

KEYNOTE SPEECH DELIVERED BY HON. AUGUSTINE KPEHE NGAFUAN, MINISTER OF FINANCE, RL, AT THE GRADUATION CEREMONY OF THE 35TH BASIC POLICE RECRUIT CLASS HELD AT THE POLICE TRAINING ACADEMY
January 22, 2010

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Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen.

Permit me to first and foremost express my thanks and appreciation for the opportunity afforded me to speak at this very important occasion marking yet another significant achievement of the Liberia National Police and all the partners that are assisting our efforts to train a professional police force. It is my understanding that this is the 35th Basic Police Recruitment Class and that over one hundred and forty –three young men and women will be sworn in as guardians of our country’s security.

As you may be aware, the Liberian government concluded after months of consultations with various local and international stakeholders the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), now christened “Lift Liberia”. The strategy is a three-year road map intended to reverse the negative trend in our human development indicators and begin to lay the bulwarks for the sustainable and inclusive development of our country that has been battered by more than twenty five years of political and economic turbulence. The PRS is undergirded by four pillars, among which is the Peace and Security Pillar. The central goal of the Pillar as articulated in the PRS is “to create a secure and peaceful environment, both domestically and in the sub-region, that is conducive to sustainable, inclusive, and equitable growth and development.” In furtherance of this overarching goal, the government committed itself to achieving three key objectives:

Building and maintaining effective national security institutions based in law and subject to civilian authority that are capable of defending Liberia and its inhabitants.

Building public confidence in the abilities of the security forces to maintain peace and security, complying with and enforcing international Human Rights Laws and other norms, and protecting against domestic and transnational crimes.

Promoting domestic and sub-regional peace and security through close cooperation, coordination, and adoption of best practices.

Accordingly, the necessary pre-condition to achieving these objectives was to train capable and professional gallant men and women to man our security institutions. The government pursued among other initiatives, the training of at least 2000 soldiers for the Armed Forces of Liberia, at least 3500 officers of the Liberia National Police, and 500 officers of the Emergency Response Unit (ERU). Thanks to the generous support of the US and other friendly governments, we can now boast that we have hit target and that we now have about 2000 gallant men and women prepared to serve their country as soldiers. Again thanks to our bilateral and multilateral partners, especially UNMIL, we have already trained more than 3500 police officers and are moving closely in achieving our target of training 500 officers for the Emergency Response Unit (ERU).

Although we have a paltry budget vis a vis the colossal challenge of post-war reconstruction, we have endeavored amidst constraints to provide the necessary support to the Liberia National Police. Thus from a Budget of US\$3.9M in 2006/2007, we have more than doubled the budget of the Liberia National Police including the Police Training Academy to US\$8.2M. With the gradual draw down of support from our partners, government has been stepping up to the plate in granting support to the Police. However, I will be the first to concede that the security sector including the Liberia National Police needs more support from government, and I can safely commit that government’s support to the Police will go north as government financial capability improves.

We make this pledge because we too are aware that all the deliverables in the other three pillars of the PRS cannot be achieved if we do not have a peaceful and secure environment that can conduce economic growth and development. So we do not need sermons to be converted. We are already converted.

We as fiscal managers sit at the pinnacle where we take a panoramic view of all the nation's problems and are buffeted from all fronts with the competing priorities from various sectors. Recognizing that after years of destruction and economic collapse, the priorities of a state are many, we try to "prioritize among the priorities". But even those sectors that are prioritized will still complain about lack of resources. The obvious reason is that the size of our nation's cake, the budget, is very small compared to the number of persons that are competing to have a giant piece of it and the level of their hunger. A big chunk of a small cake is not the same as a big chunk of a big cake. That's why we must work collectively to ensure that our economy grows so that we can have a bigger cake to divide in order to impact more meaningfully on the challenges facing all our critical sectors including the security sector.

But as we talk security, we need to have a holistic view of security because the security of the state is a composite of factors. Unemployment is a source of insecurity and may lead to deviant behaviors. So, when government is working to create an enabling investment environment through better legislations and policies that attract investors both local and foreign, we should recognize that the government is positively impacting on the security of the state. When the government is spending resources on agriculture and attracting private investment to engage in modern farming practices such as is occurring in Foya, Lofa County, through ADA, we are positively impacting on the security of the state by reducing the food insecurity of our people. It is well known in Liberia that a hungry man is an angry man and that rice is a political commodity to the extent that protests over the increase in the price of rice led to the April 14, 1979 Rice Riot deemed by many political pundits as the effective precursor to the 1980 Coup and more than 25 years of turbulence.

When government channels more money to education, we are positively impacting on the security of the state because the greatest insecurity is the insecurity that comes from the lack of knowledge. It is said that the number of schools and the number of prisons in a society are in an inverse relationship. If a society builds fewer schools, it must get prepared to build more prisons; if it builds more schools, the number of prisons it may need to build will reduce. Education increases a person's chances to get employed or to employ himself, thereby making it less likely to commit crime and reducing the need for a bigger prison to house him and other similar criminals. When a government puts money on road rehabilitation and construction, it positively impacts on security because a good road catalyses development, for better roads make it easier for students to go to school, for farmers to sell their products at competitive prices, for pregnant women to reach to hospitals and for police officers to reach a crime scene. As the Chinese say, "the road to development begins with the development of roads". That is why the topmost priority in the PRS as unanimously agreed by Liberians in the nook and cranny of the country is the rehabilitation and construction of roads.

