

Development of a Democracy—Nation Building in Africa/Liberia

Good morning class,

Before I begin my discussion on “Development of Democracy-Nation building in Liberia,” let me give you some background on my country. Liberia today is on the verge of recovering from 14 years of civil conflict. The country is literally now reconstructing itself. We need everything from basic necessities such as clean water and health services to a re-evaluation of the government.

In October 2003, the United Nations Mission to Liberia (UNMIL) instated an interim government to bring about an end to the conflict. The interim government is led by Gyude Bryant. UNMIL has set the date for democratic elections to take place in August 2005. The problem is that the 2005 date for elections is too soon. There are vital tasks that Liberians must accomplish in order to put an end to the conflict and for the elections to truly be a reflection of the people’s vote.

Earlier this month, a Donors Conference for Liberia was held at the United Nations in New York. Donors pledged \$520 million to reconstruction and rebuilding efforts in Liberia for the next two years. This money will help restore some of the destroyed infrastructure, such as roads, hospitals and schools, but there is a lot of work that needs to be done. While we are grateful for this money, I hope it is only a first step.

Another aspect of Liberia's reconstruction that must be worked on before elections is the issue of redefining and reorganizing the state. I am calling for a national conference of Liberians for Liberians, so that we can strategically plan development efforts in our country. We need to develop strategic reforms, in a manner that will prevent the cycle of conflict from our past from reoccurring. Some of the issues that should be undertaken as Liberia rebuilds itself are:

1. Education

We must prioritize education for all. Free and compulsory primary education and literacy classes for adults (similar to "each one, teach one" programs) should be provided for everyone. An educated and enlightened population is unlikely to be misled, because they know their rights and powers under the constitution.

2. Freedom of Expression

People should be allowed to speak out on national issues orally and in writing, whether or not what they say favors the government.

3. Decentralize Government

The national government should work to empower local governments so that people outside the capital can have a say concerning who governs them, and fully participate in local development.

4. Legislature and Judiciary

We need to ensure an independent legislature and judiciary that will not be manipulated by the executive branch of the national government. The legislature and judiciary should consist of people of integrity.

5. The National Constitution

We need to review the constitution and make changes or amendments where necessary to reflect realities in present-day Liberia.

6. National Census

A national census should be conducted prior to the scheduled elections in 2005. A national census has not been taken in the country in twenty years.

7. Equal Rights

Liberian law should ensure the full participation of all citizens, regardless of tribe, religion, gender etc., in all affairs of the nation. Let the people have access to their legislators. Let everyone have equal rights before the law.

Make discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender etc. a crime punishable under the laws of the country.

8. *War Crimes*

Liberians should set up a war crimes tribunal to try individuals who have committed war crimes.

9. *Accountability*

As citizens, Liberians should demand accountability from public officials.