

SPEECH DELIVERED BY AUGUSTINE KPEHE NGAFUAN MINISTER OF FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING/RL AT THE LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL CADET PROGRAM UNDER THE MINISTRY OF YOUTH & SPORTS HELD IN GBARNGA, BONG COUNTY, ON FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2026

Honorable Cornelia Wonkerleh Kruah, Minister of Youth and Sports;

Officials of government from across the 15 counties,

Development Partners,

Our distinguished cadets,

Parents and Guardians of the cadets,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me begin by thanking the young and dynamic Honorable Cornelia Wonkerleh Kruah, Minister of Youth and Sports and her team at the Ministry for the kind invitation extended to me to serve as Chief Launcher of this inaugural National Cadet Program.

In November 1988, a very significant thing happened in my life – I began a six-month internship program in the Comptroller’s Department at the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company. I had just passed to the senior class at the Booker Washington Institute (BWI) and successful completion of a six-month internship was then one of the hard requirements for obtaining a diploma from BWI. So, from November 1, 1988 to April 30, 1989, I had the privilege and the honor of not only donning an ID card issued by LPRC and riding to and from work in one of the company’s large, elegant, air-conditioned buses, I also saw in real-life the practical application of some of the Accounting concepts and principles I had learned in BWI classrooms. I developed hard and soft skills and learned from great and accommodating bosses. When I returned to school in May 1989 to complete my senior class studies and earn a high school diploma months later, I was a stronger, a smarter, a more practical person than what I was when I began the internship/cadet program. Later in life, I would work and succeed in multiple jobs, thanks in no small measure to the solid professional experience I acquired as an intern/cadet during that formative, impressionable period of my life.

Fast forward to May 15, 2026, time and propitious circumstances have given me the privilege of serving as Chief Launcher of the National Cadet Program of the Government of Liberia in which more than 1000 university graduates or graduating seniors will be assigned at various government and private institutions over a six-month period to acquire practical skills that would eventually and hopefully ease their transition to the work place.

The National Cadet Program that we launch today is funded by the Government of Liberia and is one of several initiatives being undertaken to actualize President Boakai’s noble vision of youth

empowerment and inter-generational equity, ensuring that today's generation of leaders take the proper actions and make the proper investments for the benefit of the generation of tomorrow.

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen, you will recall that in July 2025, our illustrious President and the former President of the African Development Bank (AfDB), Akinwumi Adesina, launched a bold and highly transformative program, the Youth Entrepreneurship Investment Bank (YEIB), which aims to shift Liberian youths from job seekers to job creators by providing capital, skills, and business support services to youth-led businesses. The YEIB is a US\$18 million project that aims to benefit 30,000 youth-led businesses and generate more than 100,000 jobs. The YEIB is being implemented under the Ministry of Commerce and with the completion of recruitment of project management staff, the project is set to fully start in a few weeks.

The President's vision for youth empowerment was also the driving force behind Liberia's successful bid for the relocation of the ECOWAS Youth and Sports Center from Burkina Faso to Liberia. The hosting of the ECOWAS Youth and Sports Center will provide jobs and opportunities for Liberians including the youth. The ECOWAS Center will also coordinate youth and sports programs across the entire ECOWAS region. I am proud to report that the Liberian government has fully funded the acquisition, rehabilitation, and furnishing of a decent facility in Monrovia, which will shortly be dedicated by President Boakai for use as the new headquarters of the EYSC.

Today's launch also comes on the heels of several other empowerment and capacity building initiatives being undertaken by several other government ministries and agencies including the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. On December 30, 2025, we completed a four-month internship program for our first cohort of nearly 300 interns whom we deployed at the Ministry of Finance and across other government institutions including LWSC, MCC, PCC, and NTA. Some of these interns have already been fully employed by the MFDP and their assigned institutions as we prepare to recruit the 2nd cohort of interns in June. This is government practicing what it preaches: creating entry points for young professionals to gain practical experience, demonstrate competence, and transition into meaningful employment.

At the closing ceremony for that first cohort of interns at the MFDP, I made a commitment that I repeat today: "We pose absolutely no objection to employing exceptional young people who complete these programs because our greater intention is to leave no one behind." I urge ministries and agencies where our cadets will be assigned to absorb those cadets, who at the end-of the six-month cadet program, will prove themselves deserving of employment.

Today, through this National Cadet Program, we are about to give hope to more than 1,000 young people of Liberia; yet, our detractors will say Liberia is going backward. We are about to

start the construction and/or rehabilitation of more than 100 schools for foundational learning across the 15 counties and are building and/or renovating high schools across the country including schools of the Monrovia Consolidated School System (MCSS); yet our detractors will say Liberia is going backward.

