Press Statement

Hope for Young People Inc. observes International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking with youth and students in Gardnersville. Amb. Thomas Tamba Bundoo talks about challenges that drug addiction poses on young people, calls for a non billable drug offence and calls on Pres. Weah to declare drug addiction as a National Emergency and appreciates facilitators and sponsors for the dialogue.

Drug Abuse is gradually taking over the youthful population of Liberia, in every community and street corner there are ghettos and in every ghetto there is a youth who is claiming to be Five Star or CEO. I wonder what would have happened if this was during the Civil War? Young people of all genders are considering the usages of drug and illicit substances as a way of life, mothers are having restless time running from one prayer one to another to find solutions to their children drug addiction problem, it seems like those who are in authority are not care and concern about finding solution to this silence enemy called drug. If nothing is done to mitigate the proliferation in the use of illicit drugs in the country, I foresee a Liberia that will be very ungovernable in the not too distant future because of the insecurity that an illicit drug poses on the state and its people.

Hope for Youth-Liberia recent survey conducted on Drug Addiction uncovers the following as factors that are responsible for the increase in drug addiction in Liberia:

1. The weak Drug-Law is one of the major reasons for which there are difficulties in combating drug traffickers and dealers. Liberia needs a Non-billable drug law, so that those who will be arrested with drugs can't be billed for by anyone. Drug dealers have real money that can be used to hire any lawyer to plead on their behalf once they are arrested, but with a strong drug law like it’s with the rape law, it will help to minimize drug trafficking and usages in Liberia.

2. The weak security system in our country is another factor. Regrettably, some law enforcement officers are often found in ghettos taking in drugs and some are in the hobby of facilitating drug traffickers to transport their drugs, while others are owners of ghettos. The Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency (LDEA), Liberia National Police (LNP), Liberia Immigration Service (LIS) and other national security institutions need to step up their games, starting with the recruitment process of security personnel. Persons applying to be a member of the security force should undergo vigorous drug screening before undergoing training. Some of the very young people in the LDEA and other security forces are the same people we have been seeing in ghettos and other unhealthy places. While it is true that we are not discriminating against them, there is a need for them to be rehabilitated before integrating them into the security sector.  Government also needs to provide the needed equipment that will help the security forces in combating illicit drugs across the country.

3. Some government officials are seriously using the public offices to undemanding the fight against illicit drugs in the country by always interfering in the operations of law enforcement officers whenever their so-called interests are being arrested. Drug screening needs to be done to anyone who wants to contest for public office and all presidential appointees and all civil servants to ensure that we are not putting Drug Cartel in power as a government and it will also help to discourage young people who wanting to become future leaders from getting involved with the use of illicit drug.

4. Some parents are also not doing well in the upbringing of their children; this is one of the reasons for which many young people are becoming wayward. People are still trying to link the increase of disadvantaged youths (Zokos) to the Liberian Civil War which ended more than seventeen years ago. I stand to somehow disagree with them, statistics gather by Hope for Young People Incorporated show that 80% of the youths that are addicted to drug today are between the ages of 14 and 28, this means that the oldest persons in this category were born in 1993, so by 2003 the year in which the war ended those persons were at the ages of 10, what more about those under the ages of 28? Many parents are not putting much time into the upbringing of their kids, some are very busy with work while others are busy with things that are far less important than their kids future. Some parents allow their children to become self-rare, at times those children are in the streets, to nightclubs, in the ghettos and or to some unproductive places doing unhealthy things. Parents need to pay more attention to the upbringing of their kids in order to teach them the norms and values of society, but not to leave them their own way, because the family plays a very important role in the upbringing of the child.

5. Some schools are not also doing well in combating drug addiction in the country. Many schools are now considering profit making as their primary objective, instead of impacting knowledge in the young generation of leaders. More schools are no longer carrying on the basic recreation or extracurricular activities to keep students focused. Administrators are not doing proper vetting of students before granting them admission in their respective institutions. In every class there is a place called Bakayah, students of Bakayah many at times are outlaw they do unlawful things and walk with impunity, drug and other harmful substances are usually sold in that part of the class while others are gambling, school administrators are afraid to take administrative action against those students because they don’t want to lose them.

