**14476, Maxim Mulbah**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tonight I am here to speak with you about something that is very important to me. That subject is the education of children in Liberia. First, I’d like to share with you my experiences growing up in Liberia.

I was only five years old when the 14 year civil war that changed our lives and our nation’s history forever began. Before the war my father was the city mayor of Voinjama City, the Capital City of Lofa County. I lived a very decent life along with the rest of my siblings, but everything was cut short when rebel soldiers entered our city forcing us to flee for our lives into the bushes one week before Christmas in 1989. We fled into hiding in the bushes thinking it would last for only few days. But then the rebels started coming into the bushes and finding us and we ran out of supplies. So we decided to come out from our hiding places.

I, along with most Liberian children, hadn’t gone to school for four years. We were forced to witness horrible things like killings, rape and fighting by the rebel armies. Fortunately for me, I was not forced into rebel armies like many children my age, including some of my relatives. After four years without school, my dad sent us to Guinea, a country north of Liberia, so we would have the opportunity to go school. Our aunt took us to Guinea in 1993 and with the help of the international communities, we began school immediately. While in Guinea, I cried every day because I had left my mom, dad and the rest of the entire family back in Liberia. Eventually we received news that our family had been killed as the war intensified.

I felt hopeless but I continued going to school because earning an education was my only hope. The war in Liberia ended in 1997 and there was a general election held the same year. I returned home to Liberia from Guinea with my family. By that time, I had completed elementary school. But many of the children who stayed in Liberia for those 8 years had missed 8 years of school. Upon my return to Liberia, I continued my education, despite new war that had broken out, and graduated in 2004. Two years later I graduated from high school and got the opportunity to come to the USA. That wouldn’t have happened without my high school education.

Today I am here and have the opportunity to help myself and many family members back in Liberia because I was fortunate enough to acquire an elementary education because of the help of good people all over the world who stood up for a better cause. Without an elementary education, I would not have completed high school nor had the opportunity to come to this great land. The ability to survive and develop myself would remain elusive.

Liberian school age children today are still experiencing the difficulties for going to school because there are lack of schools because of the destruction of three civil wars. The parents of these children did not have the opportunity to go to school because they were forced to witness rapes, had family members killed or were forced to fight in rebel armies. They missed out on childhood development, making them totally unable to function in this 21stcentury. Although the war in Liberia ended more than 10 years ago, my children are still not going to school because of the lack of infrastructures caused by the war.

That is why the New Dimension of Hope is working to build schools in Liberia, to give children who are still suffering from the trauma created by the senseless Liberian Civil War, hope for the future by providing them education. This is their only hope for the future.

I urge each of you here tonight to take my story into your hearts. Consider the fate of the children and their need for an education if they are to survive and thrive. I personally thank those who helped me to obtain and education and ask that you do all you can to provide the same opportunities to the children of Liberia today.

Thank you