

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY  
AMBASSADOR BABATUNDE O. AJISOMO, FORMER SPECIAL  
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PRESIDENT OF ECOWAS COMMISSION  
IN LIBERIA AND FACILITATOR OF THE CENTRE FOR  
HUMANITARIAN DIALOGUE (HD) TO LIBERIA ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE 65<sup>TH</sup> ARMED FORCES DAY CELEBRATION OF THE REPUBLIC  
OF LIBERIA HELD AT THE BARCLAY TRAINING CENTRE,  
MONROVIA, LIBERIA 11<sup>th</sup>, FEBRUARY, 2022**

**Protocol**

His Excellency, Dr. George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia and the Commander- in- Chief of the Armed Forces of Liberia;

Madam Clar M. Weah, First Lady of the Republic of Liberia;

Your Excellency, Madam Vice President and President of the Senate;

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives;

Mr. President Pro-Tempore and Members of the Senate;

Your Honour, 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 here present;

The Doyen, Excellencies and Distinguished colleagues and members of the Diplomatic Corps and Consular Officials;

The Resident Coordinator of the United Nations and Head of United Mission in Liberia and other Heads of International Organizations;

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

The Inspector-General of Police and other Heads of Security Agencies in Liberia;

Former Officials of Government;

Traditional Leaders, Chiefs and Elders;

Political and Business Leaders;

Religious leaders;

Labour and Trade Unions leaders;

Civil Society Organizations;

Members of the Fourth Estate;

Special Guests;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. I am indeed honoured and humbled to be invited to this auspicious occasion of the 65<sup>th</sup> Armed Forces Day Celebration of the Republic of Liberia. I am also nostalgic and elated to have been selected to deliver this year's Armed Forces Day keynote address to this distinguished audience. Having served in Liberia for seven years from (2013-2020), in a previous capacity as the Special Representative of the President of ECOWAS Commission in Liberia and now serving as a Facilitator to the renowned Swiss-based International Non-Governmental Organization, known as Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, (HD) to Liberia, I consider my new appointment and the invitation to this special national event as a true home coming. Let me therefore use this opportunity to reiterate that I enjoyed my stay in Liberia and I am

very happy to be back. Liberia's rich cultural heritage and tradition, as well as the hospitality and receptiveness of the good people of Liberia continue to endear me to this beautiful country. I thank the Honourable Minister of National Defense, Maj Gen, (Rtd) Daniel Dee Ziankahn Jr for considering me worthy of this invitation, I am indeed grateful.

2. Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let me begin with a special tribute to the courageous men and women of the Armed Forces of Liberia in whose honour we are gathered here today to celebrate and appreciate for their sacrifices, contributions, patriotism, gallantry and spirit of volunteerism. Not forgetting the Liberian National Police, the National Immigration Service, Drug Enforcement Agency, the Fire Service and all Para-military service men and women's for their contributions to Liberia's security. It was the famed World War 11 hero, General George Patton, who made the aptly reflective observation that "It is better to fight for something in life than to die for nothing".

3. Your Excellencies, The brave warriors we are honoring today, believed in something, an ideal or causes higher than their personal interests and that informed their decision to volunteer and were not conscripted to sign up to fight for the preservation of Liberia's territorial integrity against foreign or domestic enemies. We remember those who have paid the ultimate price in the defense of the sovereignty of their motherland. We pray that God will continue to repose their souls and grant their loved ones the fortitude to bear the irreparable losses. It also behooves on all of us to remember other comrades in arms from other parts of West Africa, (our courageous ECOMOG Field Commanders and fearless troops) and the world at large, who equally paid the supreme sacrifice for peace and security in Liberia. They lived and died in solidarity, and today we are happy that their sacrifices have not been in vain. This is evident in the quantum of peace we enjoy in Liberia

today. For the avoidance of doubt, and leveraging on my experience across the length and breadth of Africa, I make bold to state that Liberia is one of the most peaceful countries in Africa today, and it is my sincere wish that the peace, tranquility and stability will continue.

