in the general elections and consolidated their democracy. Another historic Nigerian development was when former President Good-Luck Jonathan conceded defeat in the Presidential election, and called to congratulate the winner Muhammad Buhari (the incumbent) even before the formal results were announced. Nigeria is among the leading countries in Africa in the quest to entrench a culture of democratic governance, sustain peace, and enhance development in West Africa.

Touching on the importance of the Annual National Political Summit, Dr. Sawyer said the 2016 Annual National Political Summit of Nigeria, provides a platform for continuous dialogue among the political class on strategies for stabilizing and enhancing democracy in Nigeria. According to him, the paths to democratic consolidation in Nigeria, though fraught with complex crises, **portray the gradual deepening of the democratization process and the unlikelihood of democratic reversal or regression into authoritarian rule**. He was quick to note the need for “cautious optimism” as there is a mixed picture in the consolidation of Nigeria's democracy”. It can be recalled that Dr. Sawyer led the African Union Election Mission to monitor Nigeria's 2015 general elections. He believes that the elections results demonstrated an entrenched culture of democracy, and inclusive participation that contributes to peace and security, despite the presence of active terrorism, for many years now, in that country. He congratulated the Independent National

Electoral Commission, INEC leadership for delivering credible elections. Nigeria has also experienced the most military regimes within Africa since the past fifty years.

Dr. Sawyer stressed that much remains to be done in Nigeria to advance and strengthen gender equity in that country. In terms of the number of women in parliament, Nigeria is currently ranked 134 out of 144 countries by the International Parliamentary Union, IPU. After the 2015 elections, the proportion of women in the lower house was 5.6 % (20 out of 360) and 6.5 % in the Senate (7 out of 106). He encouraged Nigeria's leadership to advance gender equity advocacy at home and abroad.

Still on the Summit, Dr. Sawyer said the Political Summit provides a platform for continuous dialogue among the political class on strategies for stabilizing and enhancing democracy in Nigeria. According to him, the Summit is ideally situated for dialogues among Nigerians to enhance understandings of diverse points of view, reduce suspicions and strengthen trust and confidence among political leaders on various national issues. He said the forums can also become mechanisms for reducing legislative gridlock and overcome barriers even before the pressure of "partisanship demands" come to bear in legislative chambers. Dr. Sawyer said *"quite often in African governance, we rush to legislate even before or without broad-based discussions, especially discussions in which the opposite views are fully understood and appreciated by all."*

Among other things Dr. Sawyer pointed out that Nigeria is blessed with what he described as *"highly altruistic and respected"* former leaders of thought, culture, religion and the academy, who together contribute invaluable to peace, reconciliation and the entrenchment of democratic governance both at home and around Africa—especially West Africa.

The Economy

One of Nigeria's major exports is crude oil. Price of this commodity, for more than a decade, continues to either fluctuate or out-rightly drop on the international market. This global economic catastrophe coupled with acts of terrorism have affected the Nigerian economy (Africa's largest), an economy which has overtime enjoyed sustained economic growth of around 7%. Dr. Sawyer also spoke on both issues at the Summit noting that Nigeria's economy is threatened by falling oil prices.

"We do well when we understand security in terms of human security such that the wellbeing of our citizens becomes the focus of our development policies and determine the priorities of our budgets. Here in Nigeria, His Excellency President Muhammadu Buhari has assumed leadership when the economy is in a dire strait. Africa's largest economy, which enjoyed sustained economic growth of around 7% in the last decade and a half, is threatened by falling global oil prices. Although the country is becoming more diversified and services-oriented, the oil sub-sector remains the major source of government revenues."

Dr. Sawyer pointed out that collective efforts are encouraged to diversify Nigeria's economy to reduce the country's exposure to grave economic challenges, militate against social vices that come with such challenges, and strengthen our common sub-regional fight against terrorism.

