

STATEMENT

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. GEORGE MANNEH WEAH  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE SIGNING OF THE FARMINGTON RIVER DECLARATION 2023

FARMINGTON RIVER  
MARGIBI COUNTY  
REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

APRIL 4, 2023

Her Excellency Madam Clar Marie Weah,  
First Lady of the Republic of Liberia;

Her Excellency Madam Jewel Howard-Taylor,  
Vice President of the Republic of Liberia;

Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf,  
Former President of the Republic of Liberia;

The Speaker, President Pro-Tempore, and Members of the 54th Legislature, here  
present;

Her Honor the Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of Liberia,  
here present;

The Dean and Members of the Cabinet;

The Doyen and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

The Chairperson and Members of the Board of Commissioners of the National Election  
Commission;

Dr. Omar Alieu Touray,

President of the ECOWAS Commission;

Madam Giovannie Biha,  
Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General,  
and the Officer-In-Charge of the United Nations in West Africa and the Sahel;

The Resident Coordinator of the United Nations In Liberia;

The Resident Representative of ECOWAS in Liberia;

Heads of International Organizations, here present;

The Chairman and Members of the National Traditional Council of Liberia

Officials and Members of the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia;

Political Leaders and Other Officials of Political Parties;

Heads of Civil Society Organizations;

Representatives and Members of Women and Youth Organizations;

Members of the Fourth Estate;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasing honor to warmly welcome all of you today as we are gathered here in Farmington to sign this important Peace Pledge.

In so doing, I would like to congratulate all political leaders and other officials of political parties here present; the Chair and Members of the Board of Commissioners of the National Elections Commission; the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the United Nations; and all other stakeholders, for your steadfast commitment to the promotion of democracy, peace, security, stability and development in Liberia, and for your hard work in making this event a reality.

In June, 2017, a few months before the Presidential and Legislative Elections which were held in Liberia that year, twenty (20) of Liberia's twenty-two (22) registered political

parties met here in this place and signed a document which was named as the “Farmington River Declaration”.

In this document, we committed ourselves to an orderly and peaceful elections process in October 2017. We agreed, individually and collectively, to prevent electoral violence, impunity, and injustice; and pledged before the ECOWAS Heads of State, who were present in Liberia at the time attending the 51st Summit of that Organization, that if ever and whenever such conflicts occurred, we would address them through mediation or through legal means.

I am proud to say, as the leader of a political party which participated in that election, and who eventually won it, that every party that signed the Farmington River Declaration in 2017 kept true to their word, and the elections were conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner, without violence; and, moreover, all differences were processed and resolved through the justice system in Liberia, under the rule of law.

#### DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Once again, six years later, the citizens of this country will be going to the polls in October of this year to participate in Presidential and Legislative Elections to choose their leaders.

These elections present a significant opportunity not only to consolidate Liberia's democratic gains, but to entrench and build upon them.

They also present an opportunity to strengthen a deepening political culture that has at its core: the principles of freedom, justice, and equality, and the respect of human rights, including the rights of women and children. They will also provide the occasion for the Government of Liberia to continue to demonstrate its unreserved commitment to the protection of the rights of all citizens, as enshrined in our Constitution.

The Presidential and Legislative Elections of October 2023 will be the first to be primarily organized and administered by Liberia, since the drawdown of UNMIL, although since the incumbency of my Administration in 2018, the National Elections Commission has successfully conducted By-elections and a Referendum that were recognized by all stakeholders as peaceful, free, fair, and transparent.

It is therefore incumbent on all political stakeholders, including the ruling party, as well as the opposition parties, civil society, the media, and in fact ALL Liberians, to recognize the centrality of peace during these elections, and work collectively to deliver a credible, inclusive, and peaceful process.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

History has taught us that the risk of post-conflict countries to regress to war is extremely high. By any account, therefore, Liberia is a post-conflict success story. Today's signing ceremony is truly another milestone achievement to be admired and celebrated. It marks a symbolic celebration of twenty (20) years of uninterrupted peace since the signing of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003, most of them under the supervision of what was once the largest United Nations peacekeeping force, comprising of fifteen (15) thousand soldiers and administrators.

We have now enjoyed five (5) years of sustained and unbroken peace since I assumed the Office of President of Liberia on January 22, 2018. The transformation is stark: Liberia is now contributing troops as part of United Nations peacekeeping forces in several countries in Africa, instead of requiring peacekeepers to maintain peace in our country.

