

Summary
of the
November 5–7, 2004
National Ethnic Reconciliation Conference on Liberia

for
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1. *The Birth of the Vision*

On August 29–31, 2003, Liberian ministers in the USA attended the first All Liberian Ministers Conference. This conference was held in Silver Spring, Maryland, at Bethel World Outreach Church. Cognizant that destiny of Liberia ought not to be left entirely in the hands of politicians and warlords, these ministers prayerfully considered how the church could profoundly influence the peace process in Liberia. The issue of reconciliation was high on the agenda. The ministers realized that only genuine reconciliation could birth lasting peace in Liberia and that only Jesus Christ could birth reconciliation in the hearts of men. Consequently, the vision of a national ethnic reconciliation conference was born.

2. *The Formation of Conference Committees*

On November 22, 2003, the council of elders met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A conference steering committee was formed. Bishop Gabriel S. Lardner Sr., chairman of the council of elders, appointed Bishop Darlington G. Johnson, D.Min., as the chairman of the conference. Other appointed members of the steering committee were Rev. Robert M. Karloh, Rev. Adelaide A. Supuwood, and Rev. Dr. Henry James. In preparation for the conference, five other committees were formed:

<u>Publicity Committee</u>		<u>Ways and Means Committee</u>	
Rev. J. K. Conto	Chairman	Rev. Augustine Sneh	Chairman
Mr. Sam T. Slewion	Cochairman	Rev. Adelaide A. Supuwood	Member
Ms. Hannah Jackson	Member	<u>Intercessory Committee</u>	
Mr. Abraham Massaley	Member	Pastor Ruth M. Deah	Chairlady
Rev. Joshua Cummings	Member	<u>Entertainment Committee</u>	
Mr. Mamadi Kromah	Member	Pastor Kau Dolopei	Chairlady
Rev. Augustine Sneh	Member	Liberian Women in Philadelphia	
<u>Venue Committee</u>			
Rev. John K. Jallah	Chairman		

3. *The Involvement of Liberian County and Ethnic Leaders*

The steering committee commenced work immediately. The committee met with county and ethnic leaders and shared the vision—a national ethnic reconciliation conference—with them. These leaders were excited about the vision, grasped it, and agreed to participate in implementing the vision. In preparation for the conference, nine meetings were held with county and ethnic representatives. County and tribal leaders that participated in one or more of these meetings included

Mr. Walter B. Cole	President, Maryland County Association of Pennsylvania
Mr. Peter C. Darbey Sr.	Member, Maryland County Association of Pennsylvania
Mr. H. Vanjah Gaie	President, Bomi County Association of Pennsylvania
Mr. Fred Gwyan	President, Grand Gedeh Association
Ms. Hannah Jackson	Member, Montserrado County Association
Mr. Mike Harris	Member, Bomi County Association
Rev. John K. Jallah	Member, Lofa County Association
Mr. Sekou B. Korleh	President, Association of Liberian Youth of Pennsylvania
Mr. Mamadi Kromah	President, Mandingo Association in the USA
Mr. Scott Mandeh	President, Bassa Association of Pennsylvania
Mr. Abraham Massaley	Member, Grand Cape Mount County Association
Mr. Joseph Morlu	Member, Lofa County Association of Pennsylvania
Mr. Sam Togba Slewion	President, Sinoe County Association of Pennsylvania
Rev. Augustine Sneh	President, United Sarpo Association in the USA
Mr. Amos Suah	Member, Sinoe County Association

In addition, the committee consulted with many opinion leaders of Liberian communities in the United States.

4. The Emergence of Facilitators

As a result of these meetings, facilitators were appointed from each tribe. These facilitators would (1) ensure that tribal discussions conformed to the methodology of the conference, (2) guide their tribesmen in the development of their stories, and (3) ensure that the interethnic discussions would be conducted peacefully.

