

The Great October Elections in Liberia 2005: The Doctrine of Free and Fair Elections are not the pre-conditions for Democracy in the absence of Ethnic Reconciliation and Unification: A Prospect for a Sustainable Post-Conflict Democratic Presidential Leadership for Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Recovery, and Women's Empowerment for Liberia's Redemption

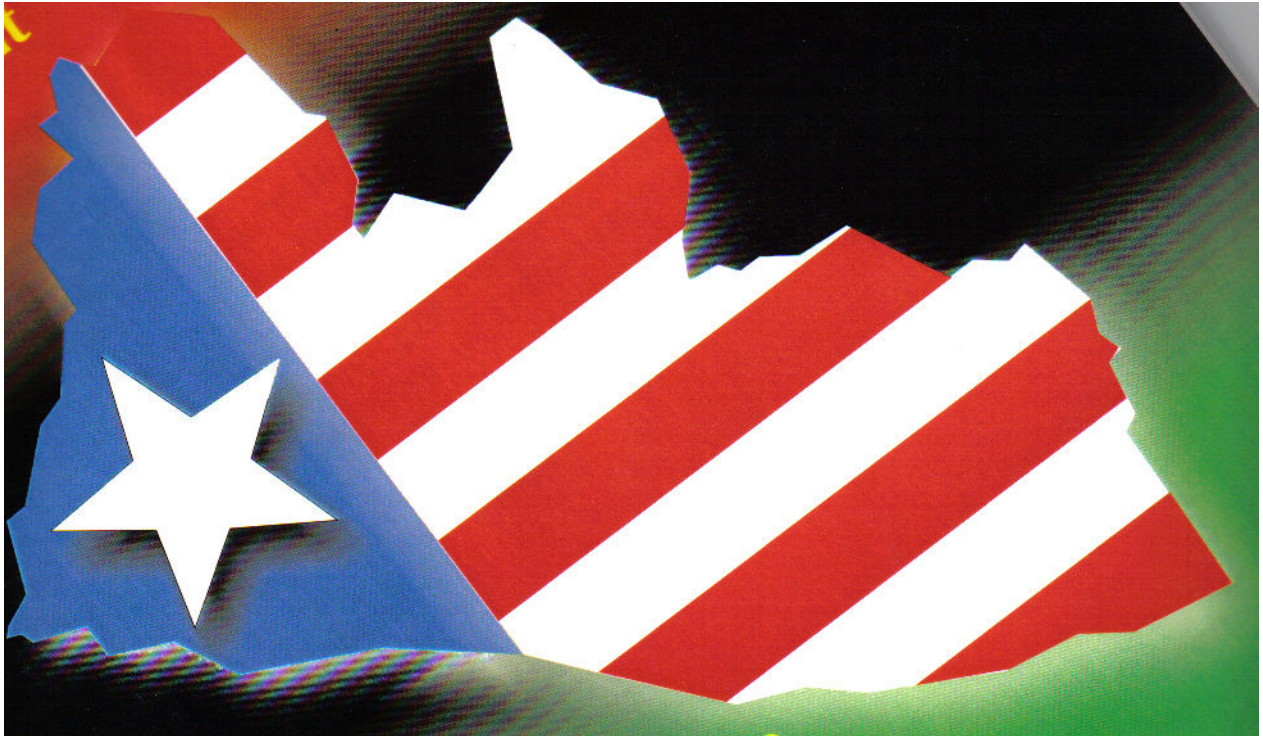


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Introduction:

As we see sweeping democratic changes around the world, the years 1990, 2000, 2001, and 2003, were particularly hard for former dictators of the world, including Liberia.

1. For instance, Slobodan Milosevic, the former President of Yugoslavia, was arrested months earlier by Serbian authorities and was put on trial at the United Nations International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, the (Netherlands). The father of Serbia, and his genocidal war and attacks against

Bosnia and the Serbian province of Kosovo, Milosevic, the head of government, became the first and only European Eastern Bloc nation to face charges of human rights violations before an international court since World War II.

