

Speech Delivered By The President of The Republic of Liberia, His Excellency,
Dr. George Manneh Weah To The 73rd Session of the United Nations General
Assembly (UNGA) on Wednesday, September 26, 2018 in New York, the United
States of America:

Excellency, Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces,

President of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly;

Excellency, Antonio Guterres,

Secretary-General of the United Nations; Excellences, Heads of State and
Government, and Heads of Delegations; Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to address this 73rd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, on behalf of the Government and People of Liberia.

Allow me, first of all, to congratulate you, Madam President and the Government and people of Ecuador, for your election as President of the 73rd Session of this august Assembly. With our eyes on history, Liberia takes special note and hails your selection as the fourth woman President of the General Assembly.

Let me also express appreciation to Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, whose dynamism and farsighted leadership continues to strengthen the United Nations in the face of perennial global challenges.

Madame President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen: Just two weeks ago, we joined millions in Ghana and around the world to bid final farewell to former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, devoted his life to peacemaking and conflict resolution; a calling at which he was renowned and successful. With his passing, Africa has lost one of its most illustrious sons, and the world has lost one of the most outstanding diplomats of our time. May his soul rest in perfect peace.

Madam President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen: Late last year, Liberians participated in Presidential and Legislative elections, the results of which represented a major shift in the underlying fundamentals of the Liberian political dynamic. In an orderly, lawful, and peaceful manner, Liberians voted in overwhelming numbers for a Change for Hope. This was the first time in 73 years that Liberians enjoyed a peaceful transfer of power from one democratically-elected Government to another.

At the end of the long campaign, when the results were announced after the run-off, it became clear that the pendulum had swung in the direction of youthful leadership, and that the paradigm had shifted in favor of change and transformation. The United Nations and its various bodies, as well as regional organizations and many of our bilateral partners and friends, were direct witnesses to the maturity of the Liberian electorate, our respect for law and order, and the successful institutionalization of the democratic processes.

As Standard Bearer of the winning Coalition for Democratic Change, the mantle and responsibility of leading this transformation therefore devolved upon me, when I was inaugurated as the 24th President of Liberia on January 22, 2018. The challenges of leadership are enormous, but in each and every one of these challenges, I see opportunities to make things better, and to bring permanent improvements to the lives of all Liberians, as we devise policies and programs that will have a lasting and positive impact on the lives of our citizens.

Madam President: The umbrella program under which we intend to pursue prosperity is the Pro-Poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity (PAPD), our

National Development Plan for the next five years. This is not an Agenda only for the poor; it is for the benefit of all Liberians. But it is a policy framework that gives priority to the alleviation of poverty, and its core objective and focus is to reduce the marginalization of the most vulnerable, whilst at the same time creating a conducive atmosphere for the middle and upper income Liberian to grow and prosper.

We want to build a harmonious society, based on the goal of economic empowerment, especially for the underprivileged. Our Pro-Poor Agenda is therefore designed to give power to the people, promote economic diversification, protect sustainable peace and encourage good governance. We appeal to our friends, bilateral partners, and private investors to support this agenda.

Madame President: As we focus on action plans to implement our development agenda, we are acutely aware of the vulnerability of our youthful population, who are clearly disadvantaged as a result of high unemployment, and a lack of access to quality education opportunities. Our plan is to reverse their unfortunate situation and make them productive citizens through the provision of adequate educational facilities at the high school and college levels, for those who still have interest in pursuing academic programs.

For those youths left behind due to the disastrous civil crisis and who have outgrown their school years, my government is investing in Technical Vocational Education and Training programs to build their entrepreneurial and marketable skill-sets.

Being conscious of the importance and impact of infrastructure on social and economic development, my government has identified investment in roads, energy and ports as our key Priority, and it is therefore soliciting funding and other technical expertise to undertake these projects in pursuit of our goal to connect our cities and towns and strengthen our economy.

Madam President: Agriculture is Liberia's comparative advantage and has also been identified as one of our major poverty alleviation instruments because it will lead us to self-sufficiency in food production, upset employment and as well as open doors for industrialization. With the implementation of the new special economic zone, we intend to attract labor-intensive light manufacturing.

Madam President, drawing from the experience of the 2014 Ebola epidemic that took the lives of thousands of Liberians and health workers, we intend to efficiently and properly organize our healthcare delivery system to ensure that the health and wellbeing our people is improved.

Finally, we are placing emphasis on national security to enable our people move and live freely without fear. With the recent withdrawal of the United Nations Peace-keeping Mission in Liberia, we are now in charge of our own security. We thank you for the sacrifices that you have made in securing and maintaining the peace after our prolonged civil crisis. In this regard, we like to extend our personal appreciation to Mr. Farif Zarif of Afghanistan, who as Special Representative and last head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia from 2015- 2018 supervised an orderly withdrawal of troops, while simultaneously securing the peace environment for peace that allowed for the robust political campaign to take place without incidence.

Madam President: My country has finally turned the corner with more years of peace than preceding years of war guided by our peace agreement signed in Accra 15 years ago. We thank the members and Security County of the United Nations for the UMNIL Peace-keeping Mission which brought stability and helped us rebuild our institutions and communities. We are a peace-keeping success story and we are grateful for the support given!

But the nation which has experienced civil war must never take peace for granted and forget the long shadow years of conflict still cast over people's lives. We must realize and appreciate that ours is still a fragile peace. Our people across the country still bear the scars of conflict, we therefore intend to initial series of national peace dialogues. Throughout Liberia, we must restart those difficult conversations at the local level and include our youths so that they and we do not

repeat the costly mistakes of the past. It is clear to me that these frank exchanges are an initial step in bringing lasting healing, reconciliation and unity to our people.

Our agenda is not one of division, but rather it is an agenda that intends to provide an enabling environment for a united and reconciled people to be able to benefit and prosper from the economic dividends of peace. Madam President, I recall with humanity when I was selected to serve as UNICEF Peace Ambassador; a mission which I undertook with passion, conviction and commitment to support and inform the world of the principles on which this organization stands. I was also privileged to be appointed as peace ambassador for Liberia, a mandate to apply these principles, preserving and maintaining the peace which your peace-keeping mission has so successfully restored. I deeply and greatly cherish these principles.

So today in closing, I want to reaffirm the support of my government for the work of the United Nations in striving to achieve global peace, counter terrorism, UN reform, security, good governance and advancement of the principle of universal human rights. We further reiterate our commitment to the rule of law, alleviation of poverty, gender equality, elimination of gender-based violence and empowerment of women, girls and young people. I also believe that the overwhelming mandate I received from the Liberian people is the mandate to end corruption in public service and I remain fully committed to this task.

Madam President: with the generous assistance and strong support as well as that of other international institutions and member states, with God's blessings, we will fulfill our agenda to uplift our people from poverty to prosperity.

I thank you!