

ANNUAL MESSAGE TO THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FOURTH  
NATIONAL LEGISLATURE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

DELIVERED BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. GEORGE MANNEH WEAH

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

THE CAPITOL BUILDING  
CAPITOL HILL  
MONROVIA, LIBERIA

25 JANUARY 2021

Madam Vice President and President of the Senate;

Mr. Speaker;

Mr. President Pro-Tempore;

Honorable Members of the Legislature;

Your Honor the Chief Justice, Associate Justices of the Supreme Court and  
Members of the Judiciary;

The Dean and Members of the Cabinet and other Government Officials;

The Doyen, Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic and Consular  
Corps;

His Excellency, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the  
United Nations in Liberia;

The Officers and Staff of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL);

The Chief of Staff and Men and Women of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL);

Former Officials of Government;

Traditional Leaders, Chiefs and Elders;

Political and Business Leaders;

Religious Leaders;

Officers and Members of the National Bar Association;

Labor and Trade Unions;

Civil Society Organizations;

Members of the Press;

Special Guests;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Fellow Liberians:

In fulfilment of my official duty under the mandate of Article 58 of the Constitution of Liberia, I am here again to present the Administration's Legislative Program for the ensuing Fourth Session of this Honorable Legislature, and to report to you on the State of the Republic.

I am further mandated to present the overall economic condition of the Nation, which should cover both expenditure and income.

I want to congratulate all new Senators and Representatives who were elected to this august body from the Senatorial and By-elections held on December 8, 2020.

Some of you have retained your seats, while others are new to the Capitol Building. I want to urge each of you to diligently perform the task for which our people have elected you. I pledge my commitment to working with all of you so that together, with our collective efforts, we will serve the Liberian people well.

Welcome back from your Annual Recess as you begin this Fourth Session of constructive dialogue and deliberation in the supreme interest of the Liberian people. I look forward to working with you in the spirit of collaboration and cooperation that we have always enjoyed.

However, before I proceed further, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to you for the sad and untimely passing of two of your members during your recently ended Third Session, namely: Hon. Munah E. Pelham of District 9, Montserrado County, and Hon. J. Nagbe Sloh of District 2, Sinoe County.

Let us pause and observe a moment of silence in their honor.

May their souls rest in perfect peace, and may light perpetual shine upon them.

Mr. Speaker:

I would like to applaud this Honorable Body for the collaboration that we enjoyed during your Third Session, which culminated in the passage of Twenty-six (26) pieces of legislation, twenty-five (25) of which were signed by me in support of the Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD).

Thank you also for your ratification of several financing agreements, which seek to revitalize our economy and create jobs for our people, while at the same time strengthen our relationship with our multilateral partners.

Our Administration also issued six (6) Executive Orders to address national concerns during the period under review. In the interest of time, a listing of these new Acts, Agreements, and Executive Orders is attached as an Appendix to this Annual Message.

Mr. Speaker:

We want to remind you that there are Bills pending before you that are important to the developmental agenda of the Government. As you begin this Fourth Session of the 54th Legislature, we urge you to kindly consider their timeous passage:

1. The Whistle-Blower and Witness Protection Bill;
2. The Anti-Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing, Preventive Measures, and Proceeds of Crime Act, 2019;
3. A Revised Public Health Law of Liberia;
4. The Convention of Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters;
5. An Act to Establish the Liberia Standards Authority;
6. An Act to Establish the Civil Service Commission;
7. The Revised and Re-stated Charter of the University of Liberia;
8. The International Solar Alliance (ISA) Framework Agreement;
9. Maritime Zones Act 2020; and
10. An Act to Endorse the National Youth Policy of Liberia: An Agenda for Action.

Honorable Members of the 54th Legislature, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

In an effort to upgrade the national anti-corruption framework, broad consultations are on-going with stakeholders such as the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, the General Auditing Commission, the Ministry of Justice, and the Judiciary Branch of Government.

I will therefore be submitting Bills to amend certain restrictive judiciary laws, as we have realized that there are processes which not only require the actions of the Legislative Branch, but also require the cooperation and

agreement of the Judiciary Branch, mainly the Supreme Court of Liberia. To adequately address corruption cases, laws providing for the Terms of Court may have to be amended to allow for extended Terms, and for the Grand Jury to be seated for the full Terms of Court.

I will also submit a Bill to amend the Domestic Violence Act and other laws, to provide enhanced protection for victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Additionally, a Bill will be submitted to you to empower young people in an effort to improve their skills through a TVET program.