5. The Training of Facilitators—Conference Resolution Workshops

Conference issues were potentially explosive. Thus, the steering committee designed and implemented workshops to train facilitators to address and handle these potentially explosive issues. Two such workshops were held: the first in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on October 9, 2004, and the second in Silver Spring, Maryland, on October 23, 2004. The Liberian Ministers Association of the Delaware Valley Inc. cohosted the first workshop. The following facilitators attended one or both of these workshops:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>
Rev. Emmanuel Bowier	ALiMUSA	Bassa
Pastor Ruth M. Deah	Mission Bethel	Gola
Mr. Robert D. Deemie	—	Gio
Rev. Dr. Napoleon L. Divine	Christ International Baptist Church	—
Mr. Daniel Doegan	Peace Talk	Bassa
Pastor Kau J. Dolopei	LMADV	Gio
Rt. Rev. H. Abraham Dorbor	LMADV	Grebo
Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Fayiah	LMADV	Kissi
Rev. John C. Gblah	ALiMUSA	Sarpo

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>
Mr. P. David Gborte	Grand Gedeh Association	Krahn
Ms. Hannah Jackson	Montserrado County Association	Americo-Liberian/Kru
Rev. John K. Jallah	FLAA ¹	Lorma
Dr. Abraham James	Grand Cape Mount Association	Vai
Bishop Darlington G. Johnson, D.Min.	ALiMUSA	Americo- Liberian/Grebo
Rev. Robert M. Karloh	ALiMUSA	Sarpo
Mr. L. Mohammed Keita	FLAA	Mandingo
Mr. Mamadi Keita	United Liberian Mandingo Association	Mandingo
Bishop Gabriel S. Lardner, Sr.	ALiMUSA and LMADV	Bassa
Mr. Abraham Massalley	Grand Cape Mount County Association	Vai
Ms. Munah Mayo	SCAA ²	—
Rev. Kparku Sam N'dorleh	LMADV	Gbandi
Elder Edith Ricks	LMADV	Americo-Liberian
Ms. Roseline Sarnoh	SCAA	Sarpo
Ms. Cleopatra Sawyerr	Liberian Women's Prayer Vigil	Americo-Liberian
Rev. Blamo Seekie	ALiMUSA	Kru/Grebo
Mr. Sam Togba Slewion	Liberian Association of Pennsylvania	Kru
Mr. George K. Suba	FLAA	Lorma
Rev. Adelaide A. Supuwood	ALiMUSA/LMADV	Americo-Liberian
Mr. David K. Wonzon	LMADV	Dan/Gio
Rev. Hananiah Zoe	—	Dan/Gio
Ms. Betty Zoe	—	Americo-Liberian/Kru

6. The Vision Becomes a Reality!

The National Ethnic Reconciliation Conference on Liberia Phase I was held on November 5–7, 2004, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at the Christ Assembly Lutheran Church. This historic conference assembled members of the 17 ethnic groups of Liberia to address the core causes of Liberian ethnic crisis and to lay the groundwork for resolving the crisis. The conference employed the Dialogical Development Model. Key elements of this model are calling forth the past, sharing stories (burden of history), listening compassionately, determining intersubjective truths, apologizing and asking for forgiveness, and entering into a covenant.

Representatives of the 17 Liberian ethnic groups congregated in different areas of the conference site for 2-hour discussions. Facilitators (Liberians trained to handle potentially explosive conference issues) oversaw those discussions. During this time, tribes reflected on the past and expressed their burden of history.

Thereafter, all conference participants reassembled. Each ethnic group selected someone from their number to tell their story. To an attentive audience, each tribal spokesman voiced the

¹ FLAA = Federation of Lofa Association in the Americas

² SCAA = Sinoe County Association in the Americas

burden of history—their hurts and traumatic loss—of his/her tribe, how the war affected them, and how other tribes afflicted them during the war. Each tribe’s account was subjective and unique and was presented from the standpoint of a victim. For example, when the Krahns told their story, they became the victims, and the Gios and Manos became the victimizers. When the Gios and Manos told their story, they became the victims, and the Krahns became the victimizers.

The audience listened compassionately. No debates occurred. No tribe argued against other tribes’ subjective accounts of their experiences. They responded only to the intersubjective truths in these stories.