We are paving the road to the South-East including to Zwedru, Fish Town, and Harper. We are rehabilitating and paving the road from Free Port to St. Paul Bridge and then to Bo Water Side and will soon begin the pavement of the Salayea to Voinjama and the Mendikorma to Voinjama highways. Yet the detractors will say that Liberia is going backward. Today, we are connecting more households to electricity and business and other activities are extending into the night hours in Monrovia, RIA Highway, Buchanan, and many other cities. Yet the detractors say Liberia is going backward.

Today we have begun increasing the pay and incentives of critical professionals in the civil service including at the C.B. Dumbar Hospital in Gbarnga where health workers danced for joy last year when they saw alerts on their phones informing them of significant increases in their pay beginning January 2025. We have also fully reversed harmonization at the GAC and the LACC and for members of the Supreme Court Bench and judges of subordinate courts. We have effected significant increases in the pay of other workers of the Judiciary as well as engineers and other professionals across government. Yet, our detractors say Liberia is going backward.

Today, we have succeeded in just 2 years, 3 months, and 24 days, in growing the budget from US\$738 million to US\$1.3 billion, driven largely by historic increases in domestic revenue generation occasioned by closing leakages in revenue collection and improved tax administration. Today, unlike in the past where the country got accustomed to the submission of a Recast Budget that essentially slashed appropriations of Spending Entities due to shortfalls in revenue collection, we are now talking about a Supplementary Budget that adds up to the appropriation of Spending Entities due to surplus revenue collection that funds, among others, the recruitment of more young people into our army, police, and immigration service as well as the enrollment onto the GOL payroll of more volunteer health and education workers and chiefs. Yet, the detractors say Liberia is going backward.

Today, our credibility and respectability have greatly improved at the United Nations where we now serve as a Non-Permanent Member of the Security Council, at the World Bank, the IMF, the AfDB, the EU, and with our bilateral partners including the US, China, France, etc. Yet, the detractors still say that Liberia is going backward and that Liberia is not rising.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the development journey is not a 100-meter rectilinear dash to the finish line. The development journey oftentimes is like a marathon race that passes through bumpy, curvy, and circuitous paths to the finish line. The infrastructure and other

challenges inherited by this government was not insignificant; in fact, they were gargantuan. Addressing these challenges is a time-intensive, arduous task that demands that we dedicate enormous sweat and brain equity to the national transformation mission.

While we are on this development journey, we could experience turbulence sometimes, requiring the captain to ask that we temporarily tighten our seat-belts.

The solace that passengers take is that good captains know how to pilot and land the plane safely to its destination in spite of turbulence. The Liberian flight to our development destination is being piloted by an experienced captain, President Joseph Nyuma Boakai; and we are well on course to achieving our development targets in spite of temporary bumps in the journey.

The interconvertible fact is that by and large, Liberia is going forward, not backward; Yes, on our development journey from Redlight to Gbarnga, we concede that we have not reached Gbarnga yet. In two years, 3 months, 24 days, we may now be not too far from Totota. So, detractors can and will focus on the distance we have not traveled yet. They can and will focus on the things we have not done yet. But they are dead wrong to say that on the journey from Redlight to Gbarnga, we are still at Redlight. No, we are not! The distance from Redlight to near Totota is quite a distance and it represents significant progress given the time we have traveled.

In summary, we still have miles to travel on our development journey. But, the fact that still remains stubborn is that Liberia is not where it used to be. Today, is better than yesterday. And tomorrow will be better than today; And the day after tomorrow will be better than tomorrow.

To our deserving cadets, as you begin this noble journey today, let me quote from the speech I delivered in January 2013 at the induction into the civil service of the 2nd Batch of recruits of the President's Young Professional (YPP):

“Pursuing an undergraduate degree is undoubtedly a very exciting time in anyone's life. In undergraduate school a young mind is loaded with tons of theories, theorems, hypothesis, models, etc. Complex realities in the real world are made simple through equations and other forms of abstraction. In school every test drawn by an instructor has a test key.

There is a definite answer to each of the questions asked by the Professor or Instructor. Success in school is usually defined as mastering the art of finding answers to the many exams that are given. Therefore, after spending four or more years in University teasing out answers to test questions, a young person may get a little cocky thinking that the real world or the University of Life can be comprehended as neatly and as easily as one comprehended Pythagoras theorem or the Solow Model.

“A young person bubbling with vitality and idealism who has been made to think that success is defined primarily by scoring A’s on an instructor’s exam experiences a rude awakening when he finds out that whereas in school two (2) plus two (2) was always equal to four (4) or that complex economic realities could be explained by a graph, in the real world, two (2) plus two (2) may not always equal four (4) and some intricate phenomena cannot lend themselves to neat graphical explanations. This sometimes brings in frustrations and even depression as a young person goes through this delicate and difficult period of reconciