

**STATEMENT OF GREETINGS
FROM CHARLES A MINOR, AMBASSADOR OF LIBERIA
TO THE LIHEDEL CONFERENCE**

October 29 – 30, Greensboro, North Carolina

The President and Members of LIHEDE
The Coordinator
Sponsoring Colleges
Fellow Liberians and Friends of Liberia

I would like to express my profound regrets for not being able to be among you to participate in this very important conference on the state of affairs in our nation and the strategies to forge ahead as we move from almost two decades of instability, violence and mayhem that have almost destroyed the fabrics of our country into an era of peace. It is time that Liberians, such as the ones meeting today and tomorrow in Greensboro, “hang head” to look at the problems that brought us here and what solutions we can muster to end long standing constraints that have impeded the harmonious development of our country.

I would also like to extend, on behalf of the government of Liberia and on behalf of Liberians of good will, our gratitude to the two institutions that have accepted to sponsor this event. As Liberia gets off the ashes of war and searches her way in the labyrinths of modern history, one of her most important tools would be education and we hope that these two institutions would be there to lend their support. We dare look forward to their practical involvement in the reconstruction of our higher education system. Speaking recently at a meeting on investments in the new Liberia in New York, organized by the Sullivan Foundation, I said that education must be one of the primary areas of focus for investment in Liberia. In the absence of education, I am afraid we might continue to fight the ghosts of the past that lead us to almost self-annihilation. This conference must therefore serve as a launching pad between Liberian and American institutions of higher education.

Last July, as part of our independence commemorative celebrations, the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA) and our embassy sponsored a Symposium at Africare in Washington, DC. Many of you participated in that meeting. That symposium was followed by another one-day forum in Baltimore. We are delighted that consultation is continuing and that Liberians are more than ever involved in a dialogue.

Ladies and gentlemen, dialogue must take precedence over all other means that we have so far tried to resolve our problems. Remedies of the past have failed because of a lack of dialogue amongst our people. We must pursue dialogue to

talk about our problems and search for solutions. I mean dialogue amongst people from the same or different religions, cultural and political belief in our national mosaic so that every Liberian will find his or her rightful place in a new Liberia built on respect and liberty for all.

You had asked me to brief you on the state of the peace in our country. Ladies and gentlemen, we have come a long way from whence we were about 15 months ago in Accra. Disarmament will be completed in a matter of days and according to numbers provided by the UNMIL (United Nations Mission in Liberia), about 90,000 combatants have been disarmed. The repatriation of Liberians who sought refuge in the West African region would begin in November. The government and the UN High Commission on Refugees have launched an information campaign to get Liberian refugees to return home. At the end of the exercise, some 800,000 are expected to return home and resettle.

The Elections Commission made recommendations to the legislature concerning new electoral laws that should be passed in the next few days. The passage of these new elections laws would kick –off the electoral process. The Good Governance Commission made some recommendations to the government through the legislature on how best to revamp our institutions. This process is also on course. However appealing these developments may be, I might say that the most important achievement of the government has been to be fully functional since its inauguration a year ago. There have been some dissensions and hurdles, but all of that pale in comparison to the situation of just a year ago. One can therefore say that this first year has been successful in many ways.

As you embark on these two days of reflection and consultations on the future of Liberia, I have no doubt that you will pinpoint every major issue, political, cultural and economic that need scrutiny to move our country forward. Your meeting to discuss these issues bodes well for the future.

Recently, when he spoke on the VOA program Africa Journal, Chairman Gyude Bryant said the cornerstone to peace is the respect of basic rights for all the people. People must not have to resort to guns and violence to make their voices heard. This government is dedicated to that free expression of people and constructive dialogue. In any government such as ours, there must be much to criticize and talk about, but beyond criticism, we must all look for solutions. And no group is better suited than this gathering to put forward new ideas for a new Liberia. We hope that these consultations will serve as the seed for broader consultations amongst Liberians both at home and in the Diaspora. Looking back at the problems or criticizing what is going on now are good exercises, but we must always accentuate what solutions are appropriate to sustain the peace, to provide greater cohesion and unity to our people, to provide avenues for empowerment to our people.

I pray that your deliberations in the next two days will be successful and will constitute a meaningful contribution to our common search for peace, stability and development. Again, please allow me to express my apology for not being with you in person. I look forward to the outcomes of this two-day conference of some of the brightest minds of our dear nation.

Long live the Republic of Liberia, "a home of glorious liberty by God's command!"