Terrorism has become a regional menace but Nigeria's leadership in this fight has been described as commendable. Sawyer urged ECOWAS to strengthen the sub-regional strategy and capabilities to fight terrorism, adding "*our security strategy must always be couched within our overall sub-regional strategy for advancing human security through democratic governance and the socio-economic upliftment of our people.*"

Political Culture of Africa

According to Dr. Sawyer, a dilemma to democracy in Africa is **weak political institutions, and therefore** the need to strengthen political institutions in Africa particularly political parties which he described as weak, inchoate, lack ideology, and internal and gender imbalanced. Ruling parties on the other hand, he observed, tend to rely on state resources to exact patronage in order to maintain party organization and management. He identified other weaknesses in African democracies to include "*poor civil society participation; abuse of power by the incumbency and militarized physical violence by agencies of the state to cow the opposition.*" These practices contribute to transforming the politics of some African countries into a zero-sum game.

Earlier, Dr. Sawyer defined political culture to mean the set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process, and provides underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in the political system. He noted that Political Culture is also the product of both the collective history of a political system and the life histories of members of that system thus rooted equally in public events and private experiences.¹

Democracy is the most popular form of governance in Africa today yet the continent is still struggling to ensure that leaders adhere to and abide by democratic tenets and principles needed to assure good governance in their respective countries. Issues such as free and fair elections, tenure of the presidency, media freedom, freedom of expression, equal justice (rule of law) for all irrespective of political ideology, political and participatory governance, respect for basic human rights, social class, gender, age, or disabilities, religious tolerance (freedom of worship), and other freedoms that support democracy are found wanting thereby giving cause for violence and, in many instances, civil unrest/war.

¹http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Political_culture.aspx

Minister Konneh Propagates Support for Vision 2030

The Governance Commission and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, a little over three years ago (December 12, 2012), sponsored a National Vision Conference in Gbarnga Bong County, under the aegis of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, with the intention of bringing Liberians together to inclusively participate in discussions pertaining to Liberia's future. The Conference marked a new beginning of the process of operationalization and implementation of Vision 2030.

Five hundred delegates represented a spectrum of interest groups and stakeholders of Liberia from all 15 Counties (156 administrative districts including the 73 political districts of Liberia) and Liberians within the Diaspora (Africa, Europe, and North America) at that Vision Conference organized by a 21 member Committee. Unlike previous National Visions, that of 2030 captures the aspirations of the people as put forward by them at the Conference and noted in various consultations, is a manifestation of Liberians faith in the future of our country, and our determination, despite our numerous challenges, to achieve our expressed national belief– **“one people, one nation, united for peace and sustainable development.”**

The Vision's 5- page document notes that the Liberian people, in the Gbarnga Vision Declaration, describes us and perceives our country as being an *“economically prosperous people, a socially and demographically harmonious nation united in diversity, a democratic political system, an environmentally beautiful flourishing country, and a country culturally vibrant, and technically innovative.”*

Vision 2030: Liberia's Transformation Process



Though critiques may say otherwise or are hesitant as to the realization and implementation of Vision 2030, Finance and Development Planning Minister Amara Konneh is one of those championing the National Vision 2030, believing that it is the surest developmental framework formulated through painstaking consultations and assures of Liberia transforming into a middle income country status by 2030.

Minister Konneh was quick to add that transforming a post war country like Liberia, a country among the world's poorest, is a formidable undertaking, but commended Liberians for taking this significant step. Minister Konneh spoke at the **Governance Commission's Policy Dialogue on “Vision 2030 and the 2017 Elections: Reaffirming commitment to a common future through Elections” held on January 19, 2017 at the Bella Casa Hotel in Sinkor.** The program was graced by representatives of the National Legislature, and political parties, as well as prospective candidates in the 2017 elections.

It can be recalled that Minister Konneh was among the hundreds of Liberians that attended the 2012 National Vision Conference held in Gbarnga. At the Policy Dialogue, Minister Konneh spoke passionately about what he referred to as the **Liberian aspiration**-“One people, one nation, united for peace and sustainable development” – the National Vision Statement.