I will also forward for your urgent attention and subsequent ratification, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) which was signed in Kigali, Rwanda in March of 2018. This agreement is a milestone achievement for Africa in terms of the promotion of trade amongst citizens of the African Union.

Madam Vice President and President of the Senate, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro-Tempore and Members of the 54th Legislature:

I am mandated by the Constitution to report to your august body on the state of the Liberian economy, which shall cover expenditure as well as income.

Accordingly, total revenue received for the calendar year under review was \$653.9 Million US dollars. This amount comprises \$475.5 Million US dollars in domestic revenue and \$178.4 Million US dollars in external resources from our development partners. Total expenditure for the same period amounted to \$606 Million US dollars.

In the period under review, the National Legislature recast the 2019/2020 National Budget twice: first to address perceived revenue challenges, and secondly to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The first recast took the National Budget from \$525.9 Million US dollars to \$505 Million US dollars. The COVID recast subsequently increased the National Budget to \$518 Million US dollars. The Government spent the amount of \$518 Million US dollars for the Fiscal Year 2019/2020 and carried forward the cash amount of \$7.0 Million US dollars for enactment in the 2020/2021 National Budget, which the National Legislature subsequently passed at an amount of \$570 Million US dollars.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Government of Liberia signed a Development Objective Grant Agreement of \$640 Million US dollars that will be programmed to support various projects that the Government of Liberia and USAID will agree on as priority areas of need over the next five (5) years. These resources are supporting key sectors and will be critical to sustain growth, going forward.

Also during the period under review, a total amount of \$399 Million US dollars was announced and committed to various projects as Official Development Assistance to the Government and people of Liberia

Additionally, the amount of \$178.6 Million US dollars was received as total budget support, which came from both traditional and non-traditional partners, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, the African Development Bank and the United States Government through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Honorable Members of the 54th Legislature:

A major feature of the year under review was a support program which was approved by the International Monetary Fund. In December 2019, a Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies was signed with the IMF to address various issues of our macroeconomy.

The program aimed to transform fiscal and monetary policy and improve public sector governance. The first and second reviews of the program have now been concluded and results show that macroeconomic stability is being restored under the program.

In approving the recent disbursement of \$48.8 Million US dollars to the Government of Liberia under the IMF-supported program, the Executive Directors of the IMF praised the Government of Liberia for the effective measures that have been undertaken so far to transform fiscal and monetary policy and restore macroeconomic stability.

In their comments, the IMF Executive Directors noted:

“The Liberian authorities are committed to fiscal discipline and further improvements in cash management, transparency and accountability in

spending, and domestic revenue mobilization to finance their development agenda. The monetary policy stance is appropriately aligned with the inflation objective, and significant progress has been made in strengthening central bank independence.”

Mr. Speaker:

The year under review has also shown our commitment to continue to improve governance and our determination to fight against corruption. In September of 2020, integrity institutions convened an anti-corruption conference which deliberated and presented a clear anti-corruption roadmap. The roadmap recommends that the Government amends the Act of 2008 creating the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, to give the LACC top-rate prosecutorial powers and the mandate to administer the Asset Declaration regime across the three branches of Government.

With this amendment, the LACC will no longer need to await the Ministry of Justice to take cases under investigation to court. The amendment relating to the asset declaration regime would also give LACC the authority to ensure compliance.

The roadmap further recommends amending the Judiciary Law to create a dedicated Corruption and Related Financial Offences Court, to be known as CRIMINAL COURT “F”. Finally, the roadmap stresses the importance of passing both the Whistleblowers and Witness Protection Acts.

Mr. Speaker, these are the key recommendations that came out of the stakeholder consultations on the fight against corruption. I appeal to the Honorable National Legislature to endorse these recommendations and act swiftly. These actions and legislation will advance the institutional fight against corruption to which our administration remains fully committed.

Honorable Members of the 54th Legislature, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Liberia’s total stock of public debt at the end of 2020 amounts to \$1.580 Billion US dollars. Of this amount, domestic debt amounts to \$643.39 Million US dollars, while external debt amounts to \$940.93 Million US dollars.

At end December 2019, the total stock of public debt stood at \$1.28 Billion US dollars, of which domestic debt amounted to \$419.8 Million US dollars, while external debt amounted to \$862.87 Million US dollars.

This increase in domestic debt stock is mainly because of the restructuring and consolidation of the Government's debt to the Central Bank of Liberia. It includes \$170.63 Million US dollars that was contracted by the previous administration but never included in official debt statistics. This irregularity has now been corrected.

The repayment on our domestic debt stock has been structured under the current IMF-supported economic program. The Government is now working to validate the stock of other domestic debt. While this work is ongoing, payments on domestic debt have commenced as a means of stimulating the economy. The Government remains committed to servicing domestic debt as a clear strategy toward stimulating growth.

