



SYNERGY

Official Newsletter of the Governance Commission

Vol. 4 No 5

www.governancecommissionlr.org

May 20175



The National Political Forum

A TWO DAY HIGH LEVEL MEETING OF POLITICAL LEADERS

On PEACEFUL ELECTIONS IN 2017

At the Monrovia City Hall.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 31ST
& THURSDAY, JUNE 1, 2017



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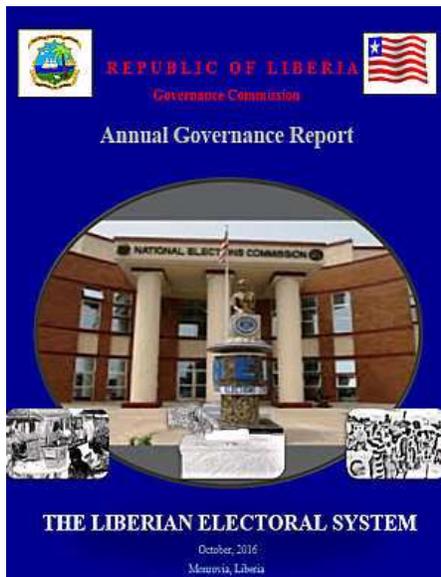
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Governance Commission Releases Finalized Copy of its AGR on Elections

The Governance Commission has released the finalized copy of its Annual Governance Report (AGR) on Elections urging political parties, candidates and stakeholders *to strengthen commitment to peaceful, violence-free elections through solemn declaration, and commitment to an ethical code of conduct.*



The GC Annual Governance report also supports calls for the monitoring of political parties' and independent candidates' source of funding in keeping with section 7 of the new elections law of Liberia. Section 7 of the new Elections law of Liberia highlights under elections campaign expenses - remittances of funds from outside Liberia to political parties or independent candidates and restriction; limitation of election expenses; accounts of political parties and requirements for examination; campaign contributions, expenses and reports; and enforcement of reporting of contributions and expenses among others.

Some political parties have flaunted newly purchased cars, motorbikes and other election related materials/equipment which many have described as possible violations of the New Elections Law of Liberia. GC therefore (in its AGR) urges NEC to work with national integrity institutions such as Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC), Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), and others to monitor campaign financing and financial flows into political parties as prescribed in NEC's mandate.

The AGR intends to contribute to the strengthening of the electoral system and assure the holding of peaceful and credible elections in Liberia. It, among other issues, examines the institutions, actors, rules, procedures and processes that constitute the electoral system of Liberia. It also seeks to identify issues for post-elections electoral reform and to elevate consciousness about how elections are important to peace and development in Liberia.

The AGR also highlights the use of elections as a platform for debate of national development issues, and that political parties and candidates should use such platforms for responsible debate of policy issues and priorities.

Other recommendations put forward in the AGR include Recruitment, training and equipping of adequate numbers of election magistrates and hearing officers; and strengthening of NEC's capacity to ably monitor campaign spending of political parties.

The actions of election magistrates and hearing officers have been at the center of most elections disputes that have reached the Supreme Court. The AGR also recommends that NEC sets a requirement of minimum numbers of agents to be recruited by each political party, provide sound training for them, and require and monitor their full deployment”.

The election of a new democratic government in October 2017 and inauguration in January 2018 will mark the first since 1944 where executive authority will be transferred from one elected president to another. These elections are expected to lay the political foundations upon which Liberians will continue to maintain peace, advance development and pursue reconciliation.

More information on the GC AGR can be found on the GC website- www.governancecommissionlr.org.

Major Political Party Leaders Attend National Political Forum

Amidst months of political wrangling in Liberia as to certain provisions of the Code of Conduct and the holding of peaceful democratic process and elections in Liberia, the Government in collaboration with its local and international partners have been working closely with political parties to ensure that the political process remain peaceful.

A preparatory meeting with political parties, actors, and stakeholders was held on May 24, 2017 at the Lutheran Guest House on 13th Street in Sinkor to thrash



out the vexing political issues while, at the same time, assuring a common understanding on the rule of law in Liberia. The meeting, like recent consultations with political parties, was spearheaded by the Presidential Steering Committee of

the National Political Forum chaired by chairman and vice chairman of the Inter-religious Council of Liberia Archbishop Jonathan Hart and Sheikh Umaru Kamara.

