

(Draft)

PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LIBERIAN NATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

This note is meant to advance the discussion regarding the construction of Liberian historical narratives. It proposes the establishment of a Liberian National History Project as an ad hoc project that will seek to contribute to reconciliation in the post-war era by assisting in developing historical consciousness among the people of Liberia and strengthening Liberian national identity, national unity and social cohesion in line with the National Vision: ONE NATION, ONE PEOPLE, UNITED FOR PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.¹

Justification of Project

Most Liberians who have read the various accounts of Liberian history taught in Liberian schools agree as to the limited scope and perspectives of the narratives and their failure to sufficiently embed the Liberian experience within the African context. There is also a dwindling number of these historical accounts such that Liberian history is hardly taught in many Liberian schools. The danger of this situation for nation-building and development cannot be overemphasized. Moreover, there is need for improved scholarly craftsmanship of history writing so as to encourage committed engagement with the discipline, especially by students. For these and other reasons, the Liberian National History Project is considered a vital part of the National Reconciliation Roadmap and the Agenda for Transformation, the two frameworks within which programs are being designed and implemented to make the vision a reality.

Goal and general objective of the National History Project

The goal of the project is to broaden general knowledge of the history of Liberia and provide Liberians with a deeper knowledge and appreciation of their history.

More specifically, its objectives are to:

- write a comprehensive general scholarly history of Liberia and on the basis for that general scholarly account,
- prepare in collaboration with MoE and other specialists, guidelines for a history curriculum for Liberian schools, grades one through twelve,
- make recommendations to institutionalize among the Liberian people the study and preservation of Liberian history.

Organization of the Project

The Liberian National History Project will have two bodies: (a) The Liberian National History Advisory Committee and (b) The Expert Panel of Liberian Historians

The Liberian National History Advisory Committee

The Liberian National History Advisory Committee will function as sponsors of the project with the responsibility to mobilize resources, ensure that the project remains faithful to the National

¹ Although the National Reconciliation Roadmap calls for the establishment of a National History Commission, Liberians seem to have become a bit weary of too many commissions, thus the option of calling this entity the Liberian History Project and to set it up with appropriate structures at the core of which is a professional working group called the Expert Panel of Liberian Historians.

Vision of ONE NATION, ONE PEOPLE, UNITED FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT, protect the integrity of the project, provide broad-based support for its work by a society yet to be fully reconciled, and ensure the use of its products in the Liberian educational system.

Expert Panel of Liberian Historians

Consistent with the National Vision of ONE NATION, ONE PEOPLE, UNITED FOR PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, the Expert Panel of Liberian Historians will be charged with the responsibility to:

- (a) Conceptualize, design and write a comprehensive and general scholarly history of Liberia; beginning with preparatory activities that will include revisiting all of Liberia's hitherto written and oral history and their sources with a view to writing a more inclusive history of the Liberian nation.
- (b) On the basis of that general scholarly history to be written, and in collaboration of curriculum experts of the MoE and others, design guidelines for the preparation of a history curriculum for Liberian schools, grades one through 12;
- (c) In collaboration with relevant public institutions such as the Center for Documentation and National Archives and non-governmental institutions such as the Liberian Association of Writers (LAW), advance recommendations to institutionalize among the Liberian people the study and preservation of Liberian history including but not limited to the establishment or revival of a Liberian Historical Society.

Expected Outputs:

- Output 1: The publication of a Comprehensive General History of Liberia;
- Output 2: Published guidelines for a national history curriculum for Liberian schools; and
- Output 3: Recommendations for institutionalizing the study of Liberian history including the establishment/revival of a Liberian Historical Society.

Timelines of Project

Output 1: The publication of a Comprehensive General History of Liberia is expected to be completed between 12 and 18 months in accordance with the following timetable:

Mid-January 2013 - Holding of organizing meeting to constitute Advisory Committee and Expert Panel of Liberian Historians from lists assembled and from others to be recommended. Meeting to agree TORs, project budget and other details including copyrights issues

Expert Panel of Historians to meet to assign responsibilities, guidelines for writing and timelines for completion of drafts and other internal organizational details

3rd or 4th week of January 2013--President to announce or launch project before Annual Message

February 2013 – writing project begins

July 2013 – progress review meeting held between Expert Panel and Advisory Committee

January 2014 – comprehensive general scholarly history of Liberia completed
Meeting held between Advisory Committee and Expert Panel of Historians

July 26, 2014 – Launch of comprehensive general scholarly history of Liberia by President of Liberia

Output 2: Preparing guidelines for national history curriculum grades 1 through 12

September 2014- Expert Panel of Liberian Historians submits guidelines for national history curriculum, grades 1 through 12.

