

**STATEMENT BY PATRICK YAW BOAMAH DELIVERED
ON THE FLOOR OF PARLIAMENT ON THE 25TH DAY OF
JANUARY, 2018 ON THE ELECTION AND SWEARING IN OF
PRESIDENT GEORGE WEAH AS PRESIDENT OF LIBERIA**

The election of George Weah as the 24th president of Liberia indicates a certain paradigm shift in contemporary elections. It also illustrates the coming of age of the electorate indicated in their resolve to exercise their civic responsibilities and participate fully in the democratic processes of their country. Though Liberia is Africa's oldest independent republic at 170 years, it experienced a recurrent civil war for 14 years which severely affected the peace and stability of the country and the Ebola virus in 2014-16 which together claimed thousands of lives. This is not the first time President Weah who is a former footballer has run for president, he first run for president in 2005 again in 2011 as Winston Tubman's vice-presidential candidate but lost to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on both occasions.

After these unsuccessful attempts at being elected as president and vice president President Weah won the first round in the presidential election in October with 38.4% of the vote compared with 28.8% won by the second placed Mr Boakai. The failure of any candidate to secure an outright majority forced a run-off which was delayed due to a legal challenge by a representative of the Liberty Party Charles Brumskine. The Supreme Court eventually ruled against the challenge and President Weah came out first in the 26th December 2017 Presidential run-off after securing 61.5% of recorded votes cast against his opponent Mr. J. Boakai who secured 38.5%.

President George Weah's election and subsequent inauguration alongside Mrs Jewel Howard Taylor is a remarkable achievement and has sparked off a lot of hope among Liberia's teeming youth and market women who voted massively for him in all but one of Liberia's 15 counties. It is also evident of the country's tenacity in forging peace and stability especially post the UN mission's exit, as well as the desire of Liberians to chart a path of growth and prosperity. The transition of power from the government of Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to President Weah marks the first time power

has been handed over between two democratically-elected presidents in 47 years in Liberia.

President Weah is well known for his extraordinary career as a footballer. President Weah was named three times as the African Footballer of the Year in 1989, 1994 and 1995. He stands out as the only African to have won the Golden Ball award (for the best European player) and the FIFA World Player in 1995. He also won FIFA's Fair Play Award in 1996. In Liberia, President Weah founded the Junior Professionals (a football team) in Monrovia in 1994 which he used to encourage young people to remain in school. He coached the Liberian National football team.

Before attaining the limelight on the global stage, President Weah who was born in October 1966 grew up in Monrovia. He became a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador in April 1997 and he was instrumental in publicizing immunization, supporting HIV/AIDS education campaigns and other projects in Ghana and Liberia. In 2004, President Weah received the prestigious Arthur Ashe Courage Award for his work on behalf of children affected by war.

Prior to his election as the President of Liberia, President George Weah was an elected senator of the Parliament of Liberia and the head of the delegation of the Liberian Parliament to the ECOWAS Community Parliament.

Being an international soccer star, President Weah once again made history in the stadium. He is cheered on once again by crowds of supporters, though, not to take a rest after a hard-won battle, rather cheers to urge him on to consolidate peace and security for his country while working to achieve greater prosperity for the Liberian people. In his inaugural speech President Weah promised the Liberian people, that he would not let them down and would ensure that their resources do not end up in the pockets of government officials. That perhaps sums up the extent of the corruption issues in Liberia where the previous government had been accused of not doing enough to stem corruption. In a country where more than half of Liberians live in poverty, with huge unemployment and youthful population the president has his work cut out for him and may very well need a magic wand to fulfil the expectations of not only his supporters but Liberians in general.

President Weah's critics have argued that he lacks political experience and despite having been elected as a senator, he has not inspired confidence in political leadership. President Weah however insists that his responsibility has been to talk for his people and to discuss their interests which the records at parliament indicates. Having finally gotten the job, he now has the chance to put his critics wrong. The whole world will be watching to see how a former footballer is able to convert a poor economy into a prosperous one.

Africa, West Africa and Ghana must stand with Liberia and President Weah to ensure that Liberia continues to enjoy peace and stability for the benefit of her people and humanity.

