



Office of the National President

UNIVERSITY OF LIBERIA ALUMNI ASSOCIATION IN THE AMERICAS (ULIBAAA)

797 John Lovelace Road

LaGrange, GA 30241

TEL: (706) 594-6255

Email: sjbhall2@gmail.com

Website: <http://www.ulibaaa.org/>



Office of the President

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**National President's Official Report on Her Trip to Liberia
Where She Served as the Keynote Speaker for the 102nd
Commencement Convocation of the University of Liberia,
Class of 2020/2021**

Fendall Campus, Louisiana, Montserrado County

“NAA NEEMI MA” (Fruitfulness)

March 9 - 18, 2022

Motto: “Giving back to our Alma Mater”



Mrs. Saundra Berry Hall

National President

University of Liberia Alumni Association in the Americas (ULIBAAA)

Convocation Speaker

Executive Summary

There is no doubt in my mind that my trip to Liberia, honoring the Invitation to serve as the Convocation Speaker for the 102nd Commencement Convocation, was a milestone in the partnership between the University of Liberia and ULIBAAA. This visit gave me the opportunity to tour the Capitol Hill and Fendall campuses, talk with students and administrators, and see up close the facilities and conditions of the learning environment of the students and faculty at the University. This visit was an eye-opening experience for me.

ULIBAAA must get involved and give back to the University more than ever before. The need is dire. It is pass time for us to sit around and argue as to who is the cause of this or talk about what the government should be doing. It is time for us to do everything we can to help the University. I have laid out in excruciating details all my meetings and discussions with student leaders and the administration. Also included are some vivid photos of my entire trip. These photos show the meetings, tours, convocation, and the condition of the classrooms at the University of Liberia. This report is a call to action. At the end, I made recommendations about some projects to be undertaken immediately following the necessary approval, planning, and fundraising.

Invitation from the University of Liberia 02/23/2022

President of the University of Liberia, Professor Dr. Julius J. Sarwolo Nelson Jr., sent me a letter on behalf of the Board of Trustees, Administration, faculty, staff, and students at the University of Liberia, on 02/22/2022. This letter invited me to serve as Convocation Speaker for three combined Commencement Convocation exercises involving the College of Social Sciences and Humanities (Liberia College), The William V. S. Tubman College of Education and The David A. Straz-Sinje Technical and Vocational Colleges. This was the 102nd Commencement Convocation of the University of Liberia. The letter further stated that the Commencement Convocation was scheduled for the morning of Monday, 03/14/2022, to be held at the Fendall Campus. The academic procession was slated to start at 9:30 am. In addition to the Combined Commencement Convocation on 03/14/2022, the letter of invitation mentioned a variety of activities during the week 03/14/2022 – 03/18/2022, including Arts and Crafts Exhibition, Alumni Homecoming, Oaths and Honors Day, and the Commencement of other colleges at the University.

After consultation with the members of the Executive Leadership Committee of ULIBAAA, the invitation was shared with the Chairlady and members of the Board of Directors of ULIBAAA. The Board voted to approve the presidential travel and allowed the disbursement of one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1500.00) to be used to facilitate my travel expenses to and from the Republic of Liberia for the duration of eight days. The financial cost associated with my travel expenses to Liberia was more than \$2500.00. I used more than \$1000.00 from my personal finances to make the trip possible and honored the invitation as Convocation Speaker. (Please see below the attached financial expense for my trip.) The First Gentleman, Dr. Melvin Hall, travelled along with me to Liberia at his own expense. He and I departed the United States from the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta on 03/09/2022 and returned on 03/18/2022. The Vice President of ULIBAAA, Mrs. Famatta Zeon, performed the presidential duties during my absence from the Nation.

Arrival in Liberia 03/10/2022

I arrived at the Robert's International Airport (RIA) in Monrovia on 03/10/2022 at 06:00 p.m. At RIA, I was required to take the COVID-19 test for a fee of \$75.00 per person. I was met on arrival at RIA by representatives from the Office of Protocol of the University of Liberia and driven to the Cape Hotel in Mamba Point, Monrovia. After being out of Liberia for 27 years, the drive from the airport to central Monrovia at 09:30 pm. was surreal. The small two-lane roads with dust and brown dirt on the side of the road

and in front of small houses with shops made me feel so grateful to be back in Liberia. I was home again. A room in the Cape Hotel had been reserved for me along with transportation and security. I was informed that the following morning, 03/11/2022, Mr. Namusa Geelor, Director of Operations of the University of Liberia, would take me to meet with Dr. Nelson at his Capitol Hill office.

