

***Urgent Need for A Coherent National Malaria Policy to Support National Malaria Program for Liberia***

***A Keynote Address***

***at  
The Administrative Building in Gbarnga, Liberia***

***Delivered by***

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***December 15, 2007***

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Madame Esther Warbey, Mayor of the Great City of Gbarnga, Honorable Ranney Jackson, Superintendent of Bong County, Senator Jewel Howard and members of the Legislative Caucus of Bong County, Officials of Government and LIHEDE Representatives present here, Distinguished Guests, Local Officials and Citizens of Bong County, Ladies and Gentleman.

I bring you heartfelt greetings from the officials and members of LIHEDE in the Diaspora. Moreover, I am very happy to be with you this morning at the Administrative Building in the City of Gbarnga, and I want to thank you for allowing us to bring our malaria free new Liberia and the second "Culture Driven Malaria" message to your waiting feet. I have come to tell you about a killer disease that is preventable, yet many people seem not to understand how serious this disease is. Malaria kills Liberia's children by the thousands. It robs our people of their future; it weakens our nation's health, as well as cheats us of our needed prosperity. For example, our government's official records revealed that the nation loses 21,500 lives and spends \$40 million dollars every year combating this disease. Apart from the deaths, this huge amount spent by the government on combating malaria does not include what poor malaria-stricken Liberian families spend on burials and funerals. Indeed, many poor Liberian families spend up to 35% of their meager incomes on malaria prevention and treatment. No wonder Liberians are poverty stricken because malaria continues to decimate their resources and population year after year.

Therefore, it is imperative that every Liberian join our efforts to defeat Malaria forever. In this endeavor, I have been in and out of Liberia twelve times since 2002 for the sole purpose of drum majoring this objective - to defeat malaria.

My brothers and sisters, the Almighty God of our parentage has blessed our beloved country with many resources to make every Liberian live happily, but as a fish on land is helpless because it cannot swim on land, so are Liberians who without the means and resources to combat malaria. This is the reason we need people like you who are committed; you can be teachers, football players, military men and women, politicians, farmers, grandfathers, grandmothers, wives, mothers, sisters, and brothers to lead the fight against malaria once and for all.

You and I can defeat malaria by pulling together our human and material resources to address the problem of malaria in our country. I said then and I say now that we must gather like vultures over a corpse in the fight to control or eradicate malaria in Liberia.

My fellow country men and women, malaria can be prevented. Other countries such as the US, Italy, Germany, England, Israel, Poland, Romania, and Mauritius have done it; so can we! Our problem is, we have not yet taken the prevention of malaria in Liberia that serious. All that has been done throughout the years has been to address the problem of malaria without a comprehensive malaria program backed by legislation. As a result, malaria has killed our people more than those that died during the 14-year Liberian civil war.

But with your help and the knowledge at the disposal of LIHEDE and Ministry of Health & Social Welfare (MOH), we hope our people will begin to realize that malaria is a disease that can be overcome. I believe it can be done; that's the reason I've made 12 trips to Liberia--to ask you for your help so that together we can defeat malaria, the heartless killer of our loved ones.

On this trip, I made it my business to come to Gbarnga, Bong County to get you involve. As you may not be aware, Bong County is my home, too. I was born in Kokoyah, then Upper Bong County. My mother has a Kpelle linkage. She and my father relocated to Gibi, then Lower Bong County when I was about a year old. The Gibi Territory (now Margibi County) blended well with the rich cultural traditions of the Loma, Klao (Kru), Bassa, Kpelle, Vai, Dan (Gio), Ma (Mano), Wee (Krahn). Thanks to the diverse makeup of the county, many of us that grew up in Gibi learned and spoke Bassa and Kpelle, the two languages that made up the tapestry of the local culture. Gibi to me represents both a microcosm of the greater Liberian society, culture and tradition. This rich culture and tradition taught us the true meanings of caring for each other.

