HOW TO DEMOCRATICALLY SUSTAIN OUR NATIONHOOD AND REBUILD POST-WAR LIBERIA

FOR

TAMBA TANDANPOLIE

Hello ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests and concerned citizens. (**If there is anyone in particular you need to acknowledge, do so here**) I would like to extend a special welcome to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. We are honored to have you present. I want to thank you for giving me a few moments to speak with you and share some thoughts on how to democratically sustain our nationhood and rebuild a strong and viable post-war Liberia. That all sounds like quite a mouthful, but as we peel away divisive rhetoric and dogma, it becomes very clear that the time has come to join together as one nation and one voice, albeit with many different tones, to stand as a united force in support of the cause of **respect**, **partnership** and **community** in order to support and foster a new, democratic, and self-sufficient Liberia. The wars are over. It’s time to do something constructive. It’s time to take a good look at what the actuality is in the country, acknowledge its strengths and challenges, and really work **in unison** to strengthen all of its tangible natural resources. After all is said and done, the sustainability movement begins with each one of us as an idea, action, and evolves into an actuality.

Of course when we think of the concept of sustainability, we tend to go directly to thoughts of a “green” movement. In some ways, that is a simple viewpoint and barely scratches the surface of what the true definition of “sustain” really means. Sustainable means, very succinctly, “To be able to be upheld or defended.” Basically, it’s at the core of what any individual or country or civilization strives for. Liberia has had a history of struggle and its people deserve more. **WE** are its people and whether we are here in the United States or in our motherland, it is time to literally “go back to the mines,” and by that I mean to identify and plumb **all** of the resources we have. **WE,** the people of Liberia, whether on its soil or abroad,are its **GREATEST** natural resource.

So how do we rebuild, and then, how do we sustain? The first thing to do is to learn from the past, then focus on **what is**-what are the actual conditions we have to deal with? What are the challenges? What are our assets? How do we lift our heads high enough to see the light? Where is that light coming from? How do we protect ourselves from repeating the devastation we endured in the past? How do we learn to live and learn **from** and **with** each other? Once we answer these questions, we will be on the road to self-discovery, mutual respect, and a stronger Liberia.

There is no question that severe divisiveness has caused war and death and damage in Liberia. I will not spend time on discussing the negative. Instead, I will share the positive. With education and involvement in determining their future, the people of Liberia can learn to be strong and self-sufficient. We know that the life expectancy of Liberians is painfully low. The estimate for 2011 for females was 58.6 years of age and for males it was even lower. We also know that the literacy rate for females is 22.4% and for males is 53.9%. The first thing that is obvious that must be done in order to sustain and rebuild a post-war populace is to **educate**. In the United States, in a post terrorist society, we have become aware of the slogan, “If you see something, say something.” Today I propose an adaptation of this phrase for all of the people of Liberia, and that is, “If you meet someone, **TEACH** someone.” We are all on this planet for one purpose, and that is to learn. Ignorance is **NOT** bliss, as is obvious. Ignorance is death and starvation and painfully low life expectancy and literacy rates. The time has come for each one of us to make a pledge to ourselves and the world, that our partners-our neighbors in Liberia, will learn. Even the simplest of lessons form the building blocks that lead to powerful and liberating knowledge, and that knowledge base has the ability to grow geometrically. Whether it’s formal school education or sharing the simplest steps or receiving training in simple skills in order to learn how to survive, knowledge is power. Knowledge breeds self-sufficiency and self-respect, and each particle learned that lands on an otherwise unaware Liberian creates potential. Encourage people to learn and pay close attention to the people you meet. Everyone is an individual with different talents and assets to offer. Encourage communities to play to the strengths of each individual. No Liberian should be denied a chance to learn…something. Former **(I am not sure if you use “former” in his title**) U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan has said, “Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. **It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.**” Ladies and gentlemen, the time has come to make sure the **women** of Liberia are educated in order to build a stronger and more well sustained nation. Furthermore, **we** must be educated as well. We need to know what conditions prevail and it is our mandate to ask questions and see what is needed to build a stronger constituency. It is no longer acceptable to exist in a world where “we don’t know what we don’t know.” People are dying. People are being exploited. It’s time for **all of us** to learn something and to pass it along. The opportunity to receive an education is a democratic one and all Liberians have the right to learn. There is no one on this planet that knows everything, but in order to grow as a society and nation, everyone needs to have the opportunity to learn.

We must learn to share. We all live in challenging times. Here in the United States and throughout the world, we face economic uncertainty, political divisiveness, devastation from potential natural disasters, and **still** we must realize that we have enough to share. If you are in this room, no matter what you think you and your family and friends and neighbors do or don’t have, you have **enough**. We all just need to redefine what “enough” is. And if we have “enough,” then we have enough to share-**no matter what it is**. All we have to do is to **believe it**. It is up to each one of us to come from a place of sufficiency, and as we learn to view our lot as being enough, we will find the way to share and support others. For too long we have been ruled by rampant commercialism, and that is not going to stop. But in a post consumerist world, one that emphasizes sustainability of product and human potential, we will all be better off by taking an honest and realistic inventory of assets both tangible and intangible, learn to **appreciate** what we have, and find the way to distribute that inventory to strengthen those in need.

Nourishment of mind and body is also key to democratically sustaining humanity. J. Donald Walters, also known as Swami Kriyananda Giri, teaches us, “There are realities **we all share**, regardless of our nationality, language, or individual tastes. As we need food, so do we need emotional nourishment: love, kindness, appreciation, and support from others.” We have to find the way to feed the mind, soul and stomachs of **all** of the Liberian people. They, and we, need the strength required of the task. They need the clean water, medical support, and sustenance so urgently required to be able to fortify themselves, each other and ultimately the country.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb that states, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. **Teach** a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” By teaching the mind we share sustenance, both literal and figurative and we feed the soul at the same time.

The time has come for all of us, both here and in Liberia, to come up with the plan and procedures required to rebuild a strong Liberia for the 21st century and beyond. We must learn to educate, nourish and support the population. We must reinforce positivity, integrity, and self respect-all form the foundation of the fortitude required to journey into the future. We must feed our neighbors and countrymen with clean water, healthier conditions, and we must provide them with the will to build and to have pride in their creation. We must teach them what it means to have integrity, and we must let them know that poverty is not an excuse to foster negativity. It’s an opportunity to find the strength required to build something worthwhile and to be able to sustain oneself and his or her environment. I know it’s easy for me to say this standing in this well-built room in this safe city in one of the strongest countries in the world, but we have to start somewhere. Those steps done properly and relentlessly will create a condition that will naturally sustain, but remember-it is not up to your neighbor to come up with a solution or support. It’s up to each one of you, and me, to do our part to teach, share, inform and learn. As we all are part of this planet, we cannot be considered successful if there are people living marginal or below marginal lives. We have seen throughout history how trends shift globally, and it is now Africa’s, and in particular, Liberia’s chance to rise and build a strong nation. No empire lasts forever, and no country should remain forsaken forever either. I urge all of you to think of what I’ve shared and consider what **you** can do to democratically support a self-sustained and strong Liberia. The time is **now**. Education plus nourishment plus sharing equals mutual respect and partnership. There is no way, in this day and age, with all we know and all that we have access to, that we can ignore what needs to be done. The “haves” need to find a way to contribute. The “have-less’s” must find a way to build a longer and more fulfilled life for themselves and their children.

Thank you all.