

REMARKS

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. GEORGE MANNEH WEAH

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

AT THE OPENING

OF THE

NATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION CONFERENCE

THE MINISTERIAL COMPLEX

MONROVIA, LIBERIA

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2020

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislature;

Mr. Chief Justice and Members of the Judiciary;

Members of the Cabinet and other Officials of Government;

The Dean and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Heads and Representatives of International Organizations;

Chiefs, Elders and Zoes,

Members of Civil Society Organizations;

Members of the Fourth Estate;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today, this important occasion reflects yet another opportunity for us to tackle Corruption, which is an age-old menace that continues to exist in our society. Corruption has eroded trust in our institutions and deprived communities across the country of much-needed development. That is why my administration has made fighting this vice, in all its forms, a top priority from the onset.

Although some of the public debates about corruption have been laden with unsubstantiated claims and politically-driven propaganda, we have acted without

hesitation wherever and whenever there has been sufficient probable cause to do so - regardless of who was involved. These actions on the part of the government have led to dismissals, resignations, arrests and arraignment of many persons, including some of the high-ranking officials of this Government.

On my instructions, the Ministry of Justice last year began the process of recuperating lost and stolen assets of the Republic of Liberia, calling on officials, both past and present, to account for resources which had been entrusted to them by the Liberian people. This process will continue in an equitable and impartial manner. The principal objective is not only to retrieve public resources, but also to serve as a deterrent to potential perpetrators.

While these actions may not yet have gained the full traction they deserve, they rest well with our partners - both local and international. For example, we have received their plaudits for operating a very unique and transparent budget and financial management system. And Liberia's ranking on recent anti-corruption surveys, which gauge public perception of corruption, has improved. But we should not, and will not, rest on our laurels.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

As you are well aware, our country is endowed with vast natural resources, but we still have not reaped all of the benefits that can be attained from their efficient and responsible use. By this conference, we are seeking to change that trend. But I want you to be aware that it will take the collective effort of all of us for that to happen.

From time immemorial, we have come to perceive corruption as a way of life as it plagues all aspects of the Liberian society. In response to these concerns, my Government's four-pillar national development document, the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD), designates one of these pillars to improving GOVERNANCE and TRANSPARENCY.

For example, you will recall the recent baseless allegations that Sixteen Billion Liberian dollars had somehow gone missing in Liberia, and could not be accounted for by the Central Bank. The immediate response of my Government was that this matter should be investigated thoroughly, professionally, and transparently.

Accordingly, I did not restrict the process only to local institutions, but reached out to the United States Government for assistance in this regard. The response was positive, and funding was provided to engage an internationally-recognized firm to investigate these allegations.

At the conclusion of their work, they issued findings which showed that no money had gone missing, but that there had been irregularities in the procurement process on the part of the Central Bank. Recommendations were made to restructure and revamp the Central Bank, including its leadership.

Very shortly thereafter, a new Executive Governor and a new Board of Governors were appointed, a new management team was put in place, and the independence and autonomy of the Central Bank was reinforced.

By so doing, we demonstrated our willingness to fight incidents of corruption and other forms of malfeasance, and also improve transparency and accountability in governance. However, in order to continue to achieve this, all the institutions of government involved with the fight against corruption ought to have a greater degree of autonomy and work collaboratively with each other.

Although substantial progress has been made in the investigation and prosecution of corruption cases consistent with law, there is still more that needs to be done. This Conference offers a unique opportunity to tap into the expertise of various

governance stakeholders and partners in order to evolve a new strategy for fighting corruption in Liberia.

We are therefore pleased that the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission and all the other national institutions involved in the fight against corruption have embarked on this remarkable process of critical introspection.

We trust that the outcome of this important national endeavor will help the government and our partners to re-focus attention on critical activities that will yield both short- and long-term results in the fight against corruption.

Thank you and I wish you success in your deliberations.

I thank you.