It is this cultural inheritance of caring for each other, I believe will interplay at this consultative meeting here in Gbarnga; so that this program will be a resounding success. I will be reminded if I did not tell you how overjoyed I am to see this huge gathering of students, soccer teams, the Muslim community, Christian community, medical professionals, and well wishers from the U.S. Because in 2003, when LIHEDE decided to devote its annual symposium to combating malaria in Liberia, many people in the Liberian communities in the U.S. did not take us serious. But we are glad that LIHEDE's "We Want No More Malaria in Liberia" campaign held in Liberia in 2005 was a success. And in order to build on that success, we have come to speak to you on the topic: "Urgent Need for A Coherent National Malaria Policy to Support National Malaria Program for Liberia."

Ladies and Gentlemen, while we have all resolved to defeat malaria in Liberia, it is only through our collective efforts, commitment, cooperation, and collaboration that we can actually eradicate malaria in Liberia. I do not see it any other way. LIHEDE cannot do it alone; the people of Bong County cannot do it alone, and no single Liberian community or organization can do it alone. We must all cooperate and collaborate to prevent, control, and dismantle malaria in Liberia through the choices we make or the routes we take.

For his part, Dr. Moses M. Flomo of Lofa County, the former head of the National Herbalist Association of Liberia must be commended for inventing 10 medical formulae capable of treating various tropical diseases, including malaria. In fact, the *Inquirer* newspaper reported in its August 1 Edition that among the formulae Dr. Flomo invented is Floklax, which is used for treating malaria, typhoid fever, and cerebral malaria. If Dr. Flomo's malaria formula can succeed in curing one Liberian of malaria and typhoid fever, then we are well on our way to promoting a culture-driven malaria program in Liberia. Secondly, right here in Liberia we have plants that are repellent to mosquitoes but we lack laboratory facilities to test the efficacy of these plants. Therefore, LIHEDE has made it one of its goals to obtain a laboratory facility for this purpose. We are not making any promises, as we intent to seek help from outside the organization.

Ladies and Gentlemen, LIHEDE's "Culture-Driven Malaria Program" ties malaria treatment options to the cultural values and practices of each county or local community targeted for malaria treatment. So far, we have concentrated on the medical aspect of control and now we are embarking upon a larger scope in the treatment of the disease by involving everybody. That is by using sporting events, traditional feasts, campfire gatherings, family storytelling times, religious and secular services, radio programs in the various Liberian languages, creating malaria free zones throughout Liberia, and preparing documentaries on malaria prevention and control initiatives and television plays, and other such activities that are unique to the whole of Liberia to educate our people about the dangers of malaria. In other words, "culture-driven" means, any program or gathering that is either unique to the whole of Liberia or to people in a particular region or political subdivision of Liberia to get the message across. Hence, we in LIHEDE hold the view that "culture-driven" malaria control initiatives are imperative for any modern malaria control and prevention schemes.

Since our December 2006 Health Conference in Monrovia, I have written several articles and position papers to articulate our mission, new developments in the treatment of malaria, best practices, emerging issues in malaria control and its prevention in the world.

In fact, the core principles and objectives underlying LIHEDE's vision of a "culture-driven" malaria control program in Liberia include:

- Undertaking malaria education projects in Liberia that encompasses teaching about malaria in Liberian schools.
- Using radio scripts in Liberian vernacular languages to educate and rally the support of Liberians outside the city centers in the efforts of combating malaria.
- Establishing malaria free zones across Liberia in the campaign for malaria control, prevention, and eradication in Liberia.
- Developing a national malaria curriculum, drama, musical performances, talent shows, intraschool competition at all levels (with awards and trophies) to promote malaria awareness in Liberian schools
- Providing updated materials about malaria to schools, public libraries, which includes books, films, videos, and documentaries to Liberians regarding the control and prevention of malaria throughout Liberia.
- Hosting of annual soccer tournaments to promote malaria awareness in Liberia, and to underscore the collective efforts needed to educate the Liberian public and the African people about the dangers of malaria.
- Adopting a Pan-African approach to malaria control and prevention, which will involve the neighboring countries of Liberia as part of our effort to have African countries working together to combat malaria on the African continent.
- Lobbying the Liberian House of Representatives and Senate to enact a National Malaria Abatement Bill, and
- Establishing a Coherent National Malaria Policy for Liberia.