Meetings, Program, and tour of the Capitol Hill Campus 03/11/2022

I arrived at the office of Dr. Nelson at about 10:00 am. on 03/11/2022. He welcomed me to the campus of the University after being away for some twenty-seven years (**Photo 1**). He invited the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Moses Zinnah, to join us for the meeting. Dr. Nelson briefed me on the status of operations of the University. He shared with me some of the immediate needs and challenges at the University. Some of these needs will be shared later in this report.

During the meeting with Professor Dr. J. Sarwolo Nelson Jr., I was reminded about the Alumni Association 2022 Home-Coming Program that was scheduled for 01:00 p.m. in the University's Capitol Hill auditorium. I was introduced to the Director of Protocol, Madam Dekontee A. Tubman, her Deputy, Mr. Raphael Reeves, her special assistant, Ms. Meleter Montee Tyes, and other staff members. I also met Mr. Martin Pinnie, Acting President of the Alumni Association in Monrovia. (**Photo 2**)

Dr. Zinnah then gave me a brief tour of the main office. I walked around the Capitol Hill campus to meet and talk with students (**Photo 3 – 4**). I walked through all the classrooms and took several photos of the classrooms on the Capitol Hill campus. The classrooms were in a deplorable condition. The classroom walls were not painted. The doors and windows of many of the classrooms were broken. The chairs were noticeably insufficient in the classroom for the students. I was informed that some students usually take chairs from one classroom to another for lectures, just to ensure that they have seats during their lectures. The classrooms have wooden chairs and many of them were broken. There was green moss growing on the floor of few of the classrooms. (**Photos 5 – 16**)

The next scheduled program for the day was the 2022 UL Alumni Home-Coming Day that was to be held at the UL Capitol Hill Auditorium at 01:00 pm (**Photo 17**). The Master of Ceremony (MC) for the program was Alumnus Joah Huges, former President of the University of Liberia Student Union (ULSU). This year's theme for the UL's Homecoming was, "I am Proud to be A UL Graduate". The program featured an intellectual symposium with two outstanding speakers. The first speaker was Alumnus Hon. Conmany B. Wesseh, Senator, River Gee County. He talked on the topic, "Post Graduate Life-Challenges & Opportunities". He discussed some of his experiences from being a student leader at the University of Liberia to his current position as a national leader in the Liberian Senate. The second speaker in the symposium was Alumnus Cllr. Tiawon Saye Gongloe, Managing Partner, Gongloe & Associates, Inc. He talked on the topic, "Ethics & Corruption in the Liberian Culture." He discussed many of the reasons why it is so difficult, in the Liberian society, to clamp down on corruptions and punish the perpetrators. The closeness and interdependence of the family structure in Liberia was one of the reasons given for this difficulty. Cllr. Tiawon Saye Gongloe also announced that he was running to be president of Liberia in the next National elections. He encouraged the audience to support and work with whoever is elected. The Vice Chairlady of the Board of Directors of ULIBAAA, Madam Rebecca Dine-Nyeswa, and Madam Sayondee Koffa, our dynamic 2021 Convention Chairlady also attended the 2022 Home-Coming program.

I was given the opportunity to say a few words during the program and I delivered greetings from ULIBAAA (**Photo 18**). I encouraged the students and alumni to remain committed to the University and to always look for ways to give back. I reminded them that because they lack the means to give a lot, doesn't mean that they should give nothing. I assured them that ULIBAAA was standing by to partner with them as we give back to our alma mater. I recognized the Vice Chairlady of the Board of Directors, Mrs. Rebecca

Dine-Nyeswa and Ms. Kofa during my remarks (**Photo 19**). The President, Alumni, Professor Dr. J. Sarwolo Julius Nelson Jr. also addressed the occasion. Alumnus, Alfred Burman gave the Vote of thanks and the Benediction. The last event of the day was Class Night social outing at the student center later in the evening at 07:00 pm.

Baccalaureate Service at the Harvest Intercontinental Church 03/13/2022

The Baccalaureate Service for Commencement Convocation for the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, The William V. S. Tubman College of Education and The David A. Straz-Sinje Technical and Vocational Colleges, was held at the Harvest Intercontinental Church (formerly the Bethel World Outreach Ministries), on the Tubman Blvd in Sinkor. The Baccalaureate Service started at 11:00 a.m. on 03/13/2022. I was also invited to attend the Baccalaureate. It was a wonderful service with singing and dancing by the Graduates, who were all dressed in the same colors, mostly green and white, traditional Liberian outfit. I was asked to say a few words to the Graduates during the Baccalaureate Service. As a Minister of Gospel, it was an honor for me to remind the Graduates about our human limitations that can only be overcome through the power of God in and through us. The Assistant Pastor of the church, Rev. James Mulbah, delivered the sermon. He encouraged the graduates to be a light to the Liberian society with their new knowledge and wisdom. He prayed for God's blessings on the Graduates.

