



CONGRESS FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE (CDC)

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Office of the Standard Bearer

Independence Day Message

Citizens of our great nation Liberia, on behalf of CDCians the world over, my family and myself, I bring you greetings and congratulations on the celebration of our 163rd independence day. We take this time to join you in this celebration as today characterizes an exciting time in our journey to create a future of equality opportunity, patriotism, and hope for Liberia.

It is truly an honor and a humbling experience that my spoken and written words can represent a call to the people of Liberia and give them the inspiration that the Congress for Democratic Change represents: change in the way government should embrace its responsibilities to the people it serves. Many brave and distinguished Liberians - from educators to journalists, politicians to artists, day laborers to home makers - have stood in the confined, isolated space of being viewed as the opposition. Similarly, many other Liberians are limited in a different way because of extreme restrictions as it pertains to economic, social and judicial liberties.

Today, I am making a clarion call so that we can begin to galvanize our collective efforts towards true economic, social and judicial independence. By acquiring total independence, we can achieve for our children and ourselves a more affordable and dignified life in an environment where equality exists, and justice is guaranteed to all. Let our patriotism be represented in the love of our country. Let the love for our country be fueled by the tragic memory of the nearly 300,000 lives that were unnecessarily lost during our civil war. Let us not take our freedom and nation for granted but ensure that those who engage us for exploitative purposes are met with the greatest resistance we can muster as we remain strong and committed citizens.

As we celebrate our 163rd year of independence as a sovereign state, I am troubled that a majority of Liberians lack true stakeholder rights and do not share in the meager economic benefits that accrue to the nation's coffers. Our illiteracy rate does not represent a nation that is 163 years old and, after 163 years of being independent, we are still relying on donors to provide basic necessities for our country. Most of you will "celebrate" this day because it is a holiday but not in the true sense of the word and essence of the day. I watch with deep sadness, the jubilation a country enjoys as a result of a few days of official celebration, yet the reality of a typical day in Liberia is filled with widespread poverty.

Nevertheless, we must commend the people of Nimba who have ignored the reality of everyday suffering and life's difficulties to demonstrate a resilient performance as host of this year's official celebration. I do understand the weight that economic hardship and social inequality has thrust upon our country. I give you my word that CDC, as an opposition party, will continue to focus on pushing the Unity Party-led government towards a domestic agenda dedicated to providing every Liberian with meaningful employment, basic social services, adequate security and the right of redress. To be independent, one must be free and, to be free, one's barriers must be minimal, so consider it guaranteed that a CDC government will make your needs a domestic priority.

CDC will exercise the sovereign principle so that those we govern must not only be fully represented in the decision making process but also have equal benefits to the treasures of our country. As such, CDC shall never lose sight of the fact that the right of any political institution to lead is only validated by the pure supremacy of the ballot box. CDC will defend the unique and inalienable rights of the individual and ensure they are not compromised by government. CDC's desire to see the Liberian people rise from the ashes of poverty to a place of prosperity is what led us to join the Unity Party-led Government less than four years ago to request debt cancellation from our international friends. This was a step in helping our future generations avoid carrying the financial liability of the greed of past leaderships. Therefore, on this unique occasion in our country's history, it is only befitting that I once more express our profound gratitude to the Unity Party-led government on its leadership in achieving significant debt relief for the Republic of Liberia. I say thank you to the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and our benefactor nations for facilitating and forgiving our outstanding loans.

In order to give meaning to all the work accomplished thus far, let us truly make this 163rd Independence Day a new beginning in which true freedom, economic opportunity and equality will flourish in Liberia. Let us use all avenues of democracy to ensure that any future debt produces direct and tangible benefits to all citizens or at the minimum, provide revenue generating opportunities that will go a long way in supplementing or adequately servicing the related debt. History shows that the call for change and change itself has never come without challenges, and so, we must be prepared to stand firm in our desire for change despite unforeseen obstacles. This has been illustrated by recent attempts by our detractors to diffuse CDC's grassroots intensity by negative politicization, and the desire of our critics to diminish the political strength of CDC in the eyes of our current and future members, the civil society, INGOs, and Liberia's international partners. But rather than succumb in the face of adversary, we remained staunch, stayed strong and forged ahead with our agenda of continuous positive national and international engagements such as:

- Demonstrating our strength as a formidable opposition by winning the Montserrado By-Elections
- Engaging the International Community through petitions to the U.S. government to request additional aid for educational and health sectors
- Joining efforts to formally request of the U.S Senate and House of Representatives, for the passage of a bill to provide for the adjustment of status of needful nationals of Liberia to that of lawful permanent residents.
- Staying true to our position as a viable opposition party by ensuring through dialogue, legislation and/or legal means that the Unity Party-led Government adhere to the principles of good governance
- Being engaged in the process of strengthening our young democracy by participating in every by-election and implementing grassroots campaigning as presently exemplified in River Gee
- Sponsoring a variety of legislations which have positively affected the lives of our people in the areas of security, health, education, national reconciliation and rebuilding of other national infrastructural programs

Consequently, I would like to take this opportunity to persuade all Liberians who believe in the call for change as championed by CDC to stay true to our core values and strive to exemplify our principles of integrity and ethics. It is these ideals which will build the character of our nation from the ground up, strengthen our patriotism and allow us to put Liberia and the Liberian people first in all our endeavors.

My fellow citizens, my message to you today, even as we celebrate in these difficult times is a one of hope. A message that highlights the spirit of each Liberian whose single wish is to be given an equal opportunity to explore and develop his or her individual potential. Let us strive towards acquiring national change which will enable us to wholeheartedly celebrate our nation's independence as a result of our collective efforts and not simply because it is a holiday. It is in this light I am personally asking all Liberians to remain patriotic to our country, believe in the integrity of self, dignity of labor, and live by the basic premise that we should treat others as we would like to be treated. In closing, I cannot overstress that we must continue to be vigilant in all our efforts. We cannot be weary. We must be invigorated and energized by the prospects of the future.

Again, on behalf of myself, my family and the dedicated Partisans of the Congress of Democratic Change, I wish Liberians at home and abroad a very Happy "26"!

Thank you and God bless Liberia!

George Manneh Weah
Standard Bearer, Congress for Democratic Change