Mr. Speaker:

In the wake of low public confidence in the Central Bank of Liberia, and by extension the banking system, the Board of Governors and Management of the Bank were re-constituted by me during the year under review.

Additionally, the Amended and Re-stated CBL Act of 1999, which was passed by the National Legislature in October 2020, has strengthened the operational independence of the Bank, and improved transparency and accountability in its operations.

**HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:**

The year 2020 was challenging for the Liberian economy. Real GDP growth projection was further revised downward to negative three (-3.0%) percent for 2020, from the earlier projection of negative two point five (-2.5%) percent, reflecting a decline in economic activity, largely due to prolonged lockdowns at home, restrictions on international travels, disruptions in supply chains and international trade, and the second wave of the pandemic now seen in several countries, including Liberia's major trading partners.

Although the impact of the pandemic on the mining and manufacturing sectors was limited, the service sector, especially the hospitality sub-sector, was severely hit due to the lack of international travelers.

This year, the economy is projected to grow by three point two (3.2%) percent, on account of expected growth in all major sectors of the economy, as well as favorable global developments. But recovery of the economy will depend on the persistence, or otherwise, of COVID-19. However, recent news about production of vaccines for the prevention and treatment of the pandemic is a positive development which will fast track global post-COVID recovery.

Mr. Speaker:

During the course of the year, the policy of my government was significantly focused on protecting the purchasing power of our low-income population by aggressively fighting inflation, which reduced from about thirty (30%) percent at end December 2019 to about twelve (12%) percent at end December 2020. We continue to work aggressively on the goal of price stability so that our people will feel the benefits of macroeconomic reforms.

In the last quarter of 2020, developments in the foreign exchange market were relatively favorable as the Liberian dollar recorded persistent appreciation compared to other countries in the ECOWAS region, whose currencies widely depreciated.

Despite the printing and delivery of L\$4billion Liberian dollars in July 2020, the economy was challenged by difficulty to access Liberian dollars in the financial sector, largely reflecting about forty (40%) percent rate of mutilation of the existing Liberian dollar banknotes in circulation.

In addition, the liquidity pressure on the Liberian dollar was aggravated by increasing demand for the local currency, induced by many players in the economy such as mobile money agents, large numbers of ATM card holders, and foreign exchange bureaus.

In view of this situation, the Central Bank of Liberia has informed me that it is seeking authority from the National Legislature to print a new family of banknotes. As it is the responsibility of this august body to grant such approval under the advice of the Central Bank, I respectfully call upon you,

Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen, to act swiftly to resolve the situation before the next season of high demand for cash.

In the face of this liquidity situation, and while we endeavor to encourage our citizens to sustain the wider use of mobile money for transactions, the Executive will intensify consultation with the National Legislature to pursue currency reform, with the aim of promoting monetary policy credibility and enhancing confidence in the economy.

In the current environment in which the CBL does not have control over the more than ninety (90%) percent of Liberian dollars which are outside the banking sector, the effectiveness of monetary policy is undermined. Our goal is to reset the foundation of monetary policy.

Given the importance of the Central Bank to our economy, we will further implore the National Legislature to help to strengthen its institutional independence, in line with internationally accepted norms.

Madam Vice President and President of the Senate, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro-Tempore and Members of the 54th Legislature:

The most significant factor that negatively impacted the Liberian economy during the year under review was the Coronavirus pandemic, which has afflicted tens of millions of people in all nations.

Liberia has not been spared the impact of this global pandemic, which started in late 2019 and spread across the world in 2020. Liberia recorded its first case in March 2020 and as of today's date we have confirmed 1,927 total cases with 1,722 recoveries and 109 active cases. We have also recorded 84 deaths, with only 13 deaths occurring in treatment facilities.

In honor of the memory of those who have fallen to the pandemic in our country and of the millions who have perished around the world, it is only fitting that I propose a moment of silence.

[SILENCE]

May their souls rest in perfect peace.

Honorable Members of the 54th Legislature, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

The three branches of Government have coordinated quite well to deliver a strong National Response to COVID-19. It can be recalled that I established a Special Presidential Committee on COVID-19 (SPACOC), which brought together the Ministry of Health, the National Public Health Institute and other development partners and stakeholders to drive the fight against COVID-19.

Prior to its first case of Coronavirus, Liberia was probably the first country in Africa to begin to quarantine travelers from COVID-19 infected countries. The health authorities also launched massive testing and contact tracing programs that have proven quite successful. To date, Liberia has 1637 infections, and more than 1,360 persons have recovered from COVID-19, with 13 persons dying in a treatment facility. These numbers represent one of best COVID-19 responses in the world.

