**WELCOME SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JOSEPHINE WULU**

Hello everyone and welcome to FOYTOM’s Very First Annual Dinner and Fundraising Event benefitting the underserved women and children of our Liberian nation..... As we have gathered tonight, and as we have worked to raise awareness of what is needed in order to heal and support our real and “virtual” citizens, I want to acknowledge how heartened and impressed I am with the level of enthusiasm and cooperation we have received. Tonight, we have an interesting, informative, and delicious opportunity planned for all of us. I would like to thank those that have committed themselves and their energy to insuring this event is much more than we would have imagined.... one that sets the bar for all future follow up dinners and fundraisers... (**Name the people that have organized and set up the event)**. To \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, thank you for your time and resourcefulness in planning and insuring every detail is in place... and from the looks of things, they are!!! To our founder, for the past eight years, Edna Brown, it has been your vision and determination that drives this organization to make a difference in the lives of hundreds of women and children faced with challenges that... with information, aid, and fundamental support, can and **WILL** be overcome. You’ve provided a forum for professional, accomplished women to honor their heritage while making a critical difference to those in need. I also would like to acknowledge our esteemed and accomplished keynote speaker, Congresswoman Donna F. Edwards, for graciously joining us this evening and sharing insights and experience that have contributed to her impact as a leader and influencer in the challenging times in which we find ourselves.

Remember that I said those we benefit are **UNDERSERVED**...let’s make sure there is no confusion... **UNDER-SERVED** is by no means **UNDESERVED**. Every human being that walks this earth... whether in Liberia or right here in the United States, must have the tools and support to live a life that affords a chance at fulfillment... one in which they experience good health, foundational education, and a means by which to discover and nurture the basic dignities of life. This is not currently the case. Far too many women and children, both in our homeland of Liberia and our chosen home of the US live in the shadows.... in the shadow of illiteracy... in the shadow of poverty... and most crushingly... in the devastating shadow of disease. The Ebola epidemic that has threatened the well being of a country must be combatted, conquered and **ERADICATED**. The Centers for Disease Control estimate that in Liberia alone, since it was first discovered in 2014, almost 11,000 cases were reported resulting in over 4800 deaths. Morale, livelihood, community well being, the economy ... **EVERYTHING** is impacted by such decimation.... and it’s up to us... the healthy and informed, to do what we can to fight back.

We are all blessed beyond comprehension. No matter how challenging portions of our lives may seem, If we are fortunate enough to be in this room tonight, sharing this meal, exchanging good will and better ideas, we are also blessed to be in the position to help those less fortunate. A lot has been said about giving back. Booker T. Washington stated, “Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others.” Maya Angelou teaches us, “I have found that among its other benefits, giving liberates the soul of the giver.” Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt shared, “Since you get more joy out of giving to others, you should put a good deal of thought into the happiness you are able to give.” Let’s keep in mind that it was Mrs. Roosevelt who also reminded us that... “ A woman is like a **tea bag**. You never know how strong she is until she finds herself in **hot water**...” (**Wait for the laugh).** The time has come for us to acknowledge that we’re in **HOT WATER.**.. our Liberian sisters and children both here and abroad **NEED US**. They need our resourcefulness.... they need our guidance.... and they need our contributions... of time... money... and common solutions and **resolutions**.... and while I am sure that no one is in this room is here to measure what she receives in return, I promise you that the fulfillment we will experience by actively participating in educating, encouraging, and healing those in need will be abundant, priceless, and self perpetuating.

The time has arrived for us to test and acknowledge our collective strengths... not just as proverbially comparable “**tea bags**,” but as a society of women committed to improving the lives and well being of others. I want to thank you in advance for your grace, enthusiasm, and willingness to participate. You are wonderful and I couldn’t have imagined better, stronger, more committed partners! Thank you all!! **ENJOY**!!