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Keynote Address
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Let me begin with a quick historic glance back on a critical Diaspora challenge that we are still confronting today.

It was almost exactly 13 years ago, when this our great Union, then under the able leadership of ULAA National Executive President Anthony V. Kesselly , hosted its 35th National General Assembly right in this great State (Georgia), in the City of Decatur, running from September 25 to 27, 2009. Key among resolutions adopted in the 2009 Assembly Resolution were the following: Diaspora Voting & Dual Citizenship and to advocate for a pushing for the enactment of the Liberia Fairness Act to give Liberians on DED permanent residency in the United States of America.

As one who was a delegate at said General Assembly, I am exceedingly pleased to report to this 48th General Assembly being ,held from September 23 – 25, 2022 in the State of Georgia, 13 years later today, that DUAL CITIZENSHIP is now the law and reality of the Land in Liberia. Hence, we can now proudly proclaim that, “Once A Liberian Always A Liberian.” We can also give a sigh of relief that Liberians who were on DED/TPS are qualified to obtain their Green Card, thus entitling them to the enjoyment of permanent residency status in the United States of America.

As we convene at this Assembly we, with our sister Liberian Diaspora organizations around the world, are now submerged in the noble battle for the possibility of having “Out of Country voting” materialize in 2023 or after. And so, I can give you the good tidings that, Georgia, ULAA heard you and ULAA delivered. Let us now summon the needed courage to coalesce forces to ensure that Liberians who are legal residents in other lands, especially with appreciable populations, have the right and are enabled to vote at least in Liberia’s presidential election.

These achievements were made possible owing to ULAA’s leadership and partnerships with an assortment of other Diaspora organizations, lawmakers in both the United States of America and the Republic of Liberia, as well as the heavy push by President George M. Weah wherever push was needed. And lest I forget, we recognize our local advocates in

Georgia and down South in persons such as Madam Mabel Green, Dr. Clarice Ford Kulah, Brother Robert G. Garguah, Sr., Mr. Dennis Jah, Eminent David Flomo among many others.

The current achievements of ULAA in the advocacy for Dual Citizenship for natural born Liberians and their children; and making a Liberian woman to pass on her citizenship over to her child at birth, irrespective of the citizenship or pigmentation of the biological father, as well as making it possible for Liberians on TPS/DED to get Green Card, constitute a continuation of patriotic efforts by ULAA leaders and leadership from the 1970s to abolish the one-party political system, fight corruption and abuse of power in government, and ensure the prevalence of the rule of law.

Today, the current generation of Liberians is enjoying multi-party democracy, thanks to these gallant battles fought by ULAA and its partners. Gone are the days when lawmakers were selected, literally handpicked, and not elected. Today, in sharp contrast to yester years, the people of Liberia can actively participate in the political process as subject-actors, not mere objects, of history. They now have the leverage to impact the political situation by acknowledging legislative activities; be they good or bad, and move to effect change.

Despite ULAA's achievements in making multi-party democracy possible in Liberia--having Dual Citizenship in Liberia, TPS/DED Liberians now qualified for permanent residency in the United States of America--ULAA as an institution and its partners in civil organizations, student groups, foreign governments and diplomats, foreign institutions or organizations, are still far from declaring victory in the fight against corruption.

Today, we have the theme guiding this 48th National General Assembly as, "DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP THAT WOULD CREAT ECONOMIC GROWTH AND REDUCE POVERTY FOR THE PEOPLE OF LIBERIA." Indeed this is thoughtful theme in a pertinent issue-area of the times.

I am sure you all will agree that economic growth and poverty reduction are not possible, if we fail to win the war against corruption.

Therefore, I have come to speak to you on the topic: "OUR CURRENT FAILED STATE: AN OFFSPRING OF PERPETUAL HISTORICAL CORRUPT ATTRIBUTES OF OUR LEADERS, LEADERSHIPS AND IN SOME CASES ORDINARY LIBERIANS SINCE 1847."

To proceed, let me admonish that we all need to be honest with ourselves and with each other by abandoning the lazy excuse of holding a single government solely responsible for all of our issues.