2. J. Batrand Aristeed of Haiti was alleged to have been democratically elected and was supported by the United States government under the Bush-I, and Clinton Administrations. Under Bush-II, Aristeed was forced to seek exile in an unknown Central African Nation.
3. Charles Taylor, a former rebel leader of Liberia, is another failed African leader, who again forced his way into office after the 1997 Liberian Elections, under the watchful eyes of President Jimmy Carter and those who advocated that Taylor was a democratically elected President of Liberia. This forced the Liberian people into tyranny under the ruler ship of Taylor until 2003, at which time, President George W. Bush II, forced Taylor in exile in Nigeria.
4. Indeed, the late Samuel K. Doe of Liberia, was also supported by Ronald Reagan Administration, having robbed the 1985 Elections and was declared a democratically elected leader.

Fellow Liberians and friends of Liberia, let us be aware that the doctrine of free and fair elections is not the pre-condition for democratic leadership. A genuine democratic leadership entails a building of a nation based on justice, equality, freedom, equal opportunity and the full participation of all, in the nations' affairs. In my opinion, some (if not all), democratic elected leaders, particularly the

African leaders, failed to perform these democratic obligations thus subjecting the masses of the African people to further humiliation. Obviously, the demise and abuse of Africa's post independence and democratic process are attributable to the failure of many African leaders including Samuel K. Doe of Liberia.

These events capped decades of transitions from authoritarian rule to democratically elected governments throughout the world. Of course, in the context of the doctrine of free and fair elections, a democratically elected president must not be viewed as a pre-condition for democracy. However, the post-Charles Taylor Liberia's conflict management and resolution dimensions, must redefine "democracy" from the 21st Century perspective, so as to reflect on the "2005 Great October Elections in Liberia", as we look back to reflect our recollections at the starving and hopeless faces and the emaciated bodies of our Liberian brothers and sisters, while the world sat back and watched.

Liberia - The Lost and Found Nation in the Post-Cold War Global Dynamics:

As Liberia was clearly in a state of anarchy, which led to the massive destruction of property, the massacre by all the rebel factions of thousands of innocent civilians including foreign nationals, women and children, some of whom had sought sanctuary in churches, mosques, diplomatic missions, hospitals and under the Red Cross protection. The television screens in the western hemisphere, particularly, in the United States of America, took a cautious or constructive engagement approach to enthusiastically expose the emaciated bodies of starving, dying, and hopeless faces of Liberian children and parents. This had been similarly for other non-black and non-African people, like Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kuwait, Israel, Indonesian (Tsunami Disaster-2004). Interestingly so, television screens enthusiastically expose images of tragedies in a matter of seconds if and only if they are interested in doing so.

The Image of Liberia During the Civil Conflict:

Certainly, in the days and times, and particularly during the intensification of the Liberian civil conflict, the tragedy in Liberia could have been brought to the attention of the international community in a matter of seconds if the western

hemisphere was interested in the affairs of Liberia. To the contrary, there were some who viewed the image of Liberia as one of clans, tribes, and ethnic groups viciously fighting each other for political powers and control over the already devastating country, while others saw the horrors and the chaos as something natural and inherent amongst the African people in general. The Case Study of Rwanda in 1994. Indeed, each conflict in Africa tends to be taken out of context and describes as an incident or as a business as usual. These views, whether deliberate or based on ignorance, fail to recognize the inter-relationship between internal conflicts in various African countries and external forces. In the context of Liberian decade of genocidal civil conflict, there were both temporal and spatial relationships between what was happening in Liberia, Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Zaire, Togo, Nigeria, and the vestiges of racist conflict in South Africa, as well as those taking place in other parts of the world like Iraq and Palestine. Whatever the circumstance, 'lives lost in all fronts, and in any way, can never be equal to lives gained in all fronts and in any way'.

Liberia Political Regimes:

Certainly, it would not be far from the truth to give the impression that external and internal colonial state formation are not the pre-conditions for the civil conflict in Liberia. Therefore, this presentation intends to urge the Liberian people to take stock of their political leadership from 1847 to 1980, and from 1980 to 1990, and from 1990 to 2005, in order to judge for themselves as to which one of these regimes had been either a devastating blow in their lives, or some how alleviation or minimization of their sufferings and tolerance of their humanity. These analyses could be a necessary pre-condition in determining a fruitful role of appealing for ethnic reconciliation and national unification as a prospect for anticipated good governance and transparency in Liberia from a post-civil conflict prospective. Quite frankly, my historical analysis, personal observations and experience have revealed that there were some prospects of hope for longer lives for all Liberians, and political inclusion of indigenous Liberians under the Americo-Liberian leadership, specifically under the Tolbert's Administration. Indeed, there is much evidence to substantial and justify these hypotheses:

- a. Historically, Liberia was one of the few politically stable countries on the African Continent in general, and West Africa in particular prior to the civil conflict.
- b. There were prospects of hope for political inclusion and economic development for indigenous Liberians. Jobs and political participation were on the rise for many scholars of indigenous children.
- c. Voices of militant political organizations in schools, towns, from within the indigenous market women, vendors and Liberian churches, were being echoed throughout the nation. These, of course, gave rise to many political developments in the country.

