

**Speech Delivered by
Hon. Boima S. Kamara,
Minister of Finance and Development Planning
At the 97th Commencement Convocation of the University of
Liberia
Fendell Campus
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The Board of Trustees, the President, Members of the Faculty and staff, the graduating class of the College of Business and Public Administration of the University of Liberia, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am honored by the invitation extended me to serve as the 97th Commencement Speaker for the graduating class of the College of Business and Public Administration of the University of Liberia. I can recall that I once sat where you are sitting today 15 years ago

and went on to become an instructor at this college. To sit here today as graduates could not have come to fruition without your hard work and determination; for this, I congratulate you. I also wish to recognize the selfless and tireless efforts of the Administration and instructional staff for ensuring that you received quality guidance in pursuit of higher education. Today, 641 students

are graduating of which 423 are males, and 218 are females. This is highly commendable and largely due to the contributions made by you and your loved ones. Looking at the ratio of males to females of the total number of graduates reflects that we still have work to do in closing the gender gap.

Today, by your graduation, a new spirit must arise to guide your path in being people-centered and country-sensitive, bearing in mind your role in joining the national and global efforts in these big 5 transformative shifts: 1. Ensuring that no person, regardless of ethnicity, gender, geography, disability, race or other status is denied universal human rights and basic economic opportunities; 2. Putting sustainable development at the core of all development activities; 3. Transforming economies in the way that they provide jobs and inclusive growth; 4. Recognizing peace and good governance as core to human well-being; and 5. Forging global partnership in a spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual accountability.

With these in mind, please permit me to speak to you briefly on the Topic “Making your Degree Count for a Better Liberia”. What do I mean by making you degree count? Making your degree count can be illustrated by the concept of a social contract theory between you and the Government of Liberia. The

Government's role in this social contract is to provide the enabling academic environment for your learning. Since the inception of this administration, the education sector has remained a priority in the context of Government spending. Over the last five year fiscal period of the Agenda for Transformation, spending in the education sector as a share of the national budget rose from 12 percent in FY2012/13 to 14.4 percent in FY2016/17. However, more work has to be done, especially by ensuring that number translates in quality output.

Liberia as a country compares favorably with other developed and developing countries in terms of government spending on education. The government has made tremendous progress over the last few years achieving a maximum of 14.4 percent of total government budget on all levels of education and 4.4 percent of GDP. Are these performances enough to fully transform the education sector? The answer is no, but it is a good beginning given the tight fiscal position.

Members of this graduating class, your role in this Social Contract theory concept in the context of making your degree count means leveraging your greatest potential as graduates in a manner that shows hard work, sincerity, team work and commitment to whatsoever your hands shall find to do— remembering that your individual and collective mindset can change and, especially should be for the better where the contagion effect of your daring ideas of positive change

should inspire and encourage others to think beyond their own limits. When you properly apply what you have acquired in your academic sojourn with passion, integrity, and dedication, your degree does count with recognition by the society at large.

The Visitor of the University of Liberia, our President, Her Excellency continues to make this statement in a glaring way through her appointments of so many youths in Government than any other president before her. A classic example of what is possible for all youths of this country is my appointment as Minister of Finance and Development Planning. To you the graduates, it is possible for you to become more than a Minister, but it comes with demands and responsibilities that you have to handle with diligence.

Making degree to count also mean Government continuous support to early childhood, primary, secondary and Technical Vocational Education all of whom is the foundation upon which tertiary education stands. Without these, the idea of making your degree count will remain elusive.

Making your degree count means you must be exertive in a country which has a population of approximately 4.4 million with youth population of over 50% of this population, 33.2% have had no education, 31.1% have had only primary

education, while 35.75% have had secondary and tertiary education. The Sustainable Development Goal Four States: “Obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improving people’s lives and sustainable development. Although, major progress has been made towards increasing access to education at all levels and increasing enrolment rates in schools particularly for women and girls; basic literacy skills have improved tremendously, yet bolder efforts are needed to make even greater strides for achieving universal education goals. For example, the world has achieved equality in primary education between girls and boys, but few countries have achieved that target at all levels of education.” Taking from this and within the context to improve education, the Government of Liberia has developed a five-year development strategy (Agenda for Transformation) which prioritized education; with basic focus on providing educational opportunities for all as a way of improving quality of life by investing in more accessible and higher quality education.

As you graduate today and seek for a space in the public and private sectors, know that we are seeking on board the train of economic transformation graduates that will be champions of peace and reconciliation, economic diversification, empowerment of Liberians for inclusive growth and development, private sector as the engine for sustainable growth, bold future thinkers who push

beyond the limits of habitual thought of the Liberian-Way of doing things, and enhancing the environment of free speech where all actors including the market woman, pen-pen riders, drivers, civil society organizations, petty traders, students, the young and old alike can have a say and collectively engage and discuss our path into the future for a prosperous Liberia with better quality of life for Liberians. The result of such bold action shall be revealed through better living standards. We must realize what Plato suggested: that we are all connected in a "single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by nature are all related."

According to the Holy Bible, it is the diligent hands that shall be made fat. It is important to note that my appointment as Minister comes during one of, if not, the most challenging period in the economic history of our country and is a point in time that makes you think and unearth what you can do beyond your comfort zone as well as presents an opportunity to bring out the best of my innovative capacity to acquire new competencies to steer our economy back to recovery. Madam President, the people of Liberia, and our international development partners, be assured we will come out of this economic slowdown stronger and better. We will all have to make the sacrifices needed and embark on a collective course of action of saying no to all forms of corruption in the work place, in the

school, in the hospital, in the church, and in our homes. Graduates, this is what making your degree count means

Therefore, as we head into 2017 for the holding of the Presidential and Legislative elections, we should all take note that the Liberian people need a more conscious process of sustained transformation where the peace dividends gained over the last 13 years are maintained, not disruptive revolution. This is the true meaning of making your degree count where you become productive citizens.

In making your degree count, it will be your capacity to inspire each other to drive harmony and social progress and your willingness to collaborate across all people, institutions, and culture that will help us find answers to complex sustainability challenges. According to Mahatma Gandhi: "You need to be the change you want to see in the world. What is the change you want to see in Liberia? Take a look at yourself, YOU ARE THE CHANGE IN ENSURING THAT NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND. This is truly the real meaning of making your degree count.