We have all, for the most part, worked positively to consolidate the peace in Liberia. But while we have now turned the corner on our recent dark history, it is imperative that we reject and condemn those who would seek to take us back to those dark days.

I am proud of what we have achieved as a nation, and equally happy that we have maximized the external support we have received on our journey to this level.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

These upcoming elections, when peacefully and credibly held, will be a manifestation of the strengthening and showcasing of our democratic credentials, as well as our resilience and relentless commitment to upholding the tenets of democracy. It is about the building of trust and confidence in our political culture.

I commend all of us political leaders and our respective political parties for resolving to sign this second Farmington River Declaration, which signifies our commitment and readiness to pursue the path of a peaceful, free, fair, transparent, inclusive and credible democratic elections, come October 10 this year, that will elevate our standard as a democratic nation. With a guaranteed and successful democratic exercise, we will further demonstrate our readiness for sustained peace, security, stability and development.

This signing is a gesture which further indicates that we political leaders are sending a strong signal to our partisans, supporters, well-wishers, and followers, and also to the entire World, of our unflinching commitment and preparedness to conduct peaceful, free, fair, transparent, inclusive and credible democratic Presidential and Legislative elections on October 10 this year, and to accept the will of the Liberian People as will be expressed through the ballot box.

Above all, this Peace Pledge is about demonstrating the patriotism and statesmanship needed by us as political leaders to speak Peace to the Nation, and place our beloved nation-state, Mama Liberia, ahead of our personal ambitions.

With our collective determination to preserve Liberia's peace and unity, I am certain that the peace and non-violence Pledge that we, as political leaders, are making in writing and signing today, will serve as a testament of our firm commitment to national stability, security, peace and development.

Not only do I look to all of us political leaders gathered here today to live up to the aspirations set out in the Farmington River Declaration 2023, to which we are about to commit ourselves, but I also call upon all our political parties, supporters and the wider

electorate to follow our lead and support us in the fulfillment of the promises made today to the People of Liberia and the World, especially the pledge to prevent violence in our elections.

Let me pinpoint the need for all of us political leaders and our political parties, supporters, and the electorate in general, to also uphold the pledge to prevent violence against women in the elections, and treat our women with civility and with respect.

Beyond physical violence, women in elections or politics in Liberia have often faced harassment, discrimination, and psychological abuse, both in person and online. This behavior must not be dismissed as simply “the cost of doing politics.” It is a clear violation of human rights; it is demeaning, offensive, dis-empowering and cowardly. Such violence is considered a threat to the integrity of the elections.

This Peace Pledge will actually be put to the test before the elections, through our pre-election campaign activities. It will be put to the test on Elections Day, and it will be put to the test during the post-election period, particularly after the results are declared. This is when the sincerity of our intentions and the genuineness of our commitment in promoting and preserving peace will come under the highest scrutiny.

#### DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The promotion of peace is the shared responsibility of all stakeholders in Liberia. We are therefore expected to play our respective roles appropriately and effectively. We must pursue this common interest with sincerity and goodwill, with a view to strengthening Liberia's democratic credentials and value, not only for these forthcoming elections, but for future elections that will benefit and safeguard all the generations to come.

Let me therefore use this occasion to urge all stakeholders who have a vested interest in the October elections to avoid incendiary language and what I perceive to be a growing culture of militancy, which can have the propensity to quickly spill over into violence.

These vices must be discouraged by all of us. In this regard, the media and civil society have a crucial role to play, and I am glad that they are represented here today, because they are very important partners in this process.

Rhetoric that whips up old divisions and puts tribes and regions against one another, must be discouraged. We as political leaders must have a duty and responsibility to prevail on all of the members within the ranks of our various institutions to desist from actions that could lead to violence.

While we all support different causes and interests, there is one cause that must bring everyone of us together, in spite of our differences, and that is the cause of maintaining the peace of our Nation. I am not only referring to the parties and stakeholders in this room. Liberians everywhere have an obligation to ensure that we do not reverse the gains that have been made.

And so today, as we sign the 2023 Farmington River Declaration, I call upon all political leaders in this room to ensure that our supporters, and the wider electorate who follow us, will also adhere to the spirit of this Agreement that we have signed before God and the whole World, as we jointly work to fulfil the promises that we have made therein.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

Allow me to remind ourselves of the sacred words of our beloved National Anthem:

"All hail, Liberia, hail! (All hail!).  
In union, strong success is sure.  
We cannot fail!".

And let me add, that with YOUR support:

We must not fail.

We will not fail.

I thank you.