

Keynote Address

By

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At the

**2nd Annual Convention of the University of Liberia Alumni Association
in the Americas (ULIBAAA)**

Theme: Bridging the Gap: Illuminating the Future with Hope

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**St Andrews Ukrainian Hall
15100 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring, Maryland, 20905, USA**

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- Government Officials Present
- Officers & Members of the University of Liberia Alumni Association in the Americas;
- Friends and Supporters of the University of Liberia
- Honored and Honoring Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure for me to be here today. Thank you for honoring me with an invitation to be your keynote speaker for this all important event, the 2nd Annual Convention of the University of Liberia Alumni Association in the Americas.

As many of you know, on September 13, 2017, I was inaugurated as the 14th President of the University of Liberia (UL), and that also made me the second female to serve as UL's President. Dr. Mary Antoinette Brown was the first. While initially I may have tried to downplay the significance of this particular presidency, the reality is that it is indeed significant, both personally and historically. Because you see most of my formative years, from the age of 7 1/2, to my entry into college, were spent residing on the University of Liberia campus, in Richardson Cottage (which was at that time, the UL President's residence). Then, in 1969 as a college freshman, I enrolled at UL (during earlier times referred to as "LU"). And even though the university women's dormitory was only about 100 yards from Richardson Cottage, I entered Elizabeth Tubman Hall as a student resident.

From 1959-1972, my father, Rocheforte L. Weeks Sr. served as the third (3rd) president of the University of Liberia, and the first (1st) Liberian. To date, he remains the longest-serving president...he may also have been, the youngest-appointed president, at 36 years old. As well, a father and daughter as president of the same institution may also be a first....globally.

Many of you have been away from home/Liberia for a while now and may be unaware of the extent to which the university has grown. When I was a student, the entire enrollment may have been about 1000 students. Now, there are about 22,000 students, and just prior to the Ebola epidemic in Liberia, the estimate was about 35,000 students. Presently, there are about 1000 faculty members, with close to an equal number of full and part time faculty, along with about 1200 non-instructional personnel. I have brought with me a few brochures (though not

enough for everyone) that provide a *glance* of the University of Liberia, to update you on where we are today.

Presently, UL has **8 undergraduate colleges** that include: (1) Social Sciences & Humanities (also known as Liberia College); (2) W.V.S. Tubman Teachers College (*primary education, secondary education, and our new (2017) early childhood education major*); (3) T.J.R. Faulkner College of Science & Technology (*biological sciences, chemistry, physics and mathematics programs...engineering programs were removed from this college last year, and we hope to add in their place information communications technology programs, in the not-too-distant future*); (4) William R. Tolbert College of Agriculture & Forestry (*general agriculture, agronomy, agriculture extension, forestry, and home science & community development programs*); (5) A. Romeo Horton College of Business & Public Administration (*accounting, economics, business administration and public administration programs*); (6) College of General Studies; (7) David A. Straz-Sinje Technical & Vocational College, which was established in 2012, (*with primary education, general agriculture, surveying, building construction and electrical technology associate degree programs*),...and (8) the Engineering College, established in 2016 (*with civil-, electrical-, mining engineering and geology programs*).

There is a **Graduate School with four (4) programs**: *international relations, business administration, education supervision & administration, and regional planning*). We have **five (5) Institutes**: *Koffi Annan Institute of Conflict Transformation, Confucious Institute, Institute of Population Studies, Research Institute, and the newly established Policy Studies Research Institute*. Presently, the University of Liberia is actively searching for an Executive Director for the two research Institutes...someone with an impressive research & publication record.

Our **Professional Programs** include *medicine* in the A. M. Dogliotti College of Medicine, *pharmacy* in the School of Pharmacy, *law* in the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law, and our newly established *Nursing & Midwifery Programs* (presently, the nursing & midwifery programs are articulation programs with TNIMA and the JFK Medical Center. It may interest you to know that an inaugural 12 students will graduate from the Nursing & Midwifery articulation

programs with BSc degrees this December 2017. The University of Liberia now has **four campuses**: (1) **Capital Hill**, (2) **Fendall**; (3) **Medical**; and (4) **Straz-Sinje** in Grand Cape Mount County. The Capital Hill campus will ultimately house only our graduate programs and some professional programs.