Notwithstanding, the regimes of 1847-1980 were very successful in psychologically making the population submit to the prevailing repressive political, social, and economic developments. The indigenous population was politically and socially apathetic due to pseudo-integration and was not psychologically strong to resist. Interestingly, the psychology of indigenous representation within the Americo-Liberian administration, specifically under President Tubman and Tolbert's administrations, created a sense of participation and partnership inside and outside of the government. For instance:

- a. The choice of indigenous parents sending their children to school to compete with others was obvious.
- b. In many instances, indigenous parents would send their children to live with Americo-Liberian philanthropies or benevolence. These developments encouraged many Liberians to at least acquire some western education to a minimum or a maximum level. Hence, there was no cause for massive demonstrations against the government from 1944 to 1977, until in 1979 when the manipulation showed an obvious cracks when citizens took to the streets of Monrovia leading to the April 12, 1980, military coup.

Of course, the same was not true under the so-called indigenous military leadership from 1980 to 1990. Under these regimes, there was “Decree 88A” which forbade political organizations, student government, freedom of expression and speech. Jubilation of hopes over the coming to power of our own was soon to become disillusioned and this can be justifiable on the basis of the following:

- a. The Leadership of April 12, 1980, was inexperienced, unaccustomed to political power and were highly unfamiliar with economic matters, thus, plunging Liberia into serious economic disaster.
- b. There existed a deeper separation and much distrust between the leadership and the Liberian people. People were killed just for gathering together for mutual discussion.

- c. This was an era of the greatest involuntary and forcible Liberian exodus, population reduction, and intellectual migration in the history of the country, leading to many contradictions as regards the principal objective of the coup, and the initial willingness and wild enthusiasm of the Liberian people to give an indigenous a chance after more than a century of minority rule.

Now, my fellow Liberians and friends of Liberia, let me say this, many times when conflict erupts, policy makers, scholars, and organizations, ponder the nature and origins of the conflict to find a solution. How can we, as Liberians, must analyse and correct the past to ensure that the root causes of the conflict are properly addressed in order to prevent their recurrence in the “new Liberia?” In so doing, let me admonish us that our future as Liberians in general, is always shaped by the way we choose to act in the present, because we are the architects of our fate. In addition, let us also be aware that tomorrow for Liberia/Africa must include yesterday if it is to be successful. Yesterday in the context of studying causes and effects of our painful history. Because, it is obvious that created phenomenon, be it physical, mental, animate, or inanimate, has roots, and that the key to correctly understanding a particular phenomenon is thus, to investigate its origin and the

evolutionary path it has trodden to reach a specific state of development. Such is the case of Liberia in terms of living in the past conflict of indigenouslism, i.e., tribalism vs. Americo-Liberalism, leading to the “Congos” phenomenon. These, of course, have historically permeated the fabric of the Liberian society. These sentiments among other things have left us with numerous unanswered questions.

Questions such as:

1. What has Liberia accomplished after 158 years of so-called independence?
2. Could Liberia have been better off today and at peace with itself if the Regimes of 1847 to 1980 had not been disrupted by a bloody military coup?
3. What did Liberia accomplish from 1980 to 1990 under the so-called indigenous Liberian Regime of Samuel K. Doe to the present?
3. What can we, as Liberians tell our children the causes of the bloody civil conflict that led us to massacre one another, los our love ones, destroyed everything we ever worked for, displaced our human population and making Liberia one of Africa's most homeless population, in the 21st Century, knowing that Liberia, as I know it, was never one of those so-called successful colonial African countries?