Thanks to the pro-active leadership of national Government, working together with development partners and other stakeholders, Liberia's leadership in containing the COVID-19 virus has been globally recognized. For example, the former head of the United States Center for Disease Control has recognized Liberia as "Best at Learning form a Recent Epidemic".

He wrote recently in the Wall Street Journal: [Quote]

"Liberia, hard hit by the Ebola epidemic in 2014, was one of the first countries to start screening for COVID-19 at airports and to adopt other control measures, such as rapid testing, complete contact tracing and quarantine" [Unquote]

This recognition and praise is reserved for the thousands of medical practitioners, doctors, physician assistants, nurses, mid-wives and all other categories of healthcare workers from all over Liberia, who place their lives on the line so that Liberians can be safe. We owe them an eternal debt of gratitude that we will never be able to repay. They are our heros and heroines!!! And we say thanks to them from a grateful Nation.

Honorable Members of the 54th Legislature, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

We have held together as a country throughout the pandemic, and with the support from our Development Partners, we have mounted an effective response.

Let me use this opportunity to thank all of our development partners for their strong COVID-19 support to the Government and People of Liberia. Through both direct budgetary support and indirect support, the international community has rallied to Liberia's defense, and continues to be a reliable ally in our struggle to protect our citizens from this deadly disease.

In the period under review, the Government received direct COVID-19 budget support of \$87 Million US dollars from the International Monetary Fund, \$14 Million US dollars from the African Development Bank, and \$10.8 Million US dollars from the European Union.

These budget support resources were received over the previous and the current fiscal years and were intended as general budget support to help sustain Government revenue.

To date, the total monies directly spent on the National COVID-19 Responses under the control of the Ministry of Health and the National Public Health Institute is \$6.0 Million US dollars, which was transferred by the Government of Liberia through the National Response. The General Auditing Commission is currently auditing this expenditure.

Besides this direct spending by the Government, a little more than \$20 Million US dollars has been contributed indirectly by development partners to the National COVID-19 Response. Of this amount, the World Bank has contributed \$17 Million US dollars, and the World Health Organization and the United States Centers for Disease Control have contributed \$3.0 Million US dollars. The General Auditing Commission is also auditing these indirect expenditures also as part of the total national COVID-19 response effort.

These resources have gone to support a 23-bed National Infections Disease Center, with an additional 74-bedroom quarantine facility located at the Free

Zone on Bushrod Island. Additionally, the government was able to procure fifteen (15) ambulances; one for each county, 1,200 hospital and ICU beds and monitors, 120 motor cycles, 20 ventilators, and other consumables, and also constructed an I-V fluid and oxygen plant. These resources have also supported compensation for health workers. We also thank the many private institutions and commercial banks who have provided financial support. As a country we will forever remain grateful.

Honorable Members of the 54th Legislature:

The Government developed a legislative program that provided some relief for our people and kept the Government running under these very difficult circumstances. During the year under review and in response to COVID-19, the National Legislature approved in April 2020 a State of Emergency and provided stimulus support as part of the national budget.

An amount of \$25 Million US dollars was approved for food distribution to provide food relief to Liberians throughout the country. The World Food Program was selected to implement this food distribution program, and the \$25 Million US dollars was transferred to them. To date, according to the WFP, more than forty (40%) percent of the food has been distributed to 10 counties, benefitting about one (1) million Liberians. Five counties -- Sinoe, River Gee, Lofa, Grand Kru and Gbarpolu – are yet to receive their respective supplies. The Government has signed a no-cost extension with the WFP to complete the food distribution by end of March 2021.

The Government also provided support to the Liberia Electricity Corporation and the Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation for household electricity and water relief. Nearly one (\$1.0) million US dollars was provided to the Liberian Electricity Corporation to fund COVID-19 electricity subsidies, which benefitted nearly 38,000 households across Montserrado, Margibi, Nimba, Maryland and Grand Gedeh counties. This means that around 188,000 Liberians benefitted from the Government funded electricity program.

The Government also provided \$1.5 Million US dollars to the Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation to fund water subsidies for almost five months, benefitting nearly 10,000 households from a targeted network base of 12,000 households. This means that eighty-three (83%) percent of the targeted

base, or almost 50,000 Liberians, benefitted in Montserrado, Grand Bassa and Margibi counties.

The Legislature also approved the amount of \$2.0 Million US dollars for market women and petty traders support. This amount has been placed in escrow at the Central Bank of Liberia.

