

ULAA Responds to President Taylor

The Perspective

April 4, 2001

Editor's Note: The leadership of the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), which once pursued a policy of "active engagement" with the Taylor government, hoping that it could help transform and influence his administration in pursuing more people-centered policies that could improve the living conditions of the Liberian people, has made a radical about-face by adopting a more aggressive posture towards the Taylor regime. The new policy or approach comes in the wake of recent public hearing held on Liberia few weeks ago by the U.S. House Subcommittee on Africa.

Assailed at the hearing for his role in fueling the crisis in Sierra Leone and fomenting the destabilization of the West African sub-region, Mr. Taylor immediately reacted by sending a letter to the Committee's Chair, Congressman Ed Royce, not only refuting the [testimonies](#) made by various individuals and organizations, including ULAA, but blaming ULAA and others for painting a distorted and negative picture of his image. He was particularly flummoxed about the criticism from ULAA, an organization which helped nurtured and launched his career in Liberian politics.

In a blow by blow rebuttal, ULAA's President, Mydea Reeves-Karpeh, responds to President Taylor. Below is the full text of the rebuttal:

Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA) 's Response to President Charles Taylor

Reading President Taylor's letter of March 20, 2001, which was ostensibly written to Congressman Royce, Chairman of the Sub-committee for Africa, U.S. House of Representative, has further confirmed what we, as Liberians and some members of the international community already know: Taylor is a threat to human rights, democracy and stability in Liberia and the entire West African sub-region.

Firstly, on behalf of the people of Liberia, we must apologize to Congressman Royce, whom we regard as a true friend of the people of Liberia, for the conduct of our President, Charles Taylor, in publishing on the Internet a letter addressed to the Congressman prior to the letter being delivered through [diplomatic](#) channels. We wish to assure the Congressman that history shows that Liberians generally have a knack for international relations, but such is the aberration of statesmanship that we must now contend with.

Our Constitutional Rights

President Taylor, you have implied in your letter that Liberians in the United States of America, under the umbrella of ULAA, are freely expressing our views with regards to the ills of his administration against the people of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea because of "the TPS program for Liberians". (Your Ambassador would have served you well to have informed you that the "TPS program" was discontinued more than a year ago, and replaced by the DED.) In addition, you have also inferred that ULAA requested your Government to write on their behalf but we have no record to show this. However, even if it were true that LUPD and ULAA asked you to write said letter for victims of the Civil War to legalize their status, you should be grateful. You could not afford to have a mass influx of Liberians going home after the Civil War because your economy could not accommodate them. As a matter of fact, it was in your best interest because you are benefiting from the funds sent home each month by Liberians in the United States to assist their relatives at home. Thousands of dollars are transferred each month through Western Union to our relatives who would starve to death. Even though some of them work for your Government, they hardly [get paid](#). Contrary to what you think, Mr. President, we are in touch with our people at home and not only relying on what we hear in the media.

President Taylor, you are correct! Since you became President of Liberia, Liberians have been denied their fundamental rights under our Constitution: the right to life, liberty, security and property, right to equal protection of the law, right to freedom of expression, right to peaceful assembly and association, and the list goes on. Such fundamental rights may be expressed only by Liberians who are currently residing in the U.S. or elsewhere in the Diaspora. Yes, Mr. President, we are aware that if we are compelled to return home you will silence us, as you have done and [continue](#) to do to our brothers and sisters back home. Therefore, ULAA will continue its lobbying and advocacy through the Liberian National Immigration Advocacy Commission until the Bills currently to give "Green Cards" are passed by the US Congress.

To cite the most recent cases in point of denial of our Constitutional rights: (1) Five Liberian [journalist](#) languished in prison recently, charged with "espionage", which the Taylor's court said was a non-bailable offense, only because they published a story that the Taylor Government spent \$50,000.00 to repair a helicopter. President Taylor argued that the news about his government repairing the helicopter constituted the divulging of confidential military secret of his government to the enemy nation(s) with which he is engaged in war. Your continuous denial of support (military and otherwise) for the terrorists of Sierra Leone and rebels of Guinea, notwithstanding. And while the children of Liberia are being deprived of food, [health care](#) and other necessities by your government, Mr. President, you continue your adventurism in neighboring countries.