The Quest For National Reconciliation and Unification:

In this context, I would say that I am conscientiously motivated in my expression to you today, my beloved fellow Liberians, just like when I went to the October 16, 1995, Million Man March in Washington, DC, to say that, this is a day of atonement for me and an empowerment to express to you frankly, freely, openly and respectfully, that a unified commitment of alliance for ethnic reconciliation and unification, is based on Liberia's geo-political evolution of its ethnic diversified history. Since its inception, and despite its many historic complexities of issues in our one country from yesterday and today, Liberians of various ethnic backgrounds, have once lived together in relatively peaceable factions as brothers and sisters. I lived, I saw, and I know that it is truth. As matter of fact, I am a member and belong to all of the Liberian ethnic factions, and Liberian social, political, cultural, ethnic, and historic realities. If I were fortunate to have come from an intra-ethnic marriage situation with 9 wives, and 29 children it was wonderful. As we know it, many Liberians were very fortunate to have had inter-ethnic marriages, with many children from among various Liberian ethnic factions. This, of course, meant Liberian solidarity. To the contrary, this great solidarity

was destroyed and ethnic differences became intensified in the interim. Yet, the indigenous leadership became defaulted of its promises to the indigenous Liberian populace, creating the situation in Liberia today.

Interestingly, as we watched the sweeping changes of democracy unfold in the world today, we hear echoes and thundering voices permeating the air ways of western technological super highways, in the corners of the American cities, in particular, emanating from many overnight Liberian politicians, foot ball players, and scholars, aspiring to direct the destiny of the vulnerable Liberian people at home, and on the ground, toward post conflict democratic presidential Liberian leadership. These initiatives are enthusiastically and overwhelmingly a first step forward, and are good moves. But it must also be acknowledged that as we aspired for great nationalistic ambitions, along with anticipated goals and aspirations for an ameliorating Liberia tomorrow, let us strive to articulate national reconciliation, and national unification as the best way forward in the absence of our painful experience as we proceed to the polls to cast our votes in the 2005 Elections. For I

believe that, the truth, and only the truth, shall and will set us free, and will produce a permanent peace, reconciliation, rehabilitation, and ethnic solidarity, and good democratic Liberian Leadership.

While I feel, like many Liberians who are greatly disturbed, and worried about the future of our country, one can only hope to put forward these questions to our people, that, despite the origin of our problems, can Liberians transform or transcend their ethnic divisions, specifically from the Doe regime, which was transparently and conspicuously activated during the Liberian civil conflict? The answer is “**yes**” we can, and we will, and we must. Because, this was never the major cause of the discontent in the Liberian society. Further more, there is no problem that is incapable of settlement if only, we as Liberians, recognize and cognizably acknowledge that these problems, in many ways, are our own creation. Then, of course, we will be on our way for resolution. Upon this end, Liberians must never confine their political leadership to an exclusive act of nativity nor a paradigm of Americo-Liberianism.

Concluding Sentiment:

Having said all of the above, let me now conclude by saying, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, and fellow Liberians, if we must seek for ethnic reconciliation, Liberia unification, and cultural diversity, then permit me to say, and to tell the true, and nothing but the truth, that we, Liberians and our allies were wrong for killing President William R. Tolbert, and his followers yesterday, and after 25 years of President Tolbert's death, we are still wrong today. Because, we have not been able to justify the cause of his assassination by virtue of Liberia's political situation. Twenty-five years after the assassination of President Tolbert, Liberia has never been able to recover. Fellow Liberians, we must therefore set aside a week of national days of repentance, atonement, and reconciliation. We must extend our apologies to all of our brothers, and sisters for the historic mistakes made in the Liberian historic past, and present, with specific emphasis on the incidence of the families of April 12, 1980. We must apologize to the children and families of the late President Tolbert, and the children and families of members of

his administration who were also assassinated. Indeed, we are not “bigger and greater” than submission to reality when we are wrong. Former President Clinton apologized for the enslavement of “Black People” when he went to Africa. He also apologized to Former President Nelson Mandela when they visited Robben Island, where Mandela was in prison for 27 years. F.W. de Klerk, Former President of South Africa, admitted for the evil of Apartheid. Therefore, we must apologize to the families of April 12, 1980, and beyond. This will positively lead to the question of what can we do ‘NEXT’ as Liberians, to put our nation and its vulnerable people back together under a sustainable democratic leadership. And my ANSWER will be: ‘New thinking, new attitude, and new Liberian nationalistic alliance towards more pluralistic and decentralized nation building behavior. This, of course, will help us put Liberia back on the map of international personality. This will also reflect a more comprehensive re-connection with brothers and sister in the Diaspora. I THANK YOU

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