4. The task of the military in any society is not easy and is often considered as the highest calling of any profession. Where others fail to go, the military often succeeds in laying down their lives to achieve national dreams and prosperity. This Armed Forces Day Celebration therefore, presents us with another unique opportunity to celebrate the men and women in uniform as well as channel a greater course for the Armed Forces of Liberia. We honour the loyalty and love of country displayed by serving and retired officers and men of the Armed Forces of Liberia, and other security agencies in ensuring a safe and secure Liberia despite the challenges.

5. In retrospect and having witnessed the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), while in operations, through its drawdown and closure, I celebrate Liberia today for the nascent democracy. I also celebrate the Armed Forces of Liberia for their courage and determination in ensuring the security of lives and property in Liberia since the closure of UNMIL operations. The challenges of new armed forces and security agencies the world over are enormous, ranging from manpower shortage to infrastructural deficiencies, equipment inadequacies, capacity building and coordination issues and intelligence gathering, to mention but a few. I am particularly impressed with the manner in which the Armed Forces of Liberia has progressively surmounted these challenges and remained, *“a force for good”*. I therefore commend the leadership of the Armed Forces of Liberia, especially the indigenous Chiefs of Staff, the incumbent Minister of National Defence, Maj Gen.

(Rtd) Daniel Dee Ziankahn Jr and the current Chief of Staff, Maj Gen Prince Charles Johnson III for their exemplary leadership. I salute your prowess.

6. Let me also acknowledge the contributions of international partners in the development and the capacity of strengthening the Armed Forces of Liberia. In this regard, I would like to mention a few countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, China, Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone, while also acknowledging the significant contributions of the then United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the ECOWAS Advisory Military Training Team and the Office for Security Cooperation of the US Embassy in Liberia.

7. Your Excellency, Mr. President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the Honourable Minister's letter to me was quite explicit, conveying the theme of the Armed Forces Day and the topic for the Symposium. The theme is **'Inter-agency cooperation as a panacea for contemporary security challenges'** with **'Enhancing the Security of Liberia through a Comprehensive Approach'** as the topic for the symposium. I cherish the term 'Comprehensive approach and I will later dwell on it.' My first priority will be to establish the nexus between the topic and the theme, and I will do that shortly. The concept of national security has long been widened beyond physical and infrastructural security through military action or kinetic forces as military scholars would like to describe it. What has now evolved is the paradigm of Human Security. Human security is people-centered, multi-sectoral, comprehensive, context specific and prevention oriented. In short, human security encompasses the protection of four fundamental freedoms: freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom from fear, freedom from want.

8. To achieve a comprehensive approach to security therefore, a nation must have to develop the mechanism and culture of understanding the concept of human security first and foremost, and be ready to share ideas and collaborate.

Collaboration will have to be both vertical and horizontal. Vertical between the nation and international organizations, like the ECOWAS, African Union and United Nations in the case of Liberia, and horizontally, between nations like Liberia currently does within the Mano River Union. Additionally, there must be collaboration and cooperation among all stakeholders. These are the government institutions, security agencies and development partners. Ensuring a synergy of effort is where inter-agency cooperation becomes key to addressing contemporary security challenges.

9. Over time, security has occupied the center-stage in all human endeavours. The impact of globalization has also escalated the dynamics of security threats confronting nations. Liberia, like every other nation is equally confronted with various security challenges emanating from both external and internal threats. The country is equally affected by the effects of the global health pandemic that has affected several developmental programs. This prevailing global security environment characterized by uncertainty imposes enormous responsibility on governments to use all instruments of national power in ensuring the nation's peace and security. This reinforces the importance of collective evaluation and reassessment of our approaches to security. The theme for this year's Armed Forces Day celebration, "**Inter-Agency Cooperation as a Panacea for Contemporary Security Challenges**", is therefore designed not only towards meeting the security needs of Liberia, but also in synch with global approach to security. Permit me to quote from RD Lawrence of the National Defence University Washington, who said that:

