

THE VIRGINIA DECLARATION: A Call For a Way Forward to a New Liberia through Reconciliation and Justice resulting from the National Truth and Reconciliation Processes Culminating in the National Conference on Reconciliation Held at the Unity Conference Center in Virginia, Liberia

Virginia, Liberia June 19 2009

We, the delegates of the National Conference on Reconciliation in Liberia, representing citizens of Liberia from all 15 counties and from all walks of life, background, race, clan and tribe as well as representing perpetrators and victims of crimes of all forms and degrees against our fellow brothers and sisters; having come together to forgive and seek forgiveness through the pursuit of truthful reconciliation among ourselves placing our nation, our dignity and the future of our children and children's children ahead of us all through the Grace and Mercy of Almighty God; and

We recall the spirit of all our Great ancestors, who through love of unity, freedom, justice and liberty founded this great Nation. We honor their vision, their gallant strides and dedication to building a nation great and strong which is also able to stand against its foes. This spirit of gallantry demonstrated through unity of purpose must live on; and

We acknowledge the recent, difficult chapter in our national history. We stand together and share in the pains of victims. We acknowledge that the wounds are deep and the pains are breathless. Yet we stand together, both perpetrators and victims, forgiving and seeking forgiveness of each other, embracing each other in the true spirit of reconciliation and love once more. Recognizing all of this, we remain cognizant of the fact that justice and accountability are necessary for true reconciliation and national healing.

We the delegates at this National Reconciliation Conference, organized by the Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission with the theme: "National Reconciliation and the Way Forward", discussed at length issues related to reconciliation for our people, including reparations, prosecutions, amnesty, memorialization, traditional reconciliation and accountability mechanisms, national identity, participation in governance, land tenure and ownership, and a national vision for a new Liberia.

Following the robust and important discussions held on these topics during the National Reconciliation Conference, we the delegates representing the people of Liberia both at home and in the Liberian Diaspora, DO HEREBY DECLARE:

That the recommendations listed below represent the views of the Liberian people represented at this conference; and

That the Recommendations are not offered in order of priority. Rather, the delegates consider all of these issues to be critical and urgent components for true reconciliation and stable peace to be achieved and sustained in Liberia.

WE THEREFORE CALL:

On the Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission to:

Recommend the following in its final report:

1. That those who died as a result of the conflict be memorialized by monuments and multi-purpose halls erected in the name of victims at all sites of massacres.
2. That there be a specific date declared for proper reburial of all victims of massacres.
3. That individual reparations be granted to victims of Liberia's civil crisis in the form of psychosocial support, educational scholarships, microloans, livestock support, agricultural support, and food aid.
4. That community reparations be granted to affected populations in the form of centers for psychosocial support, support to communal farming, and priority rehabilitation of roads, schools, and health facilities.
5. That perpetrators should provide financial or in-kind contributions for reparations to buttress reparations programs at the community level.
6. That there be prosecutions for all perpetrators in positions of leadership during the conflict—including heads of warring factions, frontlines commanders, and those who committed economic crimes and supported them—who are accused of violating international humanitarian and human rights law or crimes against humanity and have not acknowledged their wrongs or appeared before the TRC.
7. That a court of competent jurisdiction be established in Liberia to deal with these cases immediately upon submission of the TRC's final report.
8. That community leaders should be empowered to use "under the palava hut" management to deal with all those that have acknowledged their wrongs and are seeking forgiveness.
9. That no blanket amnesties be granted, but that upon accounting for their deeds persons can qualify for amnesty if they were 1) below the age of 18 when acting as fighters or 2) did not violate international humanitarian and human rights law or crimes against humanity and cooperated with the TRC and spoke the truth and were remorseful.
10. That perpetrators who committed crimes against humanity should not be elected or appointed for public office.
11. That acts of corruption be defined in clear terms, particularly in relation to embezzlement.
12. That Superintendents be elected, not appointed.
13. That a code of conduct for government officials be produced and that compliance with this code becomes a requisite for any election or appointment to political office.
14. That all assets of an individual be declared and examined before being elected or appointed to a political office.
15. That political appointments be based on merit.
16. That the number of political parties be reduced.