My brothers and sisters, for the past three years, LIHEDE has effortlessly held conferences in the United States and the historic 2006 National Malaria Conference in Liberia to bring to the consciousness of the Liberian people and the world the magnitude of the impact malaria has on our people in Liberia. One of the highlights of the 2006 Conference was the invitation extended to officials of LIHEDE during the National Malaria Conference by the US Embassy to witness the historic announcement made by President George W. Bush via satellite. Liberia was selected as a focused country to benefit from the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) funds. As a focused country, Liberia is expected to receive 2.8 million US dollars in 2007, and 12 million US dollars in 2008 to combat malaria in Liberia.

Furthermore, through the initiative of the Chinese government, Liberia now has a Malaria Prevention and Treatment Center at the John F. Kennedy Medical Center. And during President Johnson-Sirleaf's visit to the U.S., President Bush made her a promise that he will help Liberia "eradicate malaria". Also, recently, the Ministry of Health hosted a historic Health Fair. And the good news is that Global funds has earmarked 37 million dollars to assist Liberia in its malaria program. But first when Liberia was denied, we were all sad for our country; as a result, we wrote them not to remove our Liberia off the list because we needed all the help we could get to combat this deadly disease. This time around, the God of our forefathers answered our prayers. At the present time, MOH National Malaria Control Strategies includes case management, multiple preventions...using ITNS, and IRS and early treatment behavioral modification, and other needed malaria screening and drugs. Opportunity is knocking-are we home?

My fellow country men and women, we must not sit back to depend on others to do for us, what we can do for ourselves. We must take our foot off the peddle to accelerate our collective efforts in the right direction. There is no stopping now! Since President Bush is still in the White House and has pledged his support and other international organizations are listening to our messages, we must take advantage of these opportunities.

Let's use our culture, combined with our education to defeat the killer disease that is in our midst. Let's unite in our fight against malaria so that mothers will not be crying in the wee hour of the morning for their children that malaria has taken away from them. I tell you this, our survival depends on the position we take collectively. We need more foot soldiers; 58 medical doctors for a population of 3 plus million people, and spending 63 cents of every dollar to malaria will not do. The opportunities for us to experience a life of abundance, good health, joy, and peace knocks at our door everyday but malaria is a cold bloody murder that is in our way.

We need to enlist everybody - young, old, people in the town, village, city, from the watershed of Lake Piso to the might fall of Kpatawee; from Lake Shepherd to Bafu Bay, from the savanna grassland to the rolling hills and rage of Putu, to say to malaria, "my friend, no way; you are juke; you've been taking our children for too long, but this time we get your medicine". I say then and I say now, we must gather like vultures over a corpse.

Brothers and sisters, human development in its broad sense is made up individual, village, town, community, and nation with the guts to face challenges head-on. For our nation whose livelihood is supported by 70-80 percent agriculture or agriculture-related activities, there should be no argument from any one that the health of its citizens is our number one priority.

And if we select to stand by and do not lend support to our President, local malaria fighting organizations and LIHEDE, we will have nobody but ourselves to blame. Therefore, we are counting on you in our fight to free the new Liberia of malaria. Remember, it is only a healthy people that can build a productive, prosperous and democratic nation. Liberia is counting on you!

I thank you for your time and efforts to once and for all, eradicate malaria from Liberia, Africa and the world. Let the "Culture-Driven Malaria Program" begins.

Long live the people of Liberia, and may God bless our president!