Liberia, Education, and Straz-Sinje Colleges Commencement 03/14/2022

The Commencement Convocation of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, The William V. S. Tubman College of Education and The David A. Straz-Sinje Technical and Vocational Colleges was scheduled to start at 9:30 a.m. at the Fendall Campus. I was advised to leave the Mamba Point Cape Hotel no later than 5:30 a.m. to avoid the long traffic delay in the Paynesville area. We arrived on the Fendall Campus at 8:00 a.m. and ate breakfast in the cafeteria. After breakfast, I spent some time in the cafeteria talking with some of the administrators and faculty members about the needs and challenges at the University. I was informed that the graduation ceremony was to be delayed by a couple of hours. While waiting for the graduation ceremonies to start, I walked around the Fendall campus to see the Engineering Building, the T. J. R. Faulkner College of Science and Technology Building, the basketball and tennis courts, and the soccer field. Because this was the summer vacation, many of the classroom doors were locked; however, I was able to walk through and see a few of the rooms and a lecture hall. (**Photos 20 – 28**)

The 102nd Commencement Convocation for the Class of 2020/2021, “NAA NEEMI MA”, which means Fruitfulness, commenced at 12:30 p.m. There were 502 graduates from the three colleges: College of Social Sciences and Humanities (252 graduates), William V. S. Tubman College of Education, formerly Teacher's College, (157 graduates), and David A. Straz-Sinje Technical and Vocational College (93 graduates). I was asked to lead the Processional followed by the acting Chairman of the Board of Directors and President Nelson. (**Photo 29**). Student, Dominic D. M. Suah gave the Invocation. The Acting, Chairman of the UL Board of Trustees, administered the oath to Professor Dr. J. Sarwolo J. Nelson, Jr. and the class valedictorian, Mr. Matthew Gonmah delivered the greetings and appreciation on behalf of the Class of 2021/2022, “NAA NEEMI MA”.

After the valedictory greetings, I was introduced and subsequently delivered the Convocation Address entitled, “The Colleges at the University of Liberia: Catalysts for Educating the New Generation of Liberian Experts.” I extended warmest greetings and congratulatory sentiments from the Chairlady and members of the Board of Directors, the Executive Leadership Committee, and the entire ULIBAAA Nation. I also thanked Dr. Nelson, the UL Board of Trustees, and the faculty for the invitation to address the Convocation. In my

keynote address, I gave a brief background of the missions of the three colleges present and reminded them that their pathway to success must be anchored on some very important pillars:

- (a) Qualified Instructional Staff
- (b) Relevant and Dynamic Curricula
- (c) Textbooks and other Instructional Materials
- (d) Learning Resource Centers
- (e) State of the Art Technology
- (f) Exposure of Students to Research and Experimental Learning.

I encouraged the students to take ownership for their own learning experience, a process that must continue beyond the walls of their classrooms. Lastly, I told them that critical thinking, evidence-based analyses, and the linking of theory and practice must be central to their educational journey. I reminded the Graduates and students that there is no substitute for good work ethics and doing and submitting assignments on time. They should never give up their dreams in the face of fierce opposition and difficult circumstances they are sure to encounter. Liberia and the University of Liberia are depending on them (**Photo 30 – 32**).

After delivering the Convocation Address, I was invited to take part in the Conferral of Degrees in Course. It was an honor for me to hand the degrees to students who had worked hard to earn their places at the 102nd Commencement Convocation (**Photo 33**). Everyone could see the joy on the faces of the students who overcame the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic and difficulties in the Liberian society. The Recessional followed the Benediction by student Dominic D. M. Suah. The Commencement Convocation was a success, and we had a wonderful time greeting the students and faculty after the program. (**Photo 34**) After the Convocation, on our way back to the hotel in Mamba Point, we got stuck in traffic at the Paynesville Red Light for three hours.

Meetings with few Student Leaders and Deans 03/17/2022

I scheduled a series of meetings, both in the morning and afternoon, on the Capitol Hill Campus with some student leaders, the Vice President and Dean of Student Affairs, Mr. Sekou Coneh, and the Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies, Mr. John Y. Tokpa. I had the opportunity to meet Mr. Isaac Garnet, Vice President of Finance.

