



**COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS DELIVERED BY
HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA
LEONE AT THE CENTENNIAL
COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF LIBERIA, Monrovia, Liberia,
11 December 2019**

CONVOCATION – UNIVERSITY OF LIBERIA 2

Your Excellency, George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia and Visitor of the University of Liberia,
The Honourable Matthew Gee Zarzar, Chairman, Board of Trustees, University of Liberia,
Officers and Members of the Board of Trustees, University of Liberia
Your Excellency, Dr. Julius Julukon Sarwolo Nelson, President of the University of Liberia,
Deans and Faculty of Graduate and Professional Schools, Academic Colleges, Programmes, and Institutes,
Faculty Senate and Administrative Council,
Faculty and Staff of the University of Liberia
Fellow recipients of honorary degrees,
Alumni of this great University,
Parents, Families, and Friends of the Class of 2019,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning.

Thank you for the great privilege to be with you for this 100th convocation ceremony. I am doubly pleased that I am sharing it with your parents, families, and friends and all those who have been near and dear as you toiled through university. You should be proud of what you have achieved at the University of Liberia. Congratulations to this distinguished class of 2019.

Through 100 convocations and through 157 years of history, this great University has produced politicians, diplomats, jurists and attorneys, soldiers and police men and women, environmentalists, human rights

activists, entrepreneurs, accountants, engineers, trade unionists, journalists, inventors, physicians, and biomedical researchers. You have inherited a great legacy. You are a continuation of the great history of the second oldest institution of higher learning in West Africa. Congratulations.

I also thank His Excellency, President Weah, who is the Visitor of this esteemed university, for the usual warm fraternal welcome and generous hospitality he has accorded me and my delegation since our arrival. Thank you, brother.

I thank the University of Liberia especially for favouring me with this invitation and the honour of a conferment of an honorary degree. I am sure my fellow honourees will not mind my assuming the liberty to thank the University for their generosity and consideration, and to say that from now and forever, we are proud University of Liberia alumni. Congratulations are in order.

Of course, Liberia and Sierra Leone share a common, unbreakable, and continuous demographic, historical, cultural, and academic heritage. We have always had close relations, forged even closer economic and other ties through the founding of the Mano River Union and we were founding members of ECOWAS. We have heightened cooperation between our two nations and we are now connecting physical infrastructure through a major highway and the CLSG power line. The Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement opens up more possibilities of trade.

Liberians have a lot to be proud of. If the AU is strong today and Africans are united by their shared aspirations, it is because a great Liberian statesman, President William Tubman, met with his brother Presidents Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Toure in the town of Sanniquelle, Liberia between July 15 and 19, 1959.

Liberia was a staunch supporter of the fight against apartheid and provided refuge and succour for anti-colonial activists including Nigeria's first President, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe. Liberia was also the first black African country to serve on the UN Security Council.

As the current Chair of the C10 for UN Security Council, I am leading advocacy on behalf of Africa's 1.2 billion people for two permanent seats in the permanent category and two seats in the non-permanent category with all rights and prerogatives including the right to veto.

Also, great academics have shuttled between our two nations enriching institutions of higher learning. Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden, one of the foremost black intellectuals of the Nineteenth Century, was a professor both at Liberia College and Fourah Bay College. Professor Davidson-Nicol collaborated with the University of Liberia in the 1980s, during the administration of UL President Dr. Mary Antoinette Brown-Grimes Sherman.

Students from both institutions have been intellectually moulded by committed professors from both countries who have been motivated by your institution's motto, *lux in tenebris*, "bringing light to the dark."

But that is not only what ties my country Sierra Leone to the Republic of Liberia. Our two nations were crafted out of adversity (slavery) and both our nations have survived adversity from civil war to Ebola. But adversity has strengthened our collective will to survive, to fight back, to live again, stronger, better, more united, and ever more hopeful. In the venerable words of President Daniel Bashiel Warner, the third President of the Republic of Liberia, that are forever enshrined in the National anthem of this great Republic,

All hail Liberia, hail

All hail Liberia, hail

In union strong, success is sure.

There can never be a perfect union or a union of perfect minds. But Liberians must always remember that the lies of the wicked and self-seeking that blind are never the ties that bind you together as a nation. Only in unity of common cause; in unity of common purpose; in unity of common goals, can Liberians make this Liberia a better place and Africa a better continent.