Vision 2030 Conference also adopted a complementary agenda for social transformation and a roadmap for national healing, peace building and reconciliation, the Agenda for Transformation

(AfT), which also includes plans for Liberia's economic transformation. Key questions shaping the Liberian agenda include "where do we come from as a country?" "Where are we today as a country?" "Where do we want to go as a people?" "How do we get there?" Vision 2030 addresses these questions, and it is important to note that the Vision (unlike previous Visions that were President – centered) secured the involvement and participation of Civil Society and ordinary Liberians which is believed to have limited cronyism in the country's development framework.

"The integrity of the visioning exercise has also limited the embedding of cronyism in developing the country's development framework, because we went to the people. They were not programmed; they were not paid agents; they did not belong to any political parties; they were the ordinary people in those 156 districts that helped us to attempt to answer these soul searching questions.

According to Minister Konneh, the scope, skill and style of the consultations gave democratic legitimacy to Vision 2030, and that the process encouraged increased voice, participation, accountability, openness and sincerity, (all of which are necessary for nation building) ended the design phase of the Vision exercise, and developed the overarching development strategy for Liberia which spans beyond the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's Administration.

The development agenda of Liberia considers human capacity building as the most important resource for this country, and at the center of both the software and hardware of our national development plan. The Minister observed that Liberia was at a crossroad. He said though government has made small, incremental progress on the hardware "what good is the hardware if it doesn't benefit the people?"

2017 Elections and Post-Conflict Violence

Minister Konneh spoke on a number of issues surrounding the 2017 national elections in Liberia and the formation of political parties. Minister Konneh warned that the use of tribalism and ethnicity to win votes in national elections is a cause for post-election violence. Citing examples from Kenya and Somalia, Minister Konneh emphasized that "tribalism" or the use of ethnic identity by politicians (that have no manifestos) to promote narrow tribal or personal interests has the propensity to fuel post-election conflict. He therefore urged Liberians to guide against what he referred to as "clan" or "tribal" politics come 2017. Post-election conflicts in a number of African countries are examples of the dangers associated with tribal/clan politics and identity, as well as ethnic competition, and underscore the importance of building nations around ideas.

"We're the same people! Vision 2030: "One people, One Nation, United for Peace and Sustainable Development.....Political leaders often exploit these tribal loyalties to promote their personal interests. So tribes are not built on democratic ideas; they thrive on zero-sum competition. Go back to our own history:all the wars we had before. The civil conflict we had here; this just ended civil war; we saw how tribal alliances were masquerading under the national interest, which prolonged our conflict after genuine effort to end it early. Let's not forget that."

Minister Konneh recommended the building of strong democratic institutions in Liberia, and called on all three branches of government, and local county leaders including all chiefs to rally around the National Elections Commission (NEC) to protect Liberia's fragile democracy. He however cautions NEC to be mindful of how it spends funds intended for the 2017 elections. He

recommends that as we push a decentralization agenda, funds should also be invested in educating general town chiefs and other local community leaders about the decentralization process.

He commended the Governance Commission for organizing the Dialogue, particularly one that focuses on our long term aspiration - the National Vision, linking it to the 2017 elections.

Swedish Ambassador Visits Governance Commission

The Governance Commission has been holding discussions with a number of its donors, international and national partners as it works the Commission's new 5 year Strategic Plan. One of such donors is Sweden. Swedish Ambassador accredited to Liberia Madam Lena Nordstrom on Thursday, January 14, 2016 led a delegation to pay an acquaintance visit to the Governance Commission.



Swedish Ambassador Lena Nordstrom in conversation with Dr. Sawyer and GC's staff

The Swedish envoy used the opportunity to reaffirm Sweden's commitment to supporting Liberia's long term development program through its bilateral development assistance in the areas of governance, human rights and gender equality.

At a meeting with Chairman Sawyer, Commissioners and Staff, Ambassador Nordstrom expressed interest in the national decentralization program, National Vision 2030 and how both tie in with Liberia's national development agenda. She noted her government's interest in funding programs that place emphasis on access to basic services, inclusive governance, and security.

Ambassador Nordstrom observed that decentralization will bring tremendous increase in people's participation in decision making process at community level and assure of improved leadership and innovation in local content initiatives.