The Government is also working with the United States Government through the United States Agency for International Development to deliver \$10 Million US dollars under a COVID-19 cash transfer program to about 85,000 petty traders, market women and other vulnerable Liberians trading in the informal economy.

Government has agreed to underwrite the cost of providing biometric identification cards to these 85,000 Liberians. The distribution of the Government's \$2.0 million US dollars will greatly benefit from the enrollment under the USAID supported program, since it may avoid duplication of payments to the same individuals.

The Government of Liberia has also extended COVID-19 related relief to healthcare workers and private school teachers. The amount of \$2.0 Million US dollars was budgeted and has been paid to healthcare workers as part of hazard pay.

Government has also provided \$1.0 Million US dollars to the Ministry of Education for private school teachers throughout Liberia. This payment is through a digital platform and is presently ongoing.

We thank all our development partners for their strong support for Liberia and wish to inform this Honorable Legislature that we continue to work with all our partners to ensure that these resources deliver ever stronger results.

The expenditure of these resources is aligned with the Government's Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development will be critical in supporting growth and transformation across key sectors of our country.

Mr. Speaker:

Although 2020 was a difficult year, the COVID-19 challenge did not prevent the Government from working for its people. Though the Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development has been impacted by both recent

macroeconomic shocks, as well as by COVID-19, the work under the PAPD continues.

Government has developed a recovery plan, and some aspects of this plan are in motion. The key focus is to continue infrastructure development, and continue policy reforms in sectors such as tourism and agriculture. In agriculture, the goal is to empower small-holder farmers with resources, inputs and markets. In infrastructure, such as roads and electricity, the goal is to continue delivering on major projects.

These developments and investments will sustain the positive growth outlook for 2021 and for the medium term. We will continue our reforms in 2021 and push to achieve growth and grow jobs across key sectors of our economy.

And so Mr. Speaker, although the state of our economy is challenged, the fundamentals remain sound and strong. That soundness and strength is based on the very hard work we have delivered over the past 18 months.

Madam Vice President and President of the Senate, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro-Tempore and Members of the 54th Legislature:

Now that I have discharged my statutory duty under Article 58 of our Constitution, I would like to allow me to speak directly to the Liberian people.

**MY FELLOW LIBERIANS:**

Just three days ago, January 22, 2020, was the third anniversary of my inauguration as President of Liberia for a six-year term. This is therefore the mid-term of my tenure, and it is timely that we review our progress and achievements made thus far, and re-calibrate where necessary, to ensure that we achieve the goals of our national development plan, the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development, which is based on the platform upon which you elected me to this high office.

First of all, let me reaffirm that road connectivity continues to be my flagship program, which is intended to serve as a major catalyst for national development. It is important that all of the fifteen (15) counties in Liberia

should be interconnected by modern roads. This entails the construction of approximately 500 kilometers of paved primary roads, as well as the maintenance of approximately 4,000 kilometers of urban and secondary roads.

In this regard, considerable progress has been made, in spite of the negative impact of the Coronavirus pandemic during the year under review. Sixty six (66) kilometers of primary roads have been completed, and construction is ongoing on an additional 365 kilometers.

The completed roads include 50 kilometers from Harper to Karloken and 16 kilometers from Harper Junction to Cavalla River.

Meanwhile, construction works are ongoing on the following roads: 67 km road from Ganta to Yekepa; 47 km road from Sanniquelle-Logatuo. Along the Bong and Lofa corridor, 80 km road from Gbarnga to Salayea. In the South-Eastern corridor, 80 km road from Karloken to Fish Town. Similarly, funding has been received and preparatory work is ongoing on the 45km highway from Roberts International Airport to ELWA Junction and the 6km road from ELWA to Coca-Cola Factory. A contract has been awarded for a 39 km road from Ganta to Saclepea in Nimba County.

Additionally, complete studies with committed funds are now available for another 131km of roads, and procurement processes are ongoing. These corridors include: 50km road from Barclayville to Sasstown, which is part of the coastal highway project. Already, the Ecowas Bank for Investment and Development has approved an initial \$50 Million US dollars for this project. Financing arrangements have also been concluded for the construction of a 20 km road from Fish Town to Kaylipo, and a 61km road from Saclepea to Tappita. The World Bank has earmarked \$55 Million US dollars for the pavement of the Tappita - Zwedru highway.

Studies have also been completed, and the Government is in discussions with partners for funding commitments for the following roads: a 208 km road from Buchanan to Greenville, a 31 km road from Yarkpa Town Junction to Cestos, and a 146 km road from Konia to Voinjama.