The preparatory meeting also known as the Inaugural meeting laid the groundwork/basis for the National Political Forum in that it heightened political discussions with the aim of addressing all concerns and unresolved issues relative to



the political process with the intent of reaching a consensus for peaceful elections in October, 2017.

The Forum took place a week after the “Inaugural meeting”. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, House Speaker Emmanuel Nuquay, and a number of

presidential hopefuls all graced the Forum.

The 2-day political forum on the holding of Peaceful Elections in October 2017 ran from May 31 to June 1, 2017 at the Monrovia City Hall..

In Special remarks at the Opening ceremony of the Forum, President Sirleaf encouraged free and open dialogue among political parties noting that Liberian electorates and international partners have high expectations about political parties and their leader’s participation in, and commitment to, the holding of free, fair, credible, transparent and peaceful elections in October this year.

President Sirleaf said she looks forward to seeing Liberia’s political parties standard bearers signing the Farmington Solemn Declaration (just as they did in Ganta) during the ECOWAS Summit on June 4, 2017 in the presence of regional and world leaders.

House Speaker Emmanuel Nuquay observed that the National Political Forum was necessary in that it charts the roadmap for the holding of peaceful elections in October - elections which are indispensable to Liberia’s democracy. According to



Speaker Nuquay those desirous of serving in leadership positions must commit to the peace and stability of Liberia. He reminded political parties and their leaders to champion the holding of free, fair credible and transparent elections come October.

The Speaker also promised the Legislature's commitment to working with the next government to protect and enhance the achievements and gains made since the past 12 years. The Legislature is part and parcel of the government and is in fact the first branch of the Liberian government.

For his part Chief ZanZan Kawah, head of the Traditional Council of Liberia, urged all political parties to put Liberia first during their deliberations. Chief Kawah appealed to political parties/actors to work together for the sake of peace in Liberia.



Earlier in his introductory remarks, Episcopal Archbishop Jonathan Hart noted that the Inter-religious Council as part of the National Political Forum's Steering Committee have worked tirelessly to bring political parties and actors, civil society and partners together to dialogue freely and openly at the Forum.

The Forum stimulated discussions around vexing political issues surrounding the electoral process in general and the holding of the October elections in particular so that a common agenda that prioritizes peace and unity could be achieved.



Episcopal Archbishop Jonathan Hart chairs both the inter-religious Council and the National Political Forum Steering Committee. He promised both groups' unflinching support to working with political parties and actors, to ensure the holding of peaceful, credible and transparent elections in October this year.

Archbishop Hart also urged all political actors to discuss freely and openly at the Forum, and recommend solutions to moving Liberia's political process in the path to peace and unity.

Most of Liberia's major political parties, standard bearers and leadership, government officials, civil society organizations including publishers of major media houses and members of the diplomatic Corps all graced Day one of the Forum.

The most controversial issue during this electoral process is the Code of Conduct. Its 5.1 and 5.2 provisions are perceived in some political quarters as having the propensity to ban certain standard Bearers from contesting the October 2017 presidential election.

Political processes across the world nowadays are characterized by wild debates or discussions but these healthy wrangling most often result in arriving at common understanding/decision. So it was with the National Political Forum. After two days of robust debates, the political party representatives agreed on a thirteen count resolution, committing themselves to the holding of free, fair, credible, transparent, inclusive, participatory democratic elections in Liberia on October 10, 2017.

The resolution titled "The Farmington River Declaration: A Commitment to Peaceful Elections and Judicial Resolution of Election Disputes in Liberia" is expected to be signed by Standard Bearers and Chairman of all 22 political parties of Liberia in the presence of West African and other world leaders during the ECOWAS Summit scheduled for June 4, 2017 in Farmington Margibi County.

UNMIL, AU, and ECOWAS all pledge support to the holding of free, fair, credible, transparent and peaceful elections in Liberia in October 2017.