The Ambassador was accompanied by Program Officer Ellen Swedenmark. Both encouraged GC to take advantage of existing human resource and capacity building programs offered by the Swedish government under its bilateral engagements.

Governance Commission Chairman Dr. Amos C. Sawyer expressed gratitude on behalf of the Commission and recalled Sweden's many positive engagements and roles in Liberia's peace building initiatives. A presentation showcasing the work of the Commission was one of the highlights of the meeting held at GC. It also highlighted future collaborative plans of the Commission in efforts at ensuring participatory inclusive governance, peace and development in Liberia. Dr. Sawyer assured the Ambassador of widening collaborations between GC and Swedish institutions for capacity building opportunities and research work. Dr. Sawyer identified research as critical to policy review and identifying solutions to problems affecting policy implementation.

GC and others Advocate Amendment of 1989 Law Creating Higher Education Commission

The Governance Commission in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) have been consulting on the need to amend the 1989 Act establishing the National Commission on Higher Education. GC spearheaded the holding of a Policy Dialogue on Wednesday January 20, 2016 at the Bella Casa Hotel in Sinkor on the issue. The consultative meeting brought together heads of colleges and universities, representatives of the Legislature, the Ministry of Education, and others interested in (academia and) improving the education sector.



L-R Dr. Micheal Slawon, Prof. Francis Maweah, Anthony Nimely, Albert Coleman and Johnson Gwaikolo

In his opening remarks, Director General of the Commission on Higher Education, Dr. Michael Slawon noted the importance of technology in modern day higher education teaching and learning process, as well as research – for easy understanding of our world. Dr. Slawon observed that globally, emphasis are being placed on curriculum reform to cope with changing realities in higher education sector for the transfer of knowledge and the betterment of our world. He said there were numerous challenges facing the world and that if not timely addressed higher education may not make many differences in shifting behaviors through higher education and sustaining development.

According to Dr. Slawon, the March, 1989 Act creating the Higher education Commission can no longer be used to regulate, monitor, and evaluate the higher education sector responsible to provide capable human resource in relevant disciplines as required by Liberia's transformation agenda. The 1989 Act does not address major challenges that have materialized in post conflict Liberia such as structure, and man-power development needed to assure viability, international competition, and proliferation of institutions of higher learning among others.



The draft Act on the other hand though more concise and comprehensive still needs the input of the sector on regulatory, monitoring and evaluation of capacities that need strengthening to address current challenges. Dr. Slawon noted that the management and regulation of the sector are plagued with more challenges now than in 1989. According to statistics, in 1989, Liberia had a total of 5 institutions of higher learning to compare with 34 of today: three baccalaureate degree granting institutions and one Associate degree granting institution to compare with 8 universities, 8-four year baccalaureate degree granting and 18 associate degree granting institutions in Liberia today.

The 2016 draft Act versus the 1989 Law

The 1989 Act establishing the r national Commission on Higher Education lacks depth, and focuses more on membership, and a little on functions, authority, tenure, program, and quorum. Unlike the 1989 Act, the 2016 draft Act is more comprehensive, and supports the development, regulatory, and support functions of the Commission; ushers in an accreditation system that provides greater guidelines and directions to the system in a participatory manner; and improves adherence to academic norms, standardization of quality, research, and better programming.

Its objective is to establish a regulatory body and facilitate the development of a National Center for the Accreditation of all degree granting institutions in Liberia to guarantee the following:

1. Ensure public trust and confidence in Liberia’s higher education system;
2. Facilitate collaboration between institutions of higher education and the community, and the development of guidelines, regulations, and mechanisms for monitoring adherence to these regulations and guidelines;
3. Facilitate development and processes required for the sustenance of the National Center for Accreditation;
4. Facilitate promotion and development of a “research culture” and conduct of research by scholars on topics that are focused on Liberia’s development agenda.