(2) Students of the University of Liberia attempted to hold a rally in support of the detained journalists (a form of freedom of expression); that was too much freedom for our President to allow. The University campus was invaded by your police and special security forces and the students and some professors were brutalized—female students were raped, limbs were broken, and others were severely beaten. Some of the students are jailed at the police station, while others are jailed at our Executive Mansion.

Yes Mr. President, you are correct—we are exercising our constitutional rights only because we are living in the United States, as it is not possible in Liberia. Such expressions would be treasonable in Liberia. What a shame, Mr. President? All Liberians (in the U.S., in Liberia, and in refugee camps) are grateful to the Government of the U.S. for granting us, their relatives and friends, the privilege of temporarily residing in this great country until respect for human rights, democracy, and stability are restored in Liberia. If Dr. Amos Sawyer, who was Interim President, could be flogged and robbed what chances do the ordinary citizens have in Liberia today?

Taylor's Achievement

Mr. President, apparently you would have us talk of your "achievements" as Chairman of the Board of Directors of ULAA, as opposed to your achievements as President of Liberia. But if the achievements of your ULAA years were advocating for and talking about democracy in Liberia, remember the adage: talking is cheap. Advocating for and talking about democracy do not require much, but allowing the principles of democracy to be practiced under one's leadership require a great statesman, which Mr. President regrettably you have not shown. ULAA is ashamed to be identified with you because you and those you mentioned have not been good examples of how the democracy you advocated here should be practiced. The tactics of protest should be translated into marks of good governance and given the record of your Government, you still want to transfer 20th Century methods to the 21st Century. What about democracy under your leadership as President of Liberia?

Members of ULAA and Liberians all over the world would have no greater joy than to be able to boast about democracy in our country and the achievements of our President. However, democracy has once again eluded us. The 1997 elections were as democratic as they could have been under the circumstances, but you have succeeded in snatching autocracy out of the jaws of democracy. By the way Mr. President, Liberians voted overwhelmingly for you, only because they assumed that it was the only way to end the suffering caused by the savage war which you unleashed. They wanted peace, reconciliation and development and they gave you a mandate but how wrong were they?

Your achievements since you became President? Sorry Mr. President, but we could not come up with a list to be proud of. Maybe you can help. We recall after your first year in office, at the All Liberian Conference, at which ULAA was represented by its President at the time, Dr. Joseph Korto, you admitted that you had failed the Liberian people. But things have progressively gotten worse since then. So Mr. President, would you help us out by having your Press Secretary list your achievements, as President of Liberia, on the Internet? How many public schools are opened? How many government-run hospitals or clinics are opened? When last was public servants paid? When will electricity be restored throughout the country?

You indicated that since your ascendancy to the leadership of Liberia you have called on professionals within the rank and file of ULAA to return home to help rebuild our economy and nurture democracy. What a joke Mr. President? With regards to the economy, you have granted monopoly to all of your business associates: Haddad, rice; Basmas, petroleum; Kowenkoven/OTC, forest timber, just to name a few. As a consequence, the economy is not growing and only you and your business partners are enjoying the benefits thereof.

The few Liberian entrepreneurs, except those who enjoy your grace, are folding up and looking elsewhere for survival. What happened to the Liberianization business plan which was enacted into law? The plan would have ensured that Liberians who are at home participated in the economy, thereby encouraging others to return home.

As to nurturing democracy, the imprisonment of students of the University of Liberia, the recently released journalists, closing of Star Radio, and the pariah image of Liberia are hardly testimonials of democracy in Liberia. But let us not forget our attempt to engage your government in the interest of our people and democracy in Liberia. ULAA wanted to engage your Government in order to bring the needed changes in our country. We wrote over six letters expressing our concerns, hosted two delegations from your Government and sent you a list of inquiries which have never been responded to this day. We even agreed to send a delegation to Liberia to assess the needs of the country in order to assist in reconstruction efforts.