Liberians Reminded about their Democratic Responsibility to Country

The Chairman of the Governance Commission, Dr. Amos Sawyer, has reminded Liberians about our responsibility toward ensuring that the October 10 elections are peaceful and violence-free, adding "let's enshrine peaceful transitions as a part of our governance culture". Dr. Sawyer noted that Liberians have the opportunity to showcase our democratic gains to our neighbors and the world at large if we ably manage our elections and transition period.



Dr. Sawyer commended President Sirleaf for her stewardship that facilitated Liberia's membership of the African Peer Review Mechanism – the AU's instrument for promoting good governance, and her pledge to ensure that Liberia's performance in the areas of democracy and political governance, economic management and governance, and socio-economic development are reviewed.

Dr. Sawyer's statement was delivered at the program held in observance of "Africa Day" at the C. Cecil Dennis Auditorium at the Foreign Ministry on Thursday, May 25, 2017. He spoke on the theme "Harnessing the demographic dividend".

According to Dr. Sawyer, Liberia is firmly on the path of deepening its democracy and advancing its development. He maintained that the peaceful hand-over of the political baton from this government to the next will showcase Liberia's democratic gains to our neighbors and the world at large.

He urged Liberians to continue to grow in the consciousness of African unity and the integration of African economies as these provide the best vehicle for the realization of our national vision, and achievement of our developmental goals and objectives.

Dr. Sawyer recalled the years of civil conflicts in Liberia, and thanked ECOWAS, AU, and UN for their solidarity and robust interventions to restore peace to Liberia. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who also chairs the Authority of heads of States and Governments of ECOWAS will turned over that mantle of authority during the Summit to Togolese President **Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé on June 4, 2017.**

Liberia is a founding member of ECOWAS, OAU now AU, the UN and League of Nations, and fought relentlessly to end Trusteeship subordination of Africans, and African continental independence.

Liberia Launches Home-Grown School Feeding Program

Liberia has launched its zero hunger strategic review report and is about to initiate its home grown school feeding program. Under the Home – Grown School Feeding program, government will introduce mechanize farming in Liberia to help local farmers grow and produce more food, and then purchase these local produce to support school feeding programs throughout the country. The program took place on May 16, 2017 at the Monrovia City Hall in Sinkor.

The zero hunger strategic review project is in support of Goal 2 of the Sustainable development goals and focuses on ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture by 2030.

Launching Liberia's Zero Hunger Strategic Review report and home grown school feeding program, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf described the Review as a baseline and roadmap comprising actions that must be prioritized and taken to achieve success, and benchmarks to monitor progress. The Review also highlights key findings and challenges facing the agriculture sector of Liberia.



Although Liberia is endowed with vast arable land, rainforests and abundant rainfall, more than 60% of our farmers live below the poverty line, with more than 50% of the population also living below the poverty line. The case of Liberia is arguable since unlike others, our situation can be related to the years of civil conflict followed by Ebola, years of recovery, reconstruction and now transition. The Ebola pandemic took its toll on Liberia's economy, growth and development.

President Sirleaf credited her government for making considerable progress in tackling hunger and malnutrition adding *“Working together with our partners, and through good policies and programs, we have increased food production, improved governance in the fisheries sector, and are seeing good results in the livestock sector.”*

The President urged Liberians to invest more in agriculture to address the issue of food insecurity throughout this country. She said *“more needs to be done **in Grand Kru, River Gee, Grand Cape Mount and Bomi counties where the levels of food insecurity are unacceptably high compared to other parts of the country**”*. National and international investments are needed in these counties to address the issue of mechanize farming and employment to increase agricultural production and enhance living conditions of rural dwellers.

Liberia imports two-thirds of its food as the country grows more rubber than its staple. President Sirleaf therefore wants urgent decisive action taken to **“reduce the nearly US\$250 million dollars”** spent annually on food imports.

On the Home Grown School Feeding program, President Sirleaf noted that the Home-Grown School Feeding Program is Liberia’s own innovative attempt to link agriculture, nutrition and education – in order to encourage more children to go to school, enhance their nutrition, boost vegetable, cereal and tuber crops production, and support and economically empower smallholder farmers whose produce will be used to support the program. The home-grown school feeding program is a joint multi-sectorial effort of several UN agencies and partners, **including WFP, FAO, UNICEF, UNDP, World Bank, AfDB, among others, as well as the Government and civil society organizations.**

Also speaking at the Launch was **Steven Were Omamo** - WFP Deputy Director for Policy and Program. He emphasized the urgent need for action against food insecurity and hunger adding that that need is stronger now than ever before.