We have failed (I am using the pronoun we to include myself) and are failing to win the fight against corruption because we as a people and nation, and foreign governments, diplomats, institutions or organizations, are very selective and biased in our fight against corruption in Liberia. Whenever a favorable person or government corrupts the national resources for the enrichment of only family members, justifications such as the following are made:

- **Since Liberia is not stable, buying a house in America or Europe will help the person's family to live in the Diaspora and be educated after which they can return to Liberia and help the country develop.**
- **The person used the money to build an edifice which the government is renting, as a result of which the person doesn't have to seek government job, thus resulting into reducing government's payroll expenses.**
- **The person is using his/her money to build houses in Liberia, thereby creating job opportunities for Liberians and helping government solve the problems of unemployment.**

- **The person does not have any house in Liberia, so there is no proof that he or she is corrupt.**
- **There is no law or tools to retrieve stolen money from Liberia, and so how do you know the person is corrupt?**

No matter what justifications are given to support or countenance the corruption related to one's associates in Liberia, let me tell you that corruption is a cancerous bug that destroys the pillars and fabrics of national development and human innovation.

Today, in this modern time and age, the distorted nature of our poor transportation and communication infrastructures and platforms, health care and educational systems, city planning, business opportunities and creativities is an offspring of corrupt attributes of government, government leaders, government leadership and, to some extent, ordinary Liberians who encourage corruption; for example: by selling lands to more than one person and using illegal power or opportunities to suppress others since 1847.

As a Liberian saying goes, you should sleep on the bed you make for yourself, or your children should sleep on the bed you make for them. The late famed West African musical icon Prince Nico Mbarga of Rocafil Jazz put it more pointedly, "As you make your bed so shall you lie in it."

As you are pointing one accusatory finger at someone for the very poor conditions in Liberia, three of your fingers are pointing back at you, representing the corrupt behavior of a family member of yours, a friend or you yourself, with God as the only witness.

Let's reflect aloud. Do you ever remember receiving a scholarship to come to United States of America to study solely because of the influence/connection of your family member, friend or yourself? Do you? There is a long list of "do you remember" how you came to America, how you got the scholarship, how you got job, etc.

Also be aware that there is a corresponding long list of victims saying, "my family was a victim" because of Do you remember?

If we have to win the war on corruption we cannot be selective or biased. We as a people and nation must develop rainbow partnerships with both local and foreign institutions to make sure anyone or everyone who corrupts faces justice in Liberia. Let foreign governments, institutions, organizations and diplomat help us retrieve stolen money from Liberia. We cannot let impunity remain the order of the day.

Let there be punitive measure for corrupt behavior, attributes, policies, practices, for any Liberian who double or triple sells land, unnecessarily and arbitrarily increases the price of goods and services, have selective

and discriminatory standard for treating people of same establishment, agents of government and other institutions. Take for a sad example, since 1847 we have not been able to resolve the issue of rice accessibility, availability, stabilization or mass production, all because of corruption.

Since 1847 corruption in Liberia is responsible for people from Bentol, Montserrado County, Voinjama, Lofa County, and Greenville, Sinoe county, as well as other distant parts of Liberia to have to always travel to Monrovia, Montserrado County, for good healthcare, education, employment, and business opportunities.

When Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was decentralizing the resources and infrastructure of Ghana for national development purposes and helping fight corruption, our leaders at the time were centralizing the country's resources and consolidating power by way of encouraging corruption. Dr. Nkrumah left a solid foundation for current day Ghana, our leaders were busy constructing for us a sinking foundation that is the result of the poor conditions in Liberia today.

To win the war on corruption we as a people and nation must to muster the courage to fight it with all our might and sincerity at all level of society, effecting a drastic change of our mind set, including but not limited to educational institutions, healthcare organizations, family

businesses, land purchase, etc. For this gigantic battle I hold that ULAA and other Diaspora organizations need to have physical and permanent representation on the ground through offices in Liberia to help bolster the concerted efforts in this fight.

Now that Dual Citizenship is the law of the land and Once A Liberian Always A Liberian a reality, we all need to return home to help in any way possible to fight corruption for the betterment of our generation and the generations yet unborn.

- **Liberia is a country, not a workplace or goldmine where one goes fetch ill gotten resources to help you sustain yourself, support your families, relatives and friends to the total disadvantage to the ordinary hardworking residents of the country.**
- **Liberia is a country not a host of your liabilities while your assets are secured far away in foreign countries.**
- **Liberia is a country and not an entity responsible to pay your student loan, car notes, rents or mortgages in the Diaspora**

We Liberians, as a people and nation shall win the war or fight against corruptions. After that economic growth and poverty reduction will be possible, leading us to the Promised Land.

May the God of Abraham, Jacobs and Isaac bless Liberia.

May God bless both the United States of America and the Republic of Liberia.

Thank you!