My Fellow Liberians:

In spite of financial constraints, Government has been determined to focus attention on various community development schemes that would enhance the living standards of our people.

Looking ahead in this coming year and beyond, the focus of my Government has always been my people and how I can improve their lives. The only way this can be achieved is by moving closer to the communities and working with them directly to empower them economically, to provide basic social services, and improve their lives in all aspects. This is clearly the focus of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development.

Accordingly, during the year under review, the following community projects were completed and dedicated:

The Government's intervention into the fire disaster which took place in 2019 in the Popo Beach Community on Bushrod Island initially prompted the construction of 50 housing units for fire victims. The second phase comprising of 39 buildings was recently completed.

The 14th Gobachop Market, which is situated within the Omega Community, Paynesville City, Montserrado County, was successfully completed and dedicated in September last year.

The Lango Lippy High School situated in Kakata, Margibi County, and the Kendeja School, situated in Paynesville, Monrovia, were renovated and dedicated last year.

A total of 39 housing units were completed under Phase 1 of the Grand Gedeh housing project, and the barracks at the EBK military base were renovated to improve the living conditions of our men and women in arms.

The work on both Kaylia/Taylia bridges in Porkpa District, Grand Cape Mount County, has finally been completed. Both bridges are expected to benefit over 20,000 poor people residing in these remote communities.

A special mention must be made of the newly-constructed 14th Military Hospital, which became operational during the year under review. It was very fortunate that Government had already taken the initiative to build this

facility, as it was readily available and became the main center for the isolation and treatment of patients who tested positive for the Corona virus. The 14th Military Hospital continues to fulfil this role to date, and is a key contributor to the relative success of our efforts to contain the Covid-19 pandemic.

FELLOW LIBERIANS, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

There is need for a renewed focus on agriculture, as Government is determined to ensure that Liberia has a vibrant agriculture sector to ensure food security and sustainable development. This is an important component of our national development agenda, the Pro Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD).

Every one must go back to the soil, in order to utilize agriculture as a vital tool for the revitalization of the economy. We have the land, we have the labor, and we have the climate. So let us go back to the soil to grow what we eat, and eat what we grow, so that we can reduce our dependence on food imports, create jobs, and increase food security.

In this regard, the Ministry of Agricultural will be the focal point to lead and coordinate this drive that should transform the agricultural landscape in Liberia. This is a task that is already underway, and which will continue to receive the fullest support of this Government.

The activities in the agricultural sector will continue to receive my personal attention and the fullest support of Government, going forward, so that Liberians will benefit from its full potential as an engine of development, economic growth, and poverty reduction.

Mr. Speaker:

We intend to continue to lend our support as a Government to the expansion of educational opportunities to our citizens. We are encouraged by the impact of our free tuition policy for state-owned universities and colleges. For example, since the implementation of this policy, we have seen enrolment at the University of Liberia more than doubled, from 8,000 students to 18,000 students.

We realized that the payment of WASSCE fee had become a huge burden for parents and students alike. This was causing a negative impact on the learning environment. We therefore put into place a policy whereby the government would assume the responsibility of paying WASSCE fees for all students.

As a result of this intervention, we have seen a significant improvement in learning outcomes. During the period under review, the number of students who passed one subject increased from 71 percent in 2019 to 82 percent. Additionally, the number of students who passed the threshold of at least 5 subjects increased from 7.9 percent in the previous year to 15.6 percent.

Mr. Speaker:

I would like to take this time to give special recognition and commendation to my dear wife, the First Lady of Liberia, Mrs. Clar Marie Weah.

Apart from standing by me as a loyal and caring partner, the First Lady continues to touch the lives of many young women, young men and the elderly alike through the implementation of several humanitarian projects under her own initiatives.

Under the Clar Hope Foundation, many projects have directly impacted many Liberians. They include the construction of a home for the elderly and disabled in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, the rehabilitation of orphanages in several counties, a program to feed the elderly, provision of medical supplies, foreign scholarships for vocational training for young people, among many others.

I thank you for your hard work and support Madam First Lady.

Mr. Speaker:

In the same vein, it has always been my personal passion to help the less fortunate and the needy in society. This is why becoming President of Liberia has not stopped me from performing my goodwill as a humanitarian seeking to transform lives of my young compatriots.

For example, under my scholarship scheme which we started early in the 1990s, we continue to provide support to thousands of students in dozens of high schools, undergraduate universities and graduate and professional schools.

We also continue to grant support to young entrepreneurs to give them a headstart.

I, George Manneh Weah, who grew up in the slums of Gibraltar, will never forget my roots and will always continue to seek the welfare of the people.