Functions and Powers

The 2016 draft Act of the NCHE authorizes the Commission to formulate broad guidelines for the establishment of institutions of higher learning, and coordinate and serve as principal liaison between institutions of learning as at post- secondary level; monitor and evaluate all institutions of higher learning; ensure the establishment of institutional structure to be responsible to accredit all institutions of higher learning; approve new and existing programs for funding for national development; ensure financial ability of the institution to support quality education; review existing programs at higher education institutions, and establish priority programs of study based on national needs; develop minimum standards of quality including but not limited to criteria for awarding academic degrees, and the governance of these institutions; draw up qualification for both instructors and administrators; ensure that rules governing admission assure relevance of curriculum to meet national needs; and setting criteria for the evaluation of students and their progress towards graduation among others.

Organization and structure of the Commission

The 1989 Law calls for no less than and no more than 17 members to form part of the Commission. It also advocates two types of membership – permanent and non-permanent. The 2016 draft Act advocates two types of membership also but membership is limited to 15, and no less than 9. The President is expected to appoint all commissioners to the NCHE. The Director General of the Commission serves as Secretary of the NCHE. The 2016 draft Act also established the National Center for the accreditation of higher education institutions in Liberia as an autonomous institution.

Division of Planning, Research and Institutional Development

This division within the NCHE is responsible for the design of strategic plans for the sector, the collection of data to enable the monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the higher education sector, and being a repository for research conducted in the sector among others.

GC Policy dialogue on Entrepreneurship

Observers have often wondered why Liberians have difficulties sustaining their businesses or playing major roles in the economy of this country. Most often Liberians are accused of rarely paying off bank loans and therefore find it difficult obtaining loans. While national efforts are being made to ensure that Liberia reaches a middle income status and become a developmental state by 2030, there is mounting pressure on Liberians to take charge or lead the economic reform process of this country.

Against this backdrop, Governance Commission on Wednesday, January 20, 2016 held a Policy Dialogue on **“Validation Consultation on a Scoping Study of Liberian Entrepreneurs Participation in the Liberian Economy”**.

In opening remarks, Dr. Amos Sawyer, Chairman of GC, observed that a major vexing issue today at street corners, top radio station discussions, and everywhere in Liberia is Liberians involvement as entrepreneurs in their economy. He noted that Liberians must recognize that our democratic system of governance and system of development cannot be sustained if we are not at the foundation of entrepreneurial activities in this country, adding *“government cannot be the major entrepreneur, and we know that foreign firms while they have a place cannot remain the dominant actors in the economy.”*

Dr. Sawyer maintained that if Liberia’s development is to be sustained it has to be driven by significant involvement of Liberian entrepreneurs in the economy, stressing that even *“our peace relies on our ownership of our economy.”* He said people are not ready to protect things that they are not really associated with especially so if they see it in a way that antagonizes or alienates them. He therefore urged everyone to do something to deepen the level of ownership in business and related Liberian enterprises in the economy. Dr. Sawyer wants the issue of nominal Liberian entrepreneur’s involvement in the economy addressed in a systematic way by first doing some serious analysis to find out the underlying causes, current situation, and strategies required to reverse the situation.

GC recently hired the Subah Belleh Associates Consulting Firm to carry out a Scoping Study of Liberian Entrepreneurs Participation in the Liberian Economy. The Policy Dialogue therefore provided a space to discuss finding of the Study. The Consultant/presenter, Francis Carbah, gave a summary presentation of their findings on fundamental economic issues involved, and the historical root of our dilemma. Senators, economists, businessmen/women, youth organizations and many other stakeholders attended and actively participated in the discussions.



In remarks Senator Edward Dagoseh, Chairman Ways, Means and Finance agreed that Liberian entrepreneurs' involvement in the economy cannot be over emphasized. He promised to rally legislative support toward all efforts geared toward ensuring effective involvement of Liberian entrepreneurs in Liberia's economic reform.

For his part **Senator Conmany Wesseh** Chairman Joint Legislative Modernization Committee commended the GC for efforts toward assuring that Liberians reach middle income status and promised increased and continued collaboration between the Senate and GC on issues of national interests. Senator Wesseh warned against what he called "dependency mentality". He explained that too often Liberians depend on others to do for them what we can do for ourselves, adding that we even give credit to others for what we are doing or have done for ourselves. He supports liking appreciating our donor partners but maintained that we learn to give credit to ourselves for doing work for our country.