In view of the above, notwithstanding Mr. President, no Liberian, whether in the U.S. or even in a refugee camp is likely to voluntarily return home, while other well-meaning Liberians are being killed, brutalized, jailed, accused of treason or some other felony, or have fled Liberia to save their lives.

Taylor's Destabilization of the Sub-region

Mr. President, the international community is quite aware of your involvement in Sierra Leone, so quit the denial. At this point, every one: Liberians, Sierra Leoneans,

and members of the international community, are only concerned with your full compliance with the demand of the United Nations. ULAA is pleased to note that you have finally condemned the terrorist acts of your allies and buddies, Foday Sankor, General Mosquito, and others in maiming infants, children, women and old folks. These are evidence of war crimes, for which the tribunal should be established without delay. Is Africa still the " Dark Continent" as you claim?

The Way Forward

Some suggestions for moving Liberia forward:

1. Dismiss the President of the University of Liberia, Dr. Ben Roberts for following your instruction and requesting riot police and your special security to rape, injure, and savagely beat students for attempting to exercise their constitutional rights. We had such high regard for Dr. Roberts prior to this.
2. Dismiss all of the police officers and members of your special security forces who took part in the abuse of the human and civil rights of the students of the University of Liberia. They should all be arrested and prosecuted.
3. Unconditionally free the students of the University who are jailed for exercising their constitutional rights.
4. Unconditionally release all political prisoners, most of whom hail from Grand Gedeh County. One of the imprisoned, Bai Gbala was supposedly your ULAA compatriot.
5. Unconditionally drop the charges against Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and other political leaders of our country.
6. Come clean on the death of your late Vice President, Enoch Dogolea. Release the autopsy report; Liberians and the world would really like to know the cause of the sudden demise of the Vice President.
7. Conclude the investigation into the death of Samuel Dokie. Why are the killers still at large and have not been punished?
8. Stop the abuse of human and civil rights in Liberia, regardless of their political opinions, ethnic background, or religious beliefs.
9. Re-open Star Radio-the people are entitled to an independent source of information, and allow freedom of press and other fundamental rights in Liberia.

10. Truly cease your involvement in Sierra Leone and Guinea, and apologize to our neighbors, especially our brothers and sisters of Sierra Leone for having supported the terrorists that committed such mayhem and atrocities against their infants, children, women and old folks.

11. Discontinue the rice and petroleum monopolies to George Haddah and the Bassmas, respectively. These monopolies are illegal, as they were granted by you and not the Legislature in accordance with law. These monopolies are killing the economy.

12. You and your OTC partner, Gus Kowenkoven, must stop destroying our forest. Stop turning Liberia into a desert, and account to the people of Liberia for the forest revenue. Or has all been used to purchase weapons to prosecute your war effort in Sierra Leone and Guinea? The environmental problems created by the depletion of the virgin forest without any reforestation program will bring untold troubles for generations to come.

13. Institutional changes must be carried out for the three branches of government to function in accordance with our Constitution-separate and equal, but coordinated, and not as your alter ego.

14. Invite the United Nations to station a Resident Representative of the UN Commission for Human Rights to monitor and report human right abuses in Liberia.

Most importantly Mr. President, you must realize, accept, and make it known to the world, by your actions, that you understand that the basic rights of the people of Liberia are guarantees of the Constitution of Liberia, and not gifts or grants of your Excellency. You have neither bestowed the rights upon us, nor are you the source of our rights. Therefore, you may not withhold or dispense them, as you see fit. Ours is a constitutional democracy, and not an autocracy. No person has the right to rain on the dreams and aspirations of the Liberian people.

Issued this 31st Day of March , 2001 in the City of Baltimore, Maryland.

Mydea Reeves-Karpeh
National President
Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA)

CC. Hon. Ed Royce, Chairman of the Sub-committee for Africa