*"The Modern battlefields (Contemporary Challenges) have assumed more dangerous dimensions than ever with increasing sophistication in weaponry. The strategic task to be carried out by the forces demand*

*certain military/civil capabilities, which no one Service/agencies) is self-sufficient to undertake.”*

10. In essence therefore, no single agency can claim to have monopoly over the wherewithal to address the challenges of the present security landscape. Liberian history for instance, presents a ready example. The effects of its prolonged civil war from 1989-2003 were only reversed by a multi-sectoral remedial approach. Liberia has fundamentally achieved peace due to the resilience of all the relevant agencies in one way or the other. The security challenges faced by other countries within the region further buttress the point and espouses the necessity of inter-agency cooperation, as rightly advocated by the theme of this Armed Forces Day Celebration.

11. Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to now lend my voice to the topic, “**Enhancing the Security of Liberia through a Comprehensive Approach**”. Nations will continue to grapple with security challenges, as a national phenomenon, some of which are systemic, but many will derive from the very nature of human in their base elements. Nations continue to postulate the concept of the Whole of Government Approach to contemporary challenges. The Whole of Government concept propagates the inclusion, cooperation and coordination of all agencies of government in addressing security challenges. However, a comprehensive look at the present security challenges will reveal the need to adopt a robust multiagency approach. For instance, a cursory look at the burning issue of “At Risk-Youths, (commonly known as Zogoes) could be a consequence of an ineffectively managed youth bulge. However, the youth bulge challenge presents an opportunity for us to harness “demographic dividends”, from what looks like a serious problem. Demographic dividends refer to equipping youth with the right skills to enable them to be a source of innovation and entrepreneurship,

thereby leading to their contribution to and benefitting from economic growth. On the other hand, youth bulge can equally become a “demographic disaster” posing a threat to national security and stability, if job opportunities are limited or if the youths lack the skills and knowledge to take advantage of economic opportunities. I must add, that uneducated or poorly educated youth, who are unemployed, suffer from the freedom of want, and can therefore, form a recruitment pool for organized crime, drug abuse, armed robbery, kidnapping and terrorism. I therefore commend and urge for immediate implementation the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the One UN System At-Risk Youth Employment Program which is principally aimed at the rehabilitation of disadvantaged youths of the country. Government alone cannot solve all the problems. Therefore, a lasting solution to the Zoegos and other socio-economic, political and security problems would require a comprehensive approach that cuts across all sectors with the aim of tackling the root causes.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. The question now is, what constitutes the Comprehensive Approach or Whole of Government Approach to security? By definition, the **Whole-of-Government Approach refers to the joint activities performed by diverse ministries, public administrations and public agencies to provide a common solution to particular problems or issues.** The Whole-of Government/comprehensive model involves public services agencies working across their mandates to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response to particular issues. The approach focuses on policy development, program management and service delivery, and can as well be broadly applied or highly specific and targeted. The approach could also involve formal and informal entities working in a shared sense of responsibility for targeted solutions.



13. The rationale behind this comprehensive approach is to ensure the delivery of holistic responses to policy issues, particularly the problems that transcend single agency mandates which the military often call “Wicked Problems”. The comprehensive approach facilitates the provision of administrative solutions to the problem and enhances execution, while reducing duplication across agencies. Most of the security issues among other contemporary challenges have underlining root causes that are beyond the training or caprices of the security agencies and it will therefore be foolhardy trying to unilaterally solve the problem of society.

14. In terms of the national security of Liberia, efforts must therefore be sustained to ensure that all agencies of government work in unison in solving identified problems. Liberia faces multifaceted challenges and the national security system today allows little flexibility and agility to address these ever-changing national threats. The goal should be to achieve a common national government culture that facilitates a shared vision in solving contemporary problems. Furthermore, a lack of inter-agency coordination and cooperation will force various agencies and departments to focus on their own objectives and goals, thereby derailing national objectives. However, with today's challenges, the demand for inter-agency collaboration has grown, and it has been identified as a necessity to achieve an adequate level of national security for the nation.