Honorable Members of the 54th Legislature, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

We will continue to remain focused in a relentless drive to make improvements in the energy sector, particular power and light. In this regard, my Government has been pro-active in the early realization of the TRANSCO CLSG transmission lines from the Ivory Coast, which will make available an additional 225 kilovolts of electricity to augment the supply from the Mount Coffee hydroelectric plant. This should make electricity more available and affordable to our citizens and residents.

The added benefit of an increase in electrical supply is that it will provide a boost to industrialization, and increase the prospects of attracting more foreign direct investment.

With the availability of a ready supply of electricity, Government has now embarked upon a major project to install street lights in Monrovia. This project is not limited only to the main streets, but in due course will also be extended to cover all communities in the Greater Monrovia environs.

Mr. Speaker:

New investors into Liberia's diverse economic sectors will bring more jobs, provide more training and education to workers, and ultimately help rebuild the nation's economic prospects.

Direct foreign investment in value-added projects is the cornerstone of economic growth for Liberia and an important part of initiatives under the government's Pro-poor agenda by creating jobs and stimulating other economic benefits.

Significant progress has been made in negotiations with ArcelorMittal Liberia. The goal is to amend the Mineral Development Agreement so that it gives more benefits to the Liberian people and also ensure an additional investment of \$800 Million US dollars to execute the second phase of their expansion by constructing a value-addition concentrator plant.

Once negotiations are concluded, the Executive Branch will be submitting a new bill to the Legislature proposing the an amendment to the AML Mineral Development Agreement to kick-start this investment in 2021.

This new AML Phase 2 project, when commissioned and made operational, will produce a superior quality content and triple the quantity of iron ore exported, representing a very large increase in government revenues from mining and additional construction jobs starting this year.

Mr. Speaker:

You will recall that in October 2019, the Government of Liberia and the Government of the Republic of Guinea signed an Implementation Agreement, where the two neighboring countries expressed their common desire to cooperate in order to allow the evacuation of Guinean mining products through Liberia, using either existing or new infrastructure in the Yekepa - Buchanan corridor.

I am pleased to inform you that the Government of Liberia has now completed a feasibility study for this project, which has presented a number of viable and bankable options for development of infrastructure in the corridor.

These proposals are currently being reviewed and assessed by the Inter-Ministerial Committee established under the Implementation Agreement, and recommendations will be made that, when approved by Government, will result in the early realization of this important bi-national project.

When completed, it will contribute not only to the sub-regional integration of the economies of Guinea and Liberia, but will also strengthen the contribution of the mining sector and related infrastructure to the socio-economic development of both countries.

Mr. Speaker:

In 2017, Liberia passed the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Act. Buchanan has been proposed by the Government of Liberia for the establishment of an SEZ. In April last year, a feasibility study was presented to various stakeholders. We look forward to an early development of the Buchanan Special Economic Zone.

Liberia understands that investors require greater levels of confidence in Liberia's ability to deliver on their investments. We understand that this will require greater transparency and improving our ease of doing business. Today, we commit to making these changes and look to engage with investors, the international community, and other stakeholders to make the necessary improvements.

Mr. Speaker:

We will continue to take targeted steps which are aimed at consolidating the fundamentals of democracy in Liberia.

The guarantee of political rights and other basic freedoms are cardinal principles of democratic governance that my government will continue to uphold at all times.

Over the last three years, we have created a conducive environment for all to fully participate, irrespective of their political, social or religious beliefs. The discourse has been diverse and loud. The media, political parties and religious groups have all made their voices heard, holding public officials accountable.

The just-ended nationwide senatorial mid-term elections served to further validate our credentials as a thriving democratic country. Despite the challenges, the National Elections Commission went on to hold one of the freest and fairest polls that the country has ever conducted. Voters elected candidates of their choice in order to make changes to the way they are governed, as enshrined in the Liberian Constitution.

During the ensuing months and years, we will take deliberate actions to encourage the kind of participation and views that bring on every facet of the Liberian society into the fold of a more inclusive governance.

Madam Vice President and President of the Senate, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro-Tempore and Members of the 54th Legislature:

During this period under review, Liberia continued to foster mutually beneficial ties with her traditional partners as well as explore new relations with friendly countries based on cooperation and partnerships in pursuit of the national interest.

Despite the debilitating effects of the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) on the international system where global citizens faced an existential threat and normal diplomatic intercourses were drastically curtailed, my Administration made noticeable strides on the bilateral and multilateral fronts, and our relations with our traditional partners remain strong, productive and mutually rewarding.

During the year under review, 17 Ambassadors presented their Letters of Credence, as Liberia currently hosts 23 Resident Foreign Ambassadors in Monrovia, 19 non-Resident Foreign Ambassadors accredited to Liberia, 29 Heads of International Organizations, and 17 Honorary Consuls General resident in Monrovia.

Meanwhile, Liberia continues to maintain 26 diplomatic missions, two Consulates General, spread across Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East. Efforts have been exerted to extend our diplomatic representation in the Oceania Region, where there is a growing Liberian population, as well as investment and trade opportunities.

Mr. Speaker:

Death is a certainty we do not easily accept, yet it comes when we least expect. During the year under review, we interacted with friends, relatives and loved ones, who we cannot see anymore, but still remember. Some of our illustrious and beloved compatriots who suddenly departed this world for the next and for whom we pray to the God of Mercy and Love to grant unto their souls a peaceful and blissful repose, were:

H.E. Mary-Ann Fossung  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of the Republic of Liberia, Dakar-Senegal;

Hon. Willard A. G. Russell  
Former Minister of Transport; former Director-General of the General Services Agency, Republic of Liberia

Hon. Jones Wah-Doe Blamo  
Deputy Director for Operations and VIP Protection Services, National Security Agency (NSA), Republic of Liberia

Hon. Emmanuel B. Nyeswa  
Director-General, Internal Audit Agency

Hon. Rev. Joseph Karbbar Gailey Levee Moulton, KC-OSA; KGB-HOAR;  
Former Assistant Minister, Bureau of Construction, Ministry of Public Works

Hon. Dr. Joseph D. Zeakedoe Korto  
Former Minister of Education, Republic of Liberia

Hon. Mobutu Vlah Nyenpan, Sr.  
Minister of Public Works and Former Senior Senator of Sinoe County (52nd and 53rd Legislature), Republic of Liberia

Hon. Nuwoe A. D. Scott  
Assistant Minister for Administration and Insurance, Ministry of Transport, Republic of Liberia

Hon. Max Massawolo Dennis, GBOSA;  
Former Minister, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Republic of Liberia;

Former Assistant Minister, Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs, Executive Mansion, Republic of Liberia

Hon. Rev. John W. H. McClain, II, GBSA;  
Former Minister and Deputy Minister, respectively, Erstwhile Ministry of Planning and Economics Affairs, Republic of Liberia

Mr. Speaker:

It has been approximately 3 years since the United Nations Mission force, UNMIL departed from Liberia after serving as the bastion of our national security. Since their departure, we as a Government and a People, have not only maintained the peace, but secured it unbroken.

However, peace and security also comes with good governance and adherence to the rule of law.

During the period under review, the government has gone to extreme lengths to ensure that the fundamental rights of all citizens were guaranteed under the law. The government will continue to hold on to its responsibility and perform its duties under the Constitution. We therefore want to call on all Liberians, irrespective of political, ethnic, religious or social differences to work in the interest of peace.

In this regard, we applaud the relentless efforts of our steadfast partner for the last 75 years, the United Nations, and its related agencies, to help build peace, lasting stability, promote human rights and spur development. Over the past year, the United Nations has consistently provided political support and accompaniment in sustaining peace, as well as coordinate policy, program and operations for peace consolidation and delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Madam Vice President and President of the Senate, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro-Tempore and Members of the 54th Legislature:

I have duly reported to you on the state of the Liberian nation, and from my report we can rightfully conclude that the State of our Nation is stable and peaceful. Together we have shown remarkable resilience in the face of the unprecedented and unforeseen challenges presented to us by this global pandemic.

In spite of these daunting challenges, our development drive has not been derailed. We understand some of the personal and collective challenges you face in your lives. We feel the pain you feel on a day-to-day basis as you seek to put bread on your table.

I too have felt the pain of hunger and poverty.

I have mandated the entire machinery of my administration to recalibrate and enhance the focus on finding lasting solutions to the bread and better issues facing our people.

Therefore, there will be no room for error, no room for laxity. All ministers and officials. TAKE NOTE!

My Administration's commitment remains unwavering when it comes to the transformational development of Liberia within the framework of an accountable and functional democracy.

This is not only my ambition, this is my determination. In order to do so, however, it will require that you rally to the cause, and make your own personal commitment to national development. This is our country. Just as it belongs to all of us, it will require the collective effort of all of us to improve it. No one person can do it for us, and we must not expect any one from outside to do it for us.

As I have often said, I have my vision, and I will fulfill my mission. That vision is fully set out and captured in the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development, and my mission is to fulfill that vision through the development of this country and the betterment of the lives of the Liberian people.

So help me God!  
I thank you.