I have said all of this to put the history of this country into context and to encourage you graduates, to know and believe that you have a duty of care to tend the future of this, your great nation. So always remember that throughout history, good Liberians and good people have made sacrifices for ideals greater than themselves. Sometimes,

involuntarily so, but most often believing that their sacrifice was right and fitting for the country they love so dearly. I want to challenge you graduates, to be the latter.

On August 24, 1990, still a young military officer in my 20s, I disembarked (under fire) from landing vessels at the Freeport of Monrovia. I was part of the very first wave of ECOMOG Peacekeeping troops. We were in Liberia to keep the peace and for months on, we secured the port and expanded our area of control. Displaced Liberians flooded into our area of control for protection. Our presence reassured people that their brothers and neighbours were prepared to sacrifice their blood in order to bring peace among Liberians. Today, you have a peaceful country. Remember the lessons of your recent history and maintain a culture of peace and democracy.

Your nation is at an inflection point and you must now respond to the challenges of nation-building. Your generation must develop strong democratic and governance institutions. Your generation must provide access to quality healthcare and food security. Your generation must make new roads, build hospitals, supply potable water to all Liberians. Your generation must reduce maternal and child mortality and stop all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Women comprise nearly 50% of Liberia's population and women matter. They must be included in development, and they must be present in all democratic and civic spaces, and their voices must be heard! Your generation must eliminate corruption from public life.

Your generation must make education fit for purpose in the twenty first century. As one of my friends, an elderly statesman remarked, Africans slept soundly while the first, second, and third Industrial revolutions happened in Europe and Africa was at the receiving end. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is upon us. Your generation must embrace science, technology, and innovation to leapfrog Liberia along the rungs of development. We do not want to become the Athens of West Africa again. Athens is in ruins and even Athens in modern day Greece is aspiring to become Silicon Valley. We want to be a site teeming with talent, educators, innovators, and entrepreneurs. So your generation must develop a knowledge-based economy in Liberia because that is what matters for Liberia to participate fully in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Yes, we can use technology to provide solutions for governance and governance processes, revenue collection, healthcare, quality education, service delivery, small-scale manufacturing, scientific research that benefits ordinary Liberians, and much more. Your generation must embrace entrepreneurship and expand the private sector and create jobs. You need not sit down and wait for a government job and an air-conditioned office

Lead by the power of your example. Always remember that you have been educated not just to run the Liberia that you have. Remind yourself every day that you graduate today to make Liberia what it should be.

Do not let people put you down. Do not let people devalue who you are. Do not let other people's opinions or declamations define who you are or what your destiny is. Remember the words of David Brinkley - "A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks others have thrown at him." I know this first hand and today, I am President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Work hard every day. Pray hard every day. Believe every day that you are on a mission. The world does not bend to your will; you make your world what you want it to be by the sheer grit of your determination and your focus. For everything you define or lay out for yourself in life; know that you must do something to make that thing happen. So disown your fears; disclaim all imperfections; abjure self-gratification, be true to yourself and care most about your essential humanity and your nation first and Africa in general.

There are those things that stir up real anger and real passion. Do not allow people to use you to further their own ambitions or their plans. Never do anything to take your nation back to that painful past. You are critical thinkers. Peaceful debate and common ground within a vibrant democratic culture where people believe in principles that matter most for nation must always prevail. To jaw-jaw is better than to war-war. Strengthen civil society voices. They may say some uncomfortable truths amidst their daily catalogue of everything that's going wrong. Those uncomfortable truths must give you pause to make the best decisions on whether to stir your nation.

The future of Liberia is in your hands. Invest in that future by feeding the brain through quality education, feeding the tummy through food security, and taking care of the whole body through access to healthcare. Make Liberia a hub of talent and innovation and entrepreneurship. Be inspired, be bold, and be all that you can be. Development is complex and multipolar and Liberia needs a critical mass of highly qualified professionals to provide sustainable solutions for its future development. Remember as you graduate today that the University has given you the tools to succeed. You must stay engaged with the university to make it succeed in delivering on its mission and sustaining development in Liberia.

The university will negotiate partnerships, develop programmes, and undertake research that inform and drive public policy and development. It will do what it must within its transformational curriculum and mandate to develop national capacity to meet national development needs.

But as you leave today, do not forget why you came to the University of Liberia. You came here to prepare you to change your own life and the lives of those who are close to you. But more importantly, you came here to change the lives of others and to transform your nation, Liberia. I thank you.