15. The national security architecture will also need to operate as a system rather than a collection of separate components. The whole of government Approach to planning, programming and budgeting national security is a concept that could establish a unified effort between inter-governmental agencies to maximize all available resources in a collaborative effort. Similarly, addressing new security challenges will be less about an objective of the dominance of one agency of government over the other than about predicting, preventing, and managing

disruptions, such as the proliferation of arms, internal security crimes, global contagions, and natural disasters, all of which have ripple effects on the collective wellbeing of a nation.

16. Following the above recommendations for a Comprehensive Whole-of-Government mindset to enhancing Liberia's security, I would proceed to explain how it works. Unfortunately there is no "one size fits all" solution, nor is there a default civil or military-centric response in a whole-of-government strategy. The primary objective of a comprehensive approach is to achieve multidimensional and system-wide outcomes in national and interagency operations. The mindset would be that when a new national security strategy is developed, or when an existing one is refined, it would have considered all entities, parties, parameters and roles in that strategy. However, certain systemic considerations are required to ensure that this comprehensive approach is allowed to thrive. Practically, if we are to enhance security through a comprehensive approach, a few national security criteria are hereby suggested:

- a. **Unifying Policies and Institutional Frameworks.** To enhance a comprehensive approach to national security, there will be the need to devise policies and institutional documents that outline guidelines for the conduct and structures of all government agencies. While not trying to reinvent the wheel, as I believe several policies and strategies already exist, additional unifying policies will be necessary to integrate across-government capability, expertise, resources and structures. Unifying policies that makes security and intelligence agencies will work closely together with other relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies, as well as the international partners, would better achieve national security objectives. The formulation of standard comprehensive policy will support the concept of a comprehensive approach

and inherently enhance joint and collaborative efforts in dealing with contemporary security challenges.

b. **Influencing Cooperation and Collaboration with all Concerned Stakeholders**. The military and other security agencies cannot do it alone, but would need to effectively collaborate and cooperate with other stakeholders. These stakeholders range from the judiciary, legislative, civil society organizations and the ordinary citizens. A comprehensive approach will only be successful when all stakeholders work in a synergistic environment with the security agencies. Effective collaboration with foreign agencies would also have a multiplier effect on any comprehensive security efforts. It is on record for instance, that the linkages between several organized crime have an international dimension which is only often tracked using the financial system and other intelligence strategies. Thus, all agencies could play pivotal roles in the entire comprehensive network.

c. **Establishing a Coordinated Information Sharing Network**. A key tool for enhancing security is the establishment of an intelligence-sharing network that facilitates coordination among agencies. This should be aimed at having a free flow of intelligence network between all agencies, and it should be the priority of all spheres of government, as well as agencies and the private sectors. The ultimate goal is to create a nationwide network in which all security and intelligence partners effectively collaborate to gather, prepare for, protect against, respond to, and recover from security problems, national disasters, or other emergencies. Such coordinated sharing of information will foster integrated support of the security operations, faster and comprehensive response including strategic, operational, and tactical intelligence activities, as well as services that are necessary for military strategy, planning, and operations.

17. Having shared my thoughts on the topic, I crave the indulgence of this distinguished audience to say a few words to the men and women of the Armed Forces and other security agencies. These security challenges mentioned above are not insurmountable. As critical stakeholders you must remain innovative, pro-active, productive, and results-oriented. The evolution of security demands that we also continue to innovate and review our tactics, processes, and interactions through continuous training and capacity building to addressing current and emerging challenges of the Liberian nation.

18. Let me state at this juncture that the Armed Forces of Liberia has fared very well and commendably. This includes their active involvement in rescue operations, both on land and sea during disasters, as well as enormous border security activities being conducted in close coordination with other security agencies to ensure territorial integrity of Liberia. I am also aware of the tremendous role the Armed Forces of Liberia played in responding to the outbreak of Ebola Virus Disease in 2014 and its role in addressing the ravaging COVID-19 Pandemic. It is in the public domain that the 14 Military Hospital of the Armed Forces of Liberia is used as the national emergency treatment and isolation center for COVID-19 patients. The hospital opens its doors and offers health care treatment to civilians. This is truly the way to go in promoting a healthy military-civilian relations.