The theme for this convention is “*Bridging the gap: illuminating the future with hope*”, which complements very nicely the theme I used for my inaugural address entitled “*To nobler destiny*” (a phrase taken from the “*Lone Star Forever*” song written by President Edwin James Barclay).

I have no doubt that what you really want to know is, as UL’s president and chief executive officer, entrusted with administering the university’s affairs to maximize benefits for students, faculty, staff, and ultimately, for Liberia, **what is my vision** for our alma mater? **How do I hope to realize this vision?** And, **what role can you play in this vision**, as alumni association in the Americas. Firstly, I am collecting and am relying on data to provide evidence for what needs to be done, for how we pro-act, react, and, for what we do. And, we will do those things that will ensure a thriving, productive, and ultimately a university that is relevant to Liberia’s needs. The previous Dennis administration has provided us with a good foundation on which to continue building on.

We are in the process of establishing a ***Personnel Evaluation and Enhancement Program (PEEP)*** to help determine effectiveness and efficiency on the job, to help determine mechanisms that need to be put in place to increase productivity, as well as to offer opportunities for staff to attain advanced degrees and participate in job-related refresher workshops, seminars, symposia and short courses. This will allow us to retain productive personnel, to re-tool and re-train dedicated and committed staff who need enhancement, and allow us to minimize deadwood. *Malfeasance* (doing something that is wrong), *misfeasance* (doing something that is right for the wrong reasons) and *nonfeasance* (doing nothing when you should do something) (MMN) are not welcome, and our policy moving forward is **zero tolerance for MMN!**

We have begun with a committee to review a recently completed *personnel audit report*, generated during the Dennis administration. The terms of reference for

the committee is straightforward: determine steps to address, guided by implementation recommendations made in the report. This is one of the most important exercises that has to be done at the onset because no matter what we plan to do, or what we plan to accomplish, it will only happen with the following persons.

Individuals with requisite skills and experience for the job at hand; individuals committed to the *ideals* and success of the University of Liberia, and trustworthy individuals with integrity. We have some, we are looking for more, and I am extending open invitations to individuals with these characteristics to come join us, keeping in mind the meager salaries that we offer at this point in time.

Within the next three (3) years we hope to realize qualitative and quantitative improvement in our Faculty Profile. How?

- By determining instructional needs of each academic unit based on required course offerings each semester, and by specifically focusing on training and hiring advanced degree faculty in these disciplines, as well as where we have specific gaps. This will allow identification of, and reduction in part-time faculty, and 1st degree holder faculty members. And, we will proactively hire faculty with advanced and terminal degrees. Also, we will implement our newly developed (presently only on paper) ***Teaching & Learning Center (TLC)***.

On Curricular issues, we hope to complete reviewing and revising all academic programs at the University of Liberia that have not been reviewed within the last 5 years. There is now a policy in place that mandates a five-year review cycle. We will also begin the process of introducing *hybrid & on-line* courses at UL before the end of 2018.

On Program Development, the following *five (5) undergraduate* and *three (3) graduate programs* will be established within the next 3-4 years (for undergraduate programs: *mechanical engineering, architecture, information communications technology, fisheries, and an Honors College*. For graduate programs: *Masters in Public Health, Masters in Environmental Sciences, and a Public Financial Management & Public Procurement Program within the existing*

graduate Business/Public Administration programs. Some of these programs will require less than three years because the developmental process is already underway. Others will take more than three years due to the complexity of the program, and availability of funding. More details on these programs can be found in my inaugural address.

On Students Success, we are on the road to realizing a fully functioning **Testing & Evaluation Center**, one that is not limited to entrance exams. As well, we hope to put in place a **Students Success & Service Center** that will contribute to correcting the existing chaotic and defective student union financial aid program, restore discipline, and at the same time infuse good leadership training for our students. The University of Liberia Student Union (ULSU) Financial Aid Program, needs improved oversight, with the introduction of a more structured merit-based and need-based selection system and process that is fair and transparent. And there needs to be more structured psycho-social and mind-education programs for our students.

On infrastructure Improvement, we hope to complete *wi-fi and internet access* for the 4 UL campuses by the end of the year. This was already in the making, and we look forward to the realization. Our challenge continues to be lack of access to a *fully-integrated network platform/system* for enrollment, human resource and financial management, which require a level of *sustained* finances that we do not presently have, but we are hopeful.