Output 3: Establishing/Reviving the Liberian Historical Society

June 2015 – Expert Panel of Liberian Historians in collaboration with Association of Liberian Universities and National Center for Documentation organize to establish/revive Liberian Historical Society

Composition of Liberian National History Advisory Committee

Institutional and individual members are to serve on the Liberian National History Advisory Committee. Institutional members are those vested with specific responsibilities within the framework of the National Vision and the Agenda for Transformation and the National Reconciliation Roadmap, bear fiduciary responsibilities otherwise under law or provide an extensive network capable of strengthen support for and deepening legitimacy of the project. These include:

Institutional Members of Advisory Committee

The Governance Commission - Chair
Ministry of Education – Co-Chair
Ministry of Finance and Development Planning - Ex-Officio
Association of Liberian Universities
Center for National Documentation and Records Agency
Ministry of Internal Affairs
Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism
National Teachers Association of Liberia
Council of Chiefs and Elders
Inter-Religious Council
Liberian Studies Association
Another relevant civil society organization

Individual members of Advisory Committee

Individual members are recommended to serve on the Advisory Committee based on their affection for and propensity to promote history as an instrument for forging common identity and a tool for reconciliation. These include

Mr. Kenneth Y. Best
Rev J Emmanuel Bowier
Willie Togba (of Nimba)
Justice Soko Sackor
3 others to be recommended

Members of the Advisory Committee will serve without honoraria but will receive a modest sitting fee to cover transportation (fuel) whenever the Committee meets.

Composition of the Expert Panel of Liberian Historians

Members of the Expert Panel include Liberians of two categories:

(a) Liberians who are *bona fide* historians by virtue of their specialization in the methodologies and subjects of history as a discipline; these include:

- Dr. William E. Allen, Acting Chairperson, Department of History, University of Liberia and Department of History, Kennesaw State University
- Dr. M. Alpha Bah, Department of History, University of Liberia
- Dr. Amos J. Beyan, Department of History, Western Michigan University
- Dr. Herbert Brewer, Jr. Department of History, University of Maryland and Morgan State University
- Dr. Augustine Conneh, Department of History, University of Liberia

(b) Liberians who have attained high academic achievements in areas other than history and have developed and applied sufficient skills in the construction of Liberian historical narratives. These include:

- Dr. Joseph S. Guannu
- Dr. D. Elwood Dunn
- Dr. C. Patrick Burrowes
- Others to be identified

Members of the Expert Panel will be the authors of chapters of what are anticipated to constitute two volumes. Members of the Expert Panel will receive honoraria as proposed below.

Among the resources to be made available to the Expert Panel are the following:

Center for National Documentation and Records Agency

The Liberian Collections, Indiana University
The Council of Chiefs and Elders and others identified by it
International Consultants (to be recommended by Expert Panel)