Your Excellency, Mr. President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. Let me also applaud the Armed Forces of Liberia for being a critical stakeholder in nation building and the development of infrastructure through the ingenious use of its engineering company in constructing roads, bridges and walkways, as well as renovating markets and public structures, which has earned the AFL, the reputation of being an exemplary modern army. The Armed Forces of

Liberia has also made significant effort in promoting cooperation and coordination through inter-agency training. An example is the yearly Exercise WATCHOVER, an internal security operation led by the Liberian National Police and often hosted by the Armed Forces of Liberia. Bringing security agencies together in exercises of this nature is a recipe for operational successes and sustainable national security.

20. In the international arena as well, the Armed Forces of Liberia has continued to soar very high as a **'Force for Good'** not only for the Liberian people but also in the service to the world at large. It is gratifying to mention that Liberia which was at one time the center-stage of United Nations peacekeeping operations is now deploying its armed forces to keep the peace in other countries. This is highlighting the participation of Armed Forces of Liberia's contingent in MINUSMA in Mali, as well as other personnel serving in staff capacities in Sudan and South Sudan, amongst others. It is also heartwarming that the Armed Forces of Liberia's contingent in Mali has won several commendations and accolades from the United Nations for achieving exemplary feats. This is highly commendable and indeed an achievement that the whole country should be proud of.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

21. I remember vividly when the Honourable Minister of National Defense, Maj Gen. (Rtd) Daniel Dee Ziankahn Jr., who previously served as the Chief of Staff and also served as the Chairman of the Committee of ECOWAS Chiefs of Defence Staff from 2016-2017. It was during his tenure that ECOWAS troops intervened in the political crises in The Gambia. His legacy lives on as evident by the prevailing peace in The Gambia today. Furthermore, the Armed Forces of Liberia maintains cordial relations with the Armed Forces of the neighbouring nations of Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. Equally noteworthy is the participation of the Armed

Forces of Liberia in regional training exercises like Exercise OBANGAME EXPRESS and other foreign based exercises. These achievements are commendable and might not have come without arduous efforts of purposeful leadership and political support. His tenure also saw the training of many young Liberian officers at the Nigerian military academies as part of capacity development of the AFL.

22. Your Excellencies, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me now sensitize this august audience to the importance of inter-agency cooperation between the Armed Forces of Liberia and other stakeholders. This Year 2022, precedes 2023, which will be critical in terms of preparation for Liberia's 2023 General Elections. Electoral violence and malpractices have been identified as the bane of democracy in Africa. Election has become a major trigger or driver of unrest and political instability, including the toppling of elected governments through military coups. Apart from the weaknesses of democratic institutions in Africa, the electoral system is also fragile and subject to ceaseless attacks by the political class. Democracy is a process and one of its critical pillars is the conduct of a credible elections which avails the electorate the unfettered freedom to choose political leaders that will deliver good governance. The only way electoral violence and rigging can be prevented is through purposeful planning and preparation, coordination and cooperation amongst all stakeholders, including security agencies which play a key role in electoral security, including the protection of the vote and electoral materials. Security agencies and personnel are an integral part of the electoral process. It is crucial that security personnel involved in electoral duties, whether police or the armed forces discharge their duties with a high sense of responsibility and professionalism in order to ensure a seamless, transparent, credible and violence-free electoral process.