17. That political power be decentralized in such a way to ensure that the seats of all Counties can share responsibility for the administration of Liberia but that Liberia remains a unitary state.
18. That appropriate and transparent mechanisms be put in place so that Liberians in the Diaspora can have the opportunity to vote in the new Liberia.
19. That a land dispute court be established to work closely with the Land Commission, with a representative in every county.
20. That a traditional land council be established to support the efforts of the Land Commission and land dispute court, reflecting ethnic, age, and gender balance.
21. That a historical review commission be established to review Liberia's history and produce a version of it that reflects the lives of the people met here by the settlers in 1822.
22. That a national culture center be established to promote Liberia's diverse culture.
23. That a national consultation process be set-up to determine a single indigenous dialect to be spoken throughout the country and taught in Liberian schools.
24. That the motto in the seal of Liberia be changed from its current form, "The love of liberty brought us here," to instead read: "The love of liberty unites us here".
25. That a palm tree be used as a national symbol for common identity in the new Liberia.
26. That streets, public buildings, and other public spaces be named in honor of traditional leaders and other prominent figures who have made significant contributions to their counties and communities in Liberia.
27. That March 15 of each year be celebrated as "Presidents' Day" in honor of all of Liberia's presidents.
28. That national ID cards be reactivated.
29. That welfare centers be created to provide care to those who can no longer provide it for themselves, including the elderly, mentally disturbed or mentally handicapped.
30. That vocational education be provided to adults in the form of literacy and skills-training programs.
31. That youth receive pre-technical qualification trainings in order to seek employment.
32. That the curriculum for children and youth be updated to include reconciliation, peacebuilding, human rights, and patriotism.
33. That *poro* and *sande* periods be coordinated with the national school calendar.
34. That more recreational opportunities be created for children and youth.
35. That more rehabilitation centers for deviant youth be established.
36. That the Independent National Human Rights Commission be immediately constituted and empowered to undertake its important work, including ensuring implementation of the TRC's recommendations.
37. That a Peace and Reconciliation Commission be established to oversee, support, and encourage reconciliation activities throughout the country.
38. That a National Peace and Reconciliation Conference be held annually, rotating between all 15 counties.

On the Government of Liberia to:

Implement these recommendations as a matter of utmost haste, creating new mechanisms or bodies for implementation where they are needed and strengthening existing mechanisms or bodies where they are weak; and

Strengthen and expedite reforms already underway to:

1. Promote a culture of respect for human rights;
2. Eliminate gender-based violence, protect survivors of rape, and prosecute people who commit violence against women;
3. Promote an understanding of child rights issues that is sensitive to African culture and focuses on both rights and responsibilities;
4. Provide security and protection to citizens against criminal activity;
5. Liberianize the economy and protect local businesses;
6. Decentralize and enhance the provision of medical services;
7. Increase and standardize educational facilities of all levels throughout Liberia.

Undertake a constitutional review process to address any inadequacies in our current constitution that may pose an obstacle in the implementation of these recommendations; and

Establish a special judiciary review committee to monitor the government's progress on implementation of these and other TRC recommendations.

On all bodies involved in the implementation of these recommendations to:

Prioritize and promote comprehensive awareness campaigns for all implementation efforts throughout all 15 political subdivisions and in all local dialects; and

Ensure that implementation efforts take into account the need to improve social protection of women, children, the disabled, and other vulnerable groups, focusing on their empowerment and participation in all levels of decision-making; and

Be cognizant and sensitive to local context and practices in all their activities; and

Defer decision-making power for the implementation of these activities to the community level wherever relevant.

On all Liberians:

To encourage and take part in reconciliation practices at all levels and to support to their greatest ability the implementation of these recommendations; and

To pressure leaders at the community, county, and national levels to remain seized of the matter of these recommendations; and

To establish civil society monitoring bodies, comprised of members from different pressure groups, community advocacy groups, and traditional leaders, to track and advocate for the implementation of the recommendations.

We, the delegates to this momentous and all-important event, submit this declaration to the Government and People of Liberia in good faith and optimism, recognizing that though the long road towards reconciliation is still ahead of Liberia, we have already come a long way since the turbulent times of our country's civil crisis. In the spirit of fostering true peace and harmony in our beloved Liberia, and in recognition that it is only once all Liberians commit to the principles of reconciliation that it can be achieved and sustained, we ourselves, the delegates of this conference, DO FURTHER DECLARE:

That we will remain seized of these issues and work at all levels of society to promote the adoption and implementation of any and all efforts that will foster true and lasting reconciliation and understanding among our people.

Working together towards peace and reconciliation in all its forms is the only way forward for our country.

Done this 19th of June, 2009 where as the below members of the Declaration Committee have affixed their signatures.

Frances R. D. Greaves

WONGOSOL

No.	Name	County /Institution	Signature
1.	Lucida A. Eastman Herbert	Montserrado	
2.	C. Kayjaleh Blyee	Sinoe	
3.	Jamesetta N. Klogba	Sinoe	
4.	James M. Hney	Grand Kru	
5.	Sam Nimely	TJWG	
6.	Dorothy Nyema	Maryland	
7.	Maryann K. Sudue	Grand Kru	
8.	Luther S. Mendin	Nimba	
9.	Lawouise M. Tudolon	Montserrado	
10.	Zawolo Z. Zuagele	Nimba	
11.	Dorothy Ben Everette	Margibi	
12.	Olaska W. Barh	Grand Gedeh	
13.	Louise M. Tucolon	Montserrado	
14.	Elizabeth G. Brown	Margibi	
14.	J. Cammue N. Dormea	Bong	
15.	Babby Brooks	Grand Cape Mount	
16.	Alfred N. Quayjandii	Grand Cape Mount	
17.	Christain S. Chea Sr.	River-Gee	
19.	J. Earnest Passawe	Montserrado	
20.	Hawa Linda Gray	Montserrado	
21.	Dominic D.Narmah	Gbarpolu	
22.	Abraham B. Combay	Bomi	
23.	Matthew Kuich	Rivercess	
24.	John S.C. Williams	Grand Bassa	