NOTES FOR THE GUIDANCE OF WORK OF EXPERT PANEL OF LIBERIAN HISTORIANS

- ***Guiding principles for the General History of Liberia:*** (a) employ to the fullest extent possible the methods of rigorous historical scholarship (b) aim at the General History being a work of synthesis (c) acknowledge that the General History cannot be exhaustive (d) make great effort to avoid being narrow and dogmatic (e) state the problems and reflect the current state of knowledge in Liberian, African and African Diaspora studies and the main trends in historical scholarship (f) show differences in historical perspectives where these exist (g) lay the basis for future historical scholarship (h) perceive General History as an instrument to assist Liberians find common threads of identity and building blocks for strengthening the Liberian nation.
- ***Character of the General History of Liberia:*** It should be primarily a history of ideas and civilizations, societies and institutions. It should be based on as wide a variety as possible of sources including oral traditions and art forms.
- ***Scope and direction of General History of Liberia:*** The general history is to consider Liberia in its totality as a historical configuration, showing the complex relationships between the different parts of the whole, the ways in which they shaped each other and were transformed by their mutual exchanges and influences, bringing out in the process each part's contribution to the making of a distinctive Liberian civilization.
- ***Orientation of the General History of Liberia:*** It is important that this be a history from the inside looking out, reflecting how Liberians, at all levels of society, have viewed their own history. This is an important factor in the recognition of a collective Liberian heritage and in bringing out the elements that will contribute to reconciliation and to building national unity. However, Liberia's historical connections with the rest of the West African sub-region and the larger Atlantic world would still receive due attention.
- ***Nature of Final Output:*** The final work will be presented in two volumes, covering 500 years, containing some 1,000 pages of text with illustrations, maps, photos, tables, graphs and accompanying audio-visual tools. Serious consideration will be given to migrating the materials online.
- ***Organization of Editorial Board:*** An editorial board consisting of a chief editor assisted by three editors will be responsible for overseeing the preparation of the General History.
- ***Selection of Editorial Board:*** The editors are to be selected by the National History Advisory Committee from among members of the Expert Panel or from the outside. The editors are responsible for preparing the two volumes in accordance with the decisions and plans adopted by the Expert Panel and endorsed by the National Advisory Committee.
- ***Quality Assurance:*** On matters of historical scholarship, the authors of the General History are accountable ultimately to the Editorial Board and the National Advisory Committee. The Editorial Board will be responsible for the contents of the volumes, the final version of the texts, the illustrations and, in general, for all the technical aspects of the work. It will consult with the

National Advisory Committee and together with the National Advisory Committee determine quality and appropriateness of historical scholarship. Ultimately, the editorial board will approve the final manuscript and when it considers the manuscript ready for publication, it transmits it to the National Advisory Committee and advises the Committee on details regarding publication.

SUGGESTED EDITORIAL BOARD

The members of the Editorial Board must be selected from among the best of Liberian scholars trained as historians. They must also represent the various (often competing) historical perspectives from which the Liberian story has been told. The following historians seem to fit the bill: William E. Allen, Augustine Conneh, Herbert Brewer, Jr. and Amos Beyan. Thus, they are suggested to constitute the Editorial Board in the following manner:

Dr. William E. Allen, Chief Editor

Dr. Amos Beyan, Editor

Dr. Herbert Brewer, Jr. Editor

Dr. Augustine Conneh, Editor

Project Cost

The cost of the project is yet to be determined, however, an outlay of \$100,000 by GoL to be provided in two tranches of \$50,000 each will be a good start. The Chairperson and key members of the Advisory Committee will be able to spearhead resource mobilization initiatives from a range of sources including UNESCO, the MacArthur Foundation and other funding sources

Honorarium: It is suggested that each author be paid an honorarium of \$2500 per chapter and an additional \$500 for research support. The editors are to receive additional compensation for providing the editorial services.

Further details regarding budget are to be worked out at the initial organizing meeting.

THE ORGANIZING MEETING

The organizing meeting of the National History Project should be held as soon as possible—as indicated above. The week of January 14 2013 will be a good time for such a meeting. The purpose of the meeting will be to put together the core group of both the Expert Panel and the Advisory Committee, discuss the organizational relationship between the two, agree upon a project budget, timetable and as much organizational details as is possible. The Expert Panel can be expanded as substantive work gets underway. Similarly, the Advisory Committee can be made more inclusive as necessary.

Participants in Organizing Meeting:

a. From the Expert Panel and other Liberian historians:

Dr. William E. Allen

Dr. Alpha M. Bah

Dr. Amos Beyan

Dr. Herbert Brewer, Jr.

Dr. Augustine Conneh

Dr. D. Elwood Dunn

Dr. Joseph S. Guannu

Ms. P. Bloh Sayeh

Ms. Krubo Kollie
The Chair, Department of History Cuttington University
A few others (selected)

b. From the Advisory Committee:

The Chairman, Governance Commission
The Minister of Education
The Director-General, Association of Liberian Universities
The Minister of Finance
The Minister of Internal Affairs
The Minister of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism
The President, National Teachers Association
The Chairman, Council of Chiefs and Elders
Sheikh Habib Abubakar
Sister Mary Laurene
The Director-General Center for National Documentation and Records Agency
Mr. Kenneth Y. Best
Rev. J. Emmanuel Bowier

c. From Resource Centers:

The Director-General Center for National Documentation and Records Agency
The Liberia Collections Project, Indiana University
The Chairman of the Council of Chiefs and Elders

d. Others

The President of the Inter-Religious Council
Dr. Jeanette Carter
Dr. James Emmanuel Roberts
The President, Liberian Association of Writers

Governance Commission
9th Street, Sinkor, Monrovia