Your Excellency Mr. President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

23. Experience from the recent Senatorial By-Elections in some Counties in Liberia could be indicative of an evolving trend, and therefore underscores the need to prepare adequately towards averting untoward consequences during the forthcoming General Elections. If electoral violence must be prevented, response to crises must be prompt and proactive. The only way to ensure timeliness is through interagency cooperation, mutual trust and understanding of each other's capabilities and roles, as well as speedy deployment, amongst others. Other necessities may include competence of the military and security forces, availability of necessary logistics and neutrality of the security forces. Some ECOWAS member states have established Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) as a deliberative platform for consultation, coordination and harmonization of election security in their countries. The Committee works closely with the Election Management Bodies and serves as an advisory organ for the efficient management and effective deployment of personnel and resources to ensure peaceful and violence-free elections.

24. Election is a vector or fundamental right that pollinates the enjoyment of two cardinal human rights - the 'right to vote' and the 'right to be voted for'. In the spirit of mutual and reinforcing collaboration, the Armed Forces of Liberia has a role to play alongside other security agencies in Liberia to ensure that Liberians enjoy their human rights relating to and in the context of elections, including right to freedom from discrimination, right to freedom of expression, right to freedom of opinion, right to freedom of peaceful assembly, right to freedom of association, right to freedom of movement, freedom from fear and intimidation among other rights. Consequently, it is imperative that every security agency in Liberia, including the Armed Forces of Liberia should collaborate with Electoral Commission and support a human rights-based electoral climate that would further consolidate peace and

development in the country. Accordingly, there should be an independent, non-discriminatory and transparent mechanisms in place to ensure accountability for electoral malpractices and aggrieved candidates should be able to avail such mechanisms to ventilate or articulate within the parameters of the law, their electoral grievances, without hindrance.

25. Let me at this juncture commend the Armed Forces of Liberia for being apolitical in previous elections, and I wish to encourage them to sustain this neutrality. The military and other security forces must continue to be extremely apolitical in order to create a conducive environment for a transparent electoral process. Political stability is the priority of every nation, including older democracies like the United States of America, which the Republic of Liberia and Africa as a whole hold in high esteem. America is a reference point today because of the stability and continuity of its democracy, in spite of the challenges that confronted its recent Presidential elections, which illustrates that democracy, as I mentioned earlier is a process and not a destination.

26. Let me use this opportunity to charge the Armed Forces of Liberia and other security agencies to leverage on the 2022 Training Year to train and prepare adequately for the 2023 General Elections. Members of the Armed Forces must be familiar with dos and don'ts of rules of engagement during elections, and consolidate on their cooperation with the Liberia National Police, Liberia Immigration Service, Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency, Liberia National Fire Service, the National Security Agency and other security agencies in Liberia.

Excellencies & Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

27. We are all aware of the resurgence of the epidemic of coups in the ECOWAS region. ECOWAS, AU and the world at large have condemned in the strongest terms the coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and the attempted coup in Guinea Bissau few days ago. Our leaders in Africa and especially in our sub-region need to take



effective and meaningful preventive measures to strengthening governance architecture and also respect the rule of law and human rights. These will go a long way in preventing recurring coups and unconstitutional change of governments in our region. I might add that in view of the alarming surge of military coups in our region and its destabilizing effects on democracy and development, ECOWAS and the AU needs to urgently revisit the use of effective implementation of the Mechanisms that earned our regional Organization international acclaims on conflict prevention, management, and resolution, including in countries, such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, etc.

28. Permit me to implore the Armed Forces of Liberia to resist the temptation or be persuaded by enemies of the state to pursue politics through other means such as by executing a coup d'état, as has been seen in a few countries across the continent. Just as it was before, coups are unpopular and will be unpopular because forcefully taking over power by the military anywhere is a subjugation of the popular will of the people. Apart from the danger that this portends for truncating the hard-earned democracy in West Africa and elsewhere, it also inadvertently opens up the floodgate of counter coups, bloodshed, and a destruction of the armed forces professionalism.

29. Let me further commend the Armed Forces of Liberia for submitting themselves to civilian control, in compliance with the Liberian constitution and regional normative principles. Civilian control of the armed forces is a primary requirement for a stable democracy, and it is mutually beneficial to the military and the nation at large. In the spirit of Professor Samuel Philips Huntington, a famous American Political Scientist, I implore the Government of Liberia to invest in training and professionalizing the Armed Forces, in order to optimize their professionalism and service to the nation.