During my meeting with the student leaders of ULSU, I was informed that there had not been any student government elections since 2012 due to students related elections violence. The current student leader, Mr. Mohamed M. Kamara, is a Geology major. His official title is the Speaker of the Interim Student Assembly. Another student leader. that was present in this meeting was the “Vice President” or to be exact, Deputy Speaker of the Interim Student Assembly, Ms. Blessed Ella Greene. Also in this meeting was Mr. Ernest Saye Barkpalah, the Assistant Secretary General for the College of Agriculture & Forestry Student Association (CAFSA). (**Photos 35 – 36**)

I listened to the student leaders as they shared with me many of the challenges facing the students at the University of Liberia. They discussed some things that they want to see implemented at the University. Some of the things they wish to accomplish include:

- (a) Reactivate and rejuvenate many of the Student Committees/Clubs, for example, Social/Culture, Academic, Health/Climate Change, and Intellectual Discourse Committees.
- (b) Revitalize the Students’ Debate teams and Discussion groups; especially, regarding conflict resolutions and nonviolence.
- (c) Reactivate the UL– Cuttington Meet (LU – CC Meet)

- (d) Have all the instruments in the band, played by students; especially, during events like the Commencement Convocation Exercises and sporting matches. They mentioned that there are not enough students at the University with the skillset to play all the instruments in the band.
- (e) Set up a printing facility for ULSU with adequate office supplies.

I informed the student leaders that we will share their needs and desires with the officers and members of ULIBAAA.

After my meeting with the student leaders, I met with the Vice President and Dean of Student Affairs, Mr. Sekou Coneh. Dean Coneh also teaches in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Present in the meeting were Dr. Flomo K. Stephen, Associate Dean of Student Affairs, and Dr. John Tokpa, Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies (**Photo 37**). They discussed some of the challenges facing the four campuses of the University, The Capitol Hill Campus, The Fendall Campus, The Medical School Campus, and the David A. Straz-Sinje Campus in Cape Mount. The only undergraduate college that is on the Capitol Hill Campus is the Business (College) School. They informed us that the Government of Liberia was about to undertake some renovations on the Capitol Hill and the Fendall campuses. They were not sure exactly when these renovations were to start or when they would be completed. We discussed the e-learning and technology situation at the University. They mentioned that a program was started that was supposed to provide a new laptop to all faculty members. Some faculty members received their laptops, but the program was not completed. We thanked them for their service to the University of Liberia under the difficult circumstances and promised to convey the content of our meeting to officers and members of ULIBAAA.

Departure from Liberia 03/18/2022

We departed from the Robert’s International Airport in Liberia on Friday, 03/18/2022 and arrived at the Hartsfield-Jackson International airport in Atlanta on Saturday, 03/19/2022 at 02:00 pm. Please see below the financial expenses for the trip to Liberia. The Board of Directors approved \$1,500.00 which was used to cover the cost of my airline ticket and part of the cost of the COVID-19 test. I am grateful to our hardworking and due-paying members of ULIBAAA.

<u>Financial Expense</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Visa from the Liberian Consulate General, Atlanta, GA	\$235.00
Yellow Fever Vaccination	\$300.00
COVID-19 Test upon Arrival in Liberia	\$75.00
COVID-19 Test at Departure from Liberia	\$75.00
Food for 8 days	\$500.00
Round Trip Airline Ticket with Delta Airlines	\$1,450.00
Transportation to and from Atlanta Airport	\$75.00
TOTAL	\$2,710.00

Recommendations

We have seen from this report and its photos that the classroom facilities at our alma mater are in ruins. The learning environment is not conducive for learning. I recommend that ULIBAAA comes together and galvanizes our members to help meet the immediate needs at the University. These needs were expressed to me by President Professor Dr. J. Sarwolo J. Nelson, Jr., and I observed them firsthand. We, in the United States of America, are blessed with the best of facilities at our various schools and places of employment. We should not neglect our alma mater that helped to educate us and prepare us to occupy these jobs and offices that we have today. The classrooms at the University desperately need durable students' desks/chairs, painting, and whiteboards for classroom instruction. The administration and students need stationery and office supplies. I recommend that we provide, in order of priority:

- (a) Classroom desks and chairs for students and professors
- (b) Paint to refurbish some of the main classrooms
- (c) White boards for the classroom instruction
- (d) Stationery and office supplies

I will be forwarding the proposal to the Board and the general membership. We need all hands-on-deck. I am calling on the ULIBAAA to come together and discuss ways to help our alma mater in providing these dire needs. We need all our grant writing experts, fundraising organizers, and project managers on board. In short, we need the involvement of everyone in this endeavor.