In many cases at the close of each tribal presentation,

- The spokesperson apologized on behalf of the tribe for all the evils done by some of their tribesmen to other tribes. Our children did you evil; we do not sanction their actions. The Liberian proverb succinctly states the basis for these apologies: “You born the child; you did not born the child’s heart.”
- Other tribes acknowledged atrocities committed by some of their tribesmen, took responsibility for those atrocities, and apologized for those atrocities. Apologies stemmed from shared truths. For example, a shared truth was that Gios killed Krahns, and Krahns killed Gios. Similarly, Mandingoes killed Lormas, and Lormas killed Mandingoes. Each tribe that was the victimizer said, We are sorry. Our children killed you, but we did not endorse it.

A spirit of brotherhood permeated the conference. The intertribal dialogue achieved two desirable outcomes:

- The 17 ethnic groups reconciled. Damaged relationships among tribes were mended. The conference resolution committee knew that for this reconciliation to be lasting, it must affect Liberian governance, justice, and human rights and must involve the equal distribution of Liberia’s resources among the 17 ethnic groups. Consequently, the committee formulated a formal resolution, which conference attendees approved and adopted at the close of the conference on November 7. This resolution will be given to the Liberian Government and is designed to influence decisions of the Liberian Government, decisions that will sustain the reconciliation achieved at the conference.
- Every Liberian at the conference signed a binding covenant condemning violence. This covenant will be a testimony to this generation (and succeeding generations) of how Liberians peacefully resolved their ethnic conflicts.

7. The Covenant

The covenant will be posted later.

8. The Resolution

Resolution
of the
National Ethnic Reconciliation Conference on Liberia
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
November 7, 2004

We, the people of the Republic of Liberia, residing in the United States of America and representing all the ethnic groups of our nation, assembled at the National Ethnic Reconciliation Conference on Liberia (NERCL) held on November 5–7, 2004, at Christ Assembly Lutheran Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

- ACKNOWLEDGING God’s continuing blessings upon our country;
- REALIZING that the Liberian nation is the product of the collective effort of immigrant settlers and indigenous Africans;
- ACKNOWLEDGING the urgent need for national healing, reconciliation, and the peaceful reunification of our people by establishing the basis for truth and forgiveness;
- LAMENTING the longstanding cultural and social cleavages that erupted into a military intervention and devastating civil war—a war that caused massive destruction of life and property and the displacement of thousands of Liberians;
- HAVING engaged one another in open, frank, and direct dialogue concerning all aspects of our coexistence as a people, for example, our grievances and the perceptions that have lingered over the years and have created division and animosity among us;
- CONVINCED that the things that unite us are more than those that divide us;

We do hereby resolve to emphasize our common national identity—we are all Liberians—while we recognize our diversity (for example, ethnic diversity), and we recommend

- That henceforth all disputes be resolved by peaceful means based on the rule of law and traditional guidelines.
- That conflict resolution and problem-solving programs be introduced at all levels of the educational system.
- That the repatriation of refugees and the settlement of internally displaced persons be undertaken expeditiously.

- That the creation of political subdivisions be based on guidelines provided in the laws of our country.
- That a vibrant, humanizing, and democratic governing structure—one that respects human dignity, embraces integrity and morality, and demonstrates the separation of powers as stated in the Liberian constitution—be implemented.

Respectfully submitted by the NERCL Resolution Committee:

Dr. Abraham James, Chairman; Rev. Emmanuel Bowier, Member; Rev. Augustine W. Sneh, Member; Anthony Kesselly, Member; and G. Yeayei Nyenlekewoi, Member

9. Conference Observers

Conference observers included the following distinguished guests:

- Bishop John Gimenez, Bishop of Rock Church International
- Rev. Don Kytka, Regional Director of Youth with a Mission
- Prof. Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Professor of International Peace and Conflict Resolution at American University
- Prof. Steve Lubkemann, Professor of Anthropology at George Washington University

10. A Resounding Success

The 2004 NERCL was a resounding success. We are convinced that God has begun a process that will reverberate throughout Liberia and bring social healing and restoration to our nation.