For our Enrichment Programs, we have potential local and international partners to assist our College of Agriculture and Forestry with developing a **Poultry Program** with focal involvement of youths (using the 4H model), and women in communities that surround our Fendall and Sinje campuses. Also, in partnership with the *University of Liberia Alumni Chorus (ULAC)* we are currently working together to construct a **Performing Arts Center**. This project was initiated a little over a year ago.

Additional medium-size and big-ticket projects may require more time to fund-raise, and will include putting in place a capital campaign. We need your help with fund-raising efforts for these projects. They are of great interest to us,

because they are potentially **revenue-generating** projects.

Revenue generation for the University of Liberia is a “must”. Financially, UL is in a perpetual state of dire straits! Eighty-five percent (85%) of its annual budget comes from the Government of Liberia (15 million US dollars); 15% is supposed to come from tuition & fees (always a struggle to generate). Seventy-five (75%) of this \$15M USD is allocated for personnel costs, leaving 25% as allocation for operations, maintenance, infrastructural development and training. This is grossly inadequate to meet expenditures. The University of Liberia has no choice but to look for alternative sources to generate revenue to sustain itself.

One such example is our College of Engineering *Fee-for-Service Program*, which includes *soil testing* among many other services in the COE. Our *Fee-for-Service Program* will help us financially sustain our laboratories. Come visit us and see some of the state-of-the-art engineering laboratories that we have today, thanks to USAID’s assistance.

Examples of some of the medium-size and big-ticket projects that we would like to pursue include:

- A **bookstore and souvenir/memorabilia shop** on the Fendall campus.
- Our very own **university printing press**.
- A **UL water-processing plant** (a proposal with a price tag has already been developed).
- A **recreation & wellness center**. This is a needed facility for our entire university family, for reasons that we all know.
- Construction of a permanent **Convocation Complex**, *rather than having to construct and dismantle temporary structures every year*.
- Construction of a **Demonstration School** for our Teachers College. Because as Lee Shulman in his 2011 publication explained, one may learn about teaching by doing courses, but teaching skills can only be acquired by active engagement in teaching practice.

So, what role can **you** play in this vision?

The University of Liberia and its alumni association can be likened to that of a

family. In a family, the parents provide a nurturing environment for their offspring to grow and thrive. Then, there comes a time when the offspring are ready to fend for themselves, to spread their wings and fly (graduate); they then go off on their own to make a life for themselves. Periodically, and on a regular basis, they come back home to see how the parents are doing. The offspring provide some assistance here and there, *on a regular basis*...sometimes large, sometimes small. There is this yearning to “*give back*” because of how the parents,...how that home contributed to the person that they have become. *There is gratitude*. And, the parents try their best to always have a welcoming home that their offspring can come back to; a home that is warm and inviting...*homecoming*. The grown-up and independent offspring do their best to help their parents to continue to make their home warm, inviting, comfortable (even better than their neighbors...other universities); a home that they can be proud of and boast about. Because the condition of that home is also a measure of the offspring’s success and their failure.

The University of Liberia looks forward to having an open line of communication with its alumni. I sincerely appreciate the excitement I feel in this room, and the level of enthusiasm that your president has....it is infectious. Please also work very closely with the Alumni Association in Liberia, through the Office of Alumni Affairs of the University of Liberia. The current Director Mrs Tianjay Joah, who has tremendous love for her alma mater, due to personal reasons related to health, has informed me that she will be stepping down as Director, the end of November. This time, an Executive Director for Alumni Affairs will be appointed. This is a very crucial position, and we look forward to a dynamic relationship between UL and its alumni, specifically in assisting with the University of Liberia’s growth and development.

And so, offspring of the University of Liberia, alumni of the University of Liberia, friends and supporters, in *Bridging the Gap: Illuminating the Future with Hope*, please let’s work together, please assist us with providing for the people of Liberia a University of Liberia that we are all proud of, a **flagship University of Liberia** that is warm and inviting, relevant to the growth and development needs of Liberia, and a university of Liberia that is more representative of what a university should be in this 21st century.

...yall yall, YALL! yall, yall, YALL! What's the matter with the University of Liberia? She's alright! What's the matter with the University of Liberia? She's alright! What's the matter with UL's Alumni in the Americas? They 're alright! Whats the matter with UL's Alumni in the Americas? They're alright! Who says so? Everybody! Who says so? Everybody! Who's everybody? We are! Whos's everybody? We are! Hip, hip, hip, Hooray; hip, hip hip, Hooray!

Thank you.