Thanks, and Appreciation

I extend my deepest thanks and appreciation to the Chairlady and members of the Board of Directors, members of the Executive Leadership Committee, and members of UILIBAA for the disbursement of \$1500 that made it possible for me to take this trip to Liberia. Thanks to the Vice President of ULIBAAA, Mrs. Famatta Zeon, for carrying out the duties of the President while I was away. Thanks also to the President of the University of Liberia, Professor Dr. J. Sarwolo Nelson, Jr. and the faculty and staff of the University of Liberia for the invitation extended to me to travel to Liberia and address the 102nd Commencement Convocation of the three Colleges: Social Sciences and Humanities (Liberia), The William V. S. Tubman College of Education, and the David A Straz-Sinje Technical and Vocational College. Thanks also go to the many staff members at the University of Liberia that made my visit pleasant and memorable. Thanks to the students at the University that took the time to talk to me, present me with a certificate of honor and share their concerns. I am forever grateful to everyone for this glorious opportunity and exceptional experience.

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9



Photo 10



Photo 11

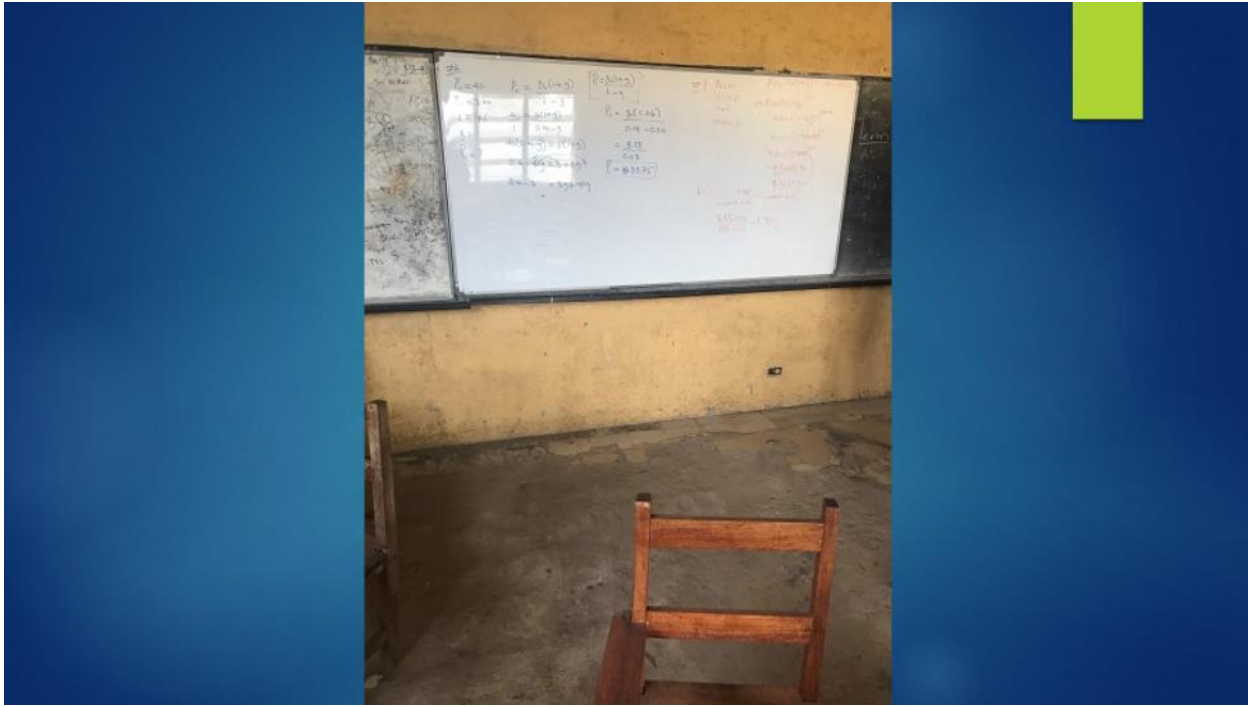


Photo 12



Photo 13



Photo 14



Photo 15



Photo 16



Photo 17



Photo 18



Photo 19



Photo 20



Photo 21



Photo 22



Photo 23



Photo 24



Photo 25



Photo 26



Photo 27



Photo 28



Photo 29



Photo 30



Photo 31



Photo 32



Photo 33



Photo 34



Photo 35



Photo 36



Photo 37



Photo 38