Let me recognize and appreciate the improvement in the security climate in the country. Today unlike few years ago, the number of crimes has drastically reduced and we hear less about ISSAKABA Boys or marauding bandits who roam in the dark of the night to inflict harm on innocent and harmless citizens. Undoubtedly, the achievement is a testament to the hard work of joint security forces and UNMIL. It is indeed a testament to the astute leadership of the Inspector General of Police Marc Amblard and other leaders of our security outfits. So I lift profuse thanks to all and sundry who have made this happen. Liberians sometimes do not appreciate those to whom appreciation belongs. Liberians sometimes get more fixated on the bad and refuse to see or recognize the good. But as I always say that the eye that cannot see the good is not qualified to objectively expose the bad. Police officers, like government officials, are sometimes treated like the surgeon who conducts 99 successful surgeries and gets no praise or appreciation, but comes under a barrage of condemnation and unfair criticism if the 100th surgery goes bad.

Yes, while the reduction in the rate of armed robbery can be attributed to the astute leadership and dedication of our Joint Security Forces, this positive phenomenon also reflects the impact of good legislations and policies on the objective conditions of society. For if we have not yet forgotten, one of the contributing factors to armed robbery was

the unfortunate situation whereby armed robbers could be bailed out of prison after paying an infinitesimal amount. But the clamor of the society led to the passage of an Act making armed robbery non-bailable, thereby erecting an effective deterrent to the commission of this heinous crime.

Today, there are loud noises out there about the PRS and its impact on poverty. As I told another gathering few days ago, for the naysayers and the notorious faultfinders, until the Minister of Finance and the Governor of Central Bank can coordinate the doling out of hard cash to the more than 3.4 m Liberians, there can be no poverty reduction. So they protest if the Ministry of Planning comes out and reports that the PRS 90-day deliverables were implemented at the rate of 88%. They punch the air in protest and say that such report is fraudulent, although they exhibited no such behavior when more than a year ago the self-same the Ministry of Planning reported an average implementation rate of 18%.

But what the naysayers fail to understand is that almost half of the interventions in the PRS revolve around the crafting of policies and the enactment of proper legislations. The naysayers behave like the narrow-minded individual who thinks that building a house begins with the digging of the ground, mixing cement and sand, laying brick and mortar. Until he sees brick and mortar, he does not think that a house project is underway. This narrow-minded individual does not factor the architect in his equation because he feels that the architect is unnecessary. But building good houses and good roads and good bridges begins with conceptualizing and designing proper plans by the engineer or the architect. No plans or poorly conceptualized plans or designs only lead to a situation where all the brick or mortar that are erected will collapse like a pack of cards in no time, thereby causing painful reversals on the development track.

So just as a good legislation two years ago is having a positive impact on the reduction of armed robbery, the good policies and legislations that are being crafted today will have a long-run positive impact on poverty reduction and development. We should never allow the impatience of today to make us to retreat from developing the proper plans for tomorrow. Our development plans and strategies and plans are not focused so much on quick impact projects, that last only a year or few months. They are primarily meant to create the firm foundation for tomorrow's development. Someone once said, "If you are planning for a year, plant corn; if you are planning for decade, plant trees; but if you are planning for a lifetime, educate men", or if you will allow me to paraphrase, make proper plans.

To conclude, let me salute our new police officers for choosing this career path and for going through the rigors of months of intensive training in policing. The road to this day was certainly tough and tortuous for some of you, but you exemplified the spirit of stick-to-itiveness and love for country to make it to this day. As I congratulate you on this day, I can only hope that your decision to be a police officer was not an afterthought, or as a result of the prodding of an uncle or a friend because every career path has its joys and its sorrows, its highpoints and its low points, its good times and its bad times. And regrettably sometimes, your job as a police man will put in harm's way, putting your precious life at risk. But if you joined the police force primarily as a result of love for the profession and love for your country, come hell or high water, you will exude dedication to the profession, to the Liberian National Police and above all, to your dear country. Remember you were not conscripted into the Police Force. Your choice to be police officer was volitional. So go out there with dedication and commitment so that your gallantry can win the admiration of the Liberian people who are real masters.

Go out there and add value to the police force. Do not tolerate crime and criminals. Behave in a professional manner so that the people in the community will run to you and not away from you. Comport yourself so that the difference between you and the criminal, you and the drug dealer, you and the rapist, you and the torturer, you and the murderer will be stark and vast. Don't tolerate evil just because it happened before. So if there is a ghetto near the police station where you will be assigned or near your house, go out there and exhibit the training you have acquired here and arrest the bandits and addicts no matter who they may be or whatever connections they may have. Remember that to be a police officer, you will be in more often than not the first line of contact with the government. Most citizens may not see the President, the Speaker, and the Chief Justice, a minister or a legislator. But they will see you and interact with you more often. If you behave properly, they will have a positive image of

government. If you behave improperly, they will have a negative image of government. I now charge you to go and be good ambassadors of your government, your people, and your country.

Congratulations for your achievement. I wish you God's bounteous blessings as you embark on this remarkable career of policing.

Thank You.