Dorbor Jallah is the Executive Director of PPCC. He observed that the Subah Belleh and Associates' Study puts Liberians in the driver's seat of their economy. Mr. Jallah said government has instituted the small business empowerment Act and that that law, among other things, requires that 25% of all government's procurement be committed to only Liberian owned businesses and of that amount, a minimum of 5% should be committed to Liberian women owned businesses. He disclosed that the

PPCC has been encouraging entities to put in much more money into the exclusive bag for Liberian owning business competition.

"What we have seen so far seems to be encouraging. Just after 2 quarters of implementation, a total of nearly 90 million US dollars have been committed by 82 ministries and agencies of government that have procurement plan approved to date. Now some of the agencies in the different sectors have percentages up to 100 so what an agency is doing in that respect typically is taking their entire procurement budget and committing them to tender competition among only Liberian companies".

According to Mr. Jallah, there are however some challenges including the capacity of Liberian companies to deliver. Evaluating some of the proposals that go before PPCC for no objection approvals show that some of the Liberian companies have problem with even submitting the required tender document for bidding. Also disappointing is that PPCC training workshops experience dismal turnout by these Liberian owned businesses, despite the fact that PPCC reached out individually to both umbrella organizations and key players of those sectors. PPCC however continues to urge stakeholders to attend their workshops and take advantage of resources and capacity building opportunities offered.

Also making remarks at the Dialogue was **Mr. Maxwell Kemayah President of LIBA**, the Liberia Business Association. Mr. Kemayah observed that Liberian owned businesses continue to be plagued with marginalization despite laws to the contrary. He said the Small Business Act is also a form of marginalization in that it specifies that Liberian businesses be allowed a minimum of 25% ownership. The LIBA president noted that he was glad that GC has decided to hold the policy dialogue to debate the issue.



Kemayah also pointed out that fundamental causes of conflicts in Liberia such as poverty, discriminatory laws, marginalization, and inadequate distribution of national wealth and resources are beginning to manifest in our society today. He urged government to strengthen Liberian small businesses capacities, overcome the gaps they now face, and invest in agriculture to ensure food security in Liberia. LIBA supports and champions the delivery of quality service by Liberian owned businesses to consumers but frowned on the use of capacity gaps as a pretense to deny Liberian owned businesses government contracts. Kemayah stressed that government is expected to create the market/environment for Liberian owned businesses to flourish but noted inadequate security to protect their businesses. He recalled instances where Liberian entrepreneurs whose businesses had either been allegedly vandalized with impunity or denied contracts for no substantive reason. Kemayah therefore recommended that government put in place security mechanisms to protect Liberian businesses throughout the country.

Francis Carbah of Subah Belleh and Associates – The study Presentation

The abridged version of the Scoping Study presented summarizes the history of Liberia's economic policies, the intent of the various economic eras mentioned, their strengths and weaknesses, and the way forward. The way forward includes recommendations that will inform strategies needed for Liberia's economic reform. The study shows that on the issue of Liberia's economic recovery and Liberians' taking the lead in their economy, we have been going in circles repeating the same mistakes for more than (100) one hundred years. The Study is expected to be published soon.



Some participants shared their appalling experiences with others at the Dialogue.



Miss Daintowon Donah Pay-bayee



Sam Teekaye

GC Holds Policy Dialogue on “Vision 2030 and the 2017 Elections

The Governance Commission on Tuesday January 19, 2016 held a Policy Dialogue on the topic “Vision 2030 and the 2017 Elections: Reaffirming Commitment to a common Future through Elections.” This Dialogue is a continuation of efforts geared toward reminding Liberians and continuing discussions around provisions of the 2012 National Vision on the one hand; while on the other hand promoting inclusive discussions with citizens and stakeholders alike on Liberia’s electoral process to assure of peaceful elections come 2017. The Dialogue was held at the Bella Casa Hotel in Sinkor.

Nathaniel Kwabo and Dr. Byron Tarr, both of the Center for Policy Dialogue, served as discussants and made key presentations on **Liberia's National Vision 2030 and the 2017 Elections: reaffirming commitment to a common future through elections.** It can be recalled that in 2012, representatives of Liberia’s 73 political districts and those in the Diaspora met in Gbarnga Bong County to chart the path they wanted Liberia to follow to ensure of a unified nation and country.



In remarks, National Election Commission Chairman **Jerome Kokoya** noted that the Dialogue on Vision 2030 and the 2017 elections was very relevant in that it focuses on Liberia’s future as envisioned by Liberians, and the strengthening of our electoral process particularly that of 2017. Mr. Kokoya commended the GC for organizing the dialogue to address contending issues that could threaten Liberia’s stability. He emphasized that efforts by peace advocates to assure a stabilize nation could become a waste if the current peace is not sustained. According to him, stability is the result of numerous and different efforts paramount of which is the holding of free and fair elections in a conducive environment and accepted by the people.

Mr. Kokoya agrees that strengthening the electoral system process to ensure that it is used as an instrument for peace and unity is crucial. He assured that NEC (with the support of everyone including the three branches of government, political parties, the media, and voters) will deliver free, fair and credible election in 2017.

National Civil Society Council of Liberia President **Frances Greaves** in remarks pledged the support of civil society to ensuring a Liberia that all citizens can be proud of in the not too distance future. She said the Dialogue, after 4 years since the launch of National Vision 2030, is crucial and cardinal to our co-existence because civil society council itself was also involved in discussions that culminated into the realization of the 2030 vision. Civil society has continued to collaborate with GC in efforts aimed at promoting Vision 2030 and ensuring peaceful elections in 2017. Madam Greaves wondered how many political parties know about the Vision and have incorporated it into their platform. How many political parties understand the vision Liberians have envisioned as a people and wants political parties to prioritize Vision 2030 if they truly want the masses to buy into their plans for leadership in Liberia.



ECOWAS Ambassador accredited to Liberia, **Ambassador Tunde O. Ajisomo**, says ECOWAS subscribes to the tenets of Liberia's Vision 2030. The Ambassador recommended that to ensure that Vision 2030 remains a shared vision, it must be taught in schools and if possible translated into local languages to promote shared knowledge and inclusiveness. He observed that the Vision propounds that Liberians know their history, know where they are coming from and know the development trajectory to achieve peace and sustainable development.

Ambassador Ajisomo assured that ECOWAS stands ready to support Liberia's transformation agenda.

ECOWAS plans for Liberia, as has been done with member countries, include but not limited to the following:

1. Provide technical, material and financial support;
 - Technical support includes sending a long term observation mission to Liberia to deepen peace and security, and ensure that there is good governance before the 2017 elections;
2. Support NEC with necessary materials and funding;
3. Organize capacity building program for political parties – especially for women in politics to ensure participation of women and youth, along with the media as done with other member countries;
4. Work with Liberia Identification Registry to ensure that Liberia's identification cards are produced as quickly as possible along with the ECOWAS Biometric features to enable us move freely within the sub-region instead of using passports;
5. Establish a national early warning mechanism system intended to deepen peace and security infrastructure in Liberia to be manned exclusively by Liberians. Liberia is one of 5 countries to benefit from the pilot project.

Ambassador Ajisomo noted the ECOWAS believes that the Policy dialogues will go a long way in preparing Liberia for effective, credible, free and fair elections if all necessary measures are put in place.

In his presentation, Mr. **Nathaniel Kwabo** addressed the Dialogue's topics from three



perspectives: Firstly is *“what is the end goal of the visioning exercise”*? In other words *“what is the preferred future of the Liberia people”*? To this he answered *“surely the developmental state”*. Secondly - how can we effectively build an elite alliance and critical minds for national support required to undertake the process and path that will get us to the desired future? Thirdly-*“how can we effectively operationalize the vision”*?

Quoting President Sirleaf Mr. Kwabo likened Liberia to a conundrum, wrap in complexity and stuff inside a paradox. He also quoted a global security report which (he said) described Liberia as a *“rather strange place. A country that should not be poor yet that's what it certainly is”*.

Mr. Kwabo, speaking in riddles, sees Liberia as a dilapidated house that is over 168 years old, and its children(Liberians) wondering and struggling with how to perhaps rebuild this house, renovate it, or recondition it until a storm came and raised the building to the ground, which then presented an opportunity to rebuild and build well. According to him, unfortunately, after this opportunity we tried on many occasions to build the house using the same old materials to rebuild.

Kwabo emphasized that Vision 2030 was adopted and launched as a national flagship for development, and therefore should be popularized. The end goal of the Vision is to ensure that the country is capable of facilitating rapid economic development and social transformation, and formulate and implement its own programs for the realization of our development agenda.

Regarding the 2016 elections, Kwabo urged Liberians to traverse political ideologies, social affiliation and tribalism, and elect a leadership that is capable of providing clear direction for social and economic change, creating a powerful pro-development constituency among the ruling and democratic elite, and harnessing the critical economic and social forces to enhance unity and sustainable peace.

Kwabo recommended the building of coalitions to include civil society (public and private organizations, youth and women groups) to serve as the social base and driving force of the vision, and that political parties align their platform with the National Vision for support and ownership.



For his part, Dr. Byron Tarr in his presentation observed that Liberia reaching a middle income level will not make her a developmental state. Dr. Tarr recalled that Liberia reached middle income state by the statistical definition around 1979. *“In 1979, per capital income was more than 1700.00 USD.”*

On the issue of the National Vision 2030 which emphasizes unity, Dr. Tarr noted that circumstances leading to Liberia’s founding and independence are root causes for Liberia being a divided country. He said even after the civil war very little was done about reconciliation and the future of Liberia becoming a developmental state. Dr. Tarr was however quick to add that Vision 2030 provides an opportunity for government to put in place necessary mechanisms that will bear witness to a united people, a promising nation which, despite their diversity, have resolve to sustain peace and enhance growth and development by 2030.



Earlier, **GC Vice Chair Elizabeth Mulbah** said the dialogue provides for all stakeholders an opportunity to sit, argue and make informed shared decision for our country’s future. She recalled that during the Vision Conference in 2012, Liberians chose the democratic developmental state as the best of the four states proposed by the studies and consultations.

Political economists note that a developmental state among other things, tries to balance economic growth and social development by using government resources to meet the people's needs. It also uses state resources and influence to expand economic opportunities while at the same time addressing poverty. Such a state directs and supports economic development through building strong public service, supporting small private businesses and driving strategic investment initiatives, creating friendly environment to attract investors, and using state owned enterprises effectively.

GC Executive Director Steve Manley gave a brief overview of Vision 2030 at the Dialogue, highlighting major components of the Vision which reflect the dreams and aspirations of the Liberian people.

Governance Commission Honors 6 Employees, and 1 Commissioner

The Governance Commission recently honored 6(six) of its employees and one (1) Commissioner that graduated from colleges/universities during the course of 2015. Five of the seven graduated from national universities and two from foreign institutions.

The six GC employees include:

1. Younger Johnson-Nah graduated with MBA in Human Resources from the University of Liberia.
2. J. Diana Moore graduated with an MPA



L-R lineup of graduates in photo

- in Public Sector Management from Cuttington University College.
3. Mohammed Konneh graduated (BBA) with Bachelor of Business Administration in Management with emphasis on Human Resource.
4. Ruthie Dolley graduated with a (BBA) Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Accounting from the Stella Marris Polytechnic.
5. Gebeh M. Doteh graduated from the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration with a Master of Arts degree in Public Sector Management. Gebeh is a beneficiary of a LIPA scholarship program to the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, GIMPA. She was nominated by GC.
6. Esther Metzgar graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Sacred Theology from the Gbarnga School of Theology, United Methodist University.
7. Commissioner Yasuo-Weh Dorliae completed his Doctorate degree in Public Policy from the Walden University in the United States.

GC Human Resource Director Maima Roberts, has also left Liberia to attend a one year MA degree program at GIMPA