Making references to statistics, Mr. Omamo noted that over 20 million people are currently facing starvation, with nearly 75% of them in Africa. Nearly 90 million more, around the world, suffer extreme food insecurity brought on by conflict, adverse weather, and other disruptions; and almost 800 million people are chronically hungry.

According to Mr. Omamo, despite this bleak picture the world is more prepared to tackle hunger and food insecurity than at any time in recent history, adding “the consensus is wide and deep.”

Sustainable Development Goal 2 of the 2030 Agenda commits Countries and their partners to combining efforts and investments toward eradicating hunger, one of the most devastating forms of human suffering and misery. If and when fully implemented, the 17 Sustainable Development goals intend to reverse the current poor state of living standards and development of most *underdeveloped/third world nations*.

“In fact, the 17 Sustainable development goals/Agenda 2063 envisions a prosperous African continent, with the means and resources to drive its own development, with sustainable and long-term stewardship of its resources and where – in the context of this meeting – agriculture is modern and highly productive, with strong value

addition, and food and nutrition security at individual, community, and national levels” says Mr. Omamo.

Mr. Omamo commended Liberia’s efforts toward poverty reduction and food security since the past ten years. *“Since 2008, Liberia has been implementing several policies and strategies for food security and nutrition that foreshadowed the Zero Hunger agenda. The National Food Security and Nutrition Strategy, the Food and Agricultural Policy and Strategy, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Vision 2030, and the Agenda for Transformation all contain priorities, thrusts, and activities that lay at the core of any strategy for Zero Hunger.”*

Another member on the WFP delegation at the program was **Mr. Peter Musoko, Deputy** Regional Director at World Food Program - Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa. He commended Liberia’s commitment to the implementation of SDG Goal 2 which focuses on achieving zero hunger in Liberia. *“We are also pleased to note that the Strategic Review has identified Home Grown School Feeding as one of the mechanism suited to responding to the challenges posed by hunger, as it creates opportunities across the agricultural value chain and help bring education to school children.”*



Mr. Musoko disclosed that Liberia was among few other countries that have reached this milestone, and therefore congratulated President Sirleaf, government and the leadership of the Zero Hunger Strategic Review team for the determination and quality of the report.

For his part Agriculture Minister Dr. Moses Zinnah noted that the launch of the Zero Hunger Strategic Report and the Home Grown School Feeding Program are 2 major steps toward achieving goal number 2 of the 17 sustainable development goals in Liberia.



The Zero Hunger Strategic review Report identifies the gaps, and challenges confronting Liberia’s agricultural sector, and makes recommendations as to the way forward to minimizing hunger and malnutrition (among women and children in particular), and achieving food security in Liberia.

Dr. Amos Sawyer is lead convener of Liberia's Zero Hunger Review team. The



Team is comprised of an Advisory Board Chaired by Dr. Sawyer and Co-chaired by the Minister of Agriculture, and a technical committee headed by Subah Belleh and Associates. Subah Belleh and Associates did a summarized presentation of the Zero Hunger report which also recommended the School feeding program. The World Food Program is a major funder of activities of the Zero

Hunger Review team.

A large number of ambassadors and international donor organizations' representatives attended the program. In remarks, **United Nations Secretary General Special Representative to Liberia** Ambassador Farid Zarif recalled the saying that “the **quality of a society is measured by the degree of care that it gives to its most venerable.**”

Amb. Zarif encouraged government to continue its fight to improve the living



standards of the masses particularly the least fortunate in our society. He observed that despite the numerous challenges, achieving zero hunger is a global priority plan, adding that the challenges are surmountable. He pledged the United Nations support to Liberia's efforts toward fighting zero hunger but assuring food security.

He concluded by urging the Legislature to pass the Local Government Bill which seeks to empower the Liberian people through the decentralization program.

Representative Josephine Francis expressed sentiments around the need for Liberia to get involved in mechanized farmer to improve food production in Liberia.

The zero hunger program was attended by government officials, national and international partners, civil society including women and youth organizations.