6. Child Trafficking is another cause of many young people getting involved in abusing drugs. Many persons from the urban parts of the country often go into the interior and take the kids from their parents in the name of sending them to school, and will provide proper care for them and there will be better living opportunities. Unfortunately, when the parents allow the kid to move with them, the kid becomes the breadwinner for their family while their biological children are attending school. What can happen is that when the child is not being treated fairly, he/she will find another option of living, if the child is being misguided by friends who are already addicted to drugs, this is when the ghetto life comes in. The Government needs to put more systems in place to combat child trafficking and people of all ages need to be properly prepared before having kids, so their kids cannot be mistreated by other people.

**Impact of Drug Addiction**

There are many impacts of Drug Addiction regaling from individual to society. Some impacts of drug Addiction are but not limited to the following:

**Impact on the Individual**

Drugs have a lot of impacts on individuals, it steals from the brain, and it makes the person's level of reasoning decline. As a result of this, those who take in drugs are not always in their rightful minds, they do the wrong things taking it to be right. It creates serious health deficiency in a person, from the inner part to the external part of the body. It increases a person's financial burden and makes them extra brave.

**Impact on the family**

Once there is someone who is addicted to drugs in a family, that family is at risk of losing valuables from the house at any time. The family will face a lot of discriminations in the community because of the person who is a drug addict. The family will also have restless time in an effort to find a solution to the person's addiction problem.

**Impact on the Community**

Drug addiction has a serious impact on the community; it creates fear in the community because of the increased criminal rate in the community. Many at times the community is even discriminated against because of the negative acts and violence that is always perpetrated in the community. Taking into consideration the great impact that an environment has on an individual, a community that has a ghetto is at risk of having more drug addicts, especially when kids in said community are not given proper care by their parents and guardians.

**Impact on the state**

There are many negative impacts of drug addiction on the state, it increases crime rate and violence in a state, it creates fare and insecurity in a country, it makes citizens of the state to lose their potential and it makes the state to lose manpower. It gives room for prison over crowdedness, allowing the government to spend state resources on fighting crimes and taking care of inmates. A state that is proliferated with drug addicts stands a chance of shying away incoming investors and losing existing ones, because of the high rate of crimes and violence caused by drug users. A state that has no control over illicit drugs will always be in disorderliness and muddiness.

**Recommendations**

Prosecute the perpetrators and care for the victims (users).

The non billable law will affect the traffickers and dealers but not the consumers. We can build a National Rehabilitation Center that will be equipped, where medical care will be provided, psychosocial counseling will be available and there will also be a vocational and technical training center where the victims when recover will be training with life skills and be reintegrated in society to contribute to the growth and development of our country.

It is very sadden and frustrating to see the bodies of young people lying on the streets every time in the name of criminals, even though at times there are no substantial evidences to substantiate those allegations in the court of competent jurisdiction, while other young people are losing their potentials to drug, getting wayward and many others liabilities on society. As the Executive Director, I cannot keep sitting and seeing my fellow young compatriots dying the way they are dying and my country losing manpower to drug addiction.

In view of the above, I am kindly calling on the President of the Republic of Liberia H.E Dr. Dr. George Manneh Weah to declare Drug Addiction as a National Emergency to help mitigate the proliferation of illicit drugs in Liberia and save the younger generation from losing their potential.

Let me conclusively conclude by extending thanks and appreciation on behalf of our organization (Hope for Young People Inc) to all those patriotic Liberians who took up time to facilitate our youth and students dialogue on drug addiction, in observance of the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking and also those special Guests and Students who attending the event, not forgetting our sponsors, especially Hon. Jerry K. Yogboh, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who in addition to what he provided for the conduct of the dialogue promised to provide a motorcycle and a set of PA System for the smooth operation of the organization when creating awareness to schools and communities about drug addiction.

 Our goal remains constant “Helping to ensure that every young person is an asset and not a liability.

God bless Mama Liberia and God bless us all.

Thank You!

Thomas Tamba Bundoo (Amb.)

Executive Director