30. Your Excellencies, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, while placing this charge on our security agencies, I also wish to beseech the Government to provide the Armed Forces and other security agencies with the required support for optimum performance. This will involve provision of the enabling policy framework, training, logistics and finance. I will at this juncture like to appreciate the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, His Excellency, Dr. George Manneh Weah and his cabinet for the unflinching support to the Armed Forces of Liberia. The ultra-modern 14 Military Hospital recently established by his government to meet the healthcare needs of the Armed Forces of Liberia's personnel and dependents as well as the ongoing barracks renovation aimed at enhancing the living condition of the Armed Forces, and the recruitment exercise to addressing lingering human security challenges of the Armed Forces are all laudable steps for the repositioning of the AFL.

31. I would be remiss not to commend Liberia's Development Partners at both bilateral and multilateral levels as they have been providing significant resources for sustaining peace and development in general in Liberia. Providing adequate funding for the security sector is a herculean task in view of other competing developmental interests, such as health, education, infrastructure, social services and enthronelement of a credible electoral process. It is against this background that the sustained interest of the international community on Liberia's development process will be most required, especially with continued adherence to governance best practices of accountability and transparency.

32. Let me also commend His Excellency, Mr. President for his Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development initiative in Liberia. Under this initiative, I understand that the Army Veteran's Farming Programs is about to kick-off. This is one of the many efforts of the Government to improve food security in Liberia. I wish to humbly encourage the President to ensure the sustainability of these laudable

projects and also put in place more social welfare programs for the Armed Forces veterans. It is now 16 years since the New Armed Forces came on board and this is the right time for the Government to begin implementing comprehensive policies for retirement benefits for the personnel as well as a befitting Pension Scheme.

33. Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, As we head towards election year in 2023, I urge the political class to place Liberia FIRST, especially by working for national and collective interests of the Liberian people instead of personal, Party, ethnic or sectional interests. The world is facing unprecedented challenges, from the Corona virus pandemic which is crippling the global economic and financial activities. Liberia is not immune but it should turn her challenges into an opportunity to consolidate democracy and good governance.

34. On this joyous note, I wish to appreciate His Excellency President George Manneh Weah for finding me worthy again, as a recipient of the prestigious National Award of the Republic of Liberia, the **Distinguished Service Order**, coming just a little over one year, after I was decorated with the “**Knight of Grand Commander of the Liberian Humane Order of African Redemption**” It is indeed an honour and a special privilege, highly appreciated by me and my family, and by extension, my beloved country, the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the ECOWAS Commission that posted me to Liberia to serve the Government and the good people of this country. I will cherish these gestures and will forever hold them in high esteem. It is my sincere prayers and wish that the Republic of Liberia will continue to flourish like a tree planted by the water side.

35. Your Excellency, Mr. President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I cannot conclude this address without commending the Government and the people of Liberia, including those in the Diaspora on the historic commemoration of the bicentennial anniversary of the arrival of the settlers on January 7, 1822 to the island

then known as Dozoa, which has been renamed as Providence Island. It is my prayers that this special anniversary will create opportunities for a more prosperous, united, peaceful, inclusive and stable Liberia.

36. In conclusion, I heartily congratulate all the officers, the rank and file of the Armed Forces and the good people of Liberia for yet another successful Armed Forces Day Celebration. Please permit me, to once again, commend the Honourable Minister of National Defense, Maj. Gen (Rtd) Daniel Ziankhan Jr and the Chief of Staff Maj Gen. Prince Charles Johnson 111 for providing the necessary leadership to the Armed Forces of Liberia to excel. May the efforts of the men and women in uniform continue to be a shining beacon for this Great Nation.

37. Long live the Armed Forces of Liberia! Long live the Republic of Liberia!! Happy Armed Forces Day! God bless Liberia and God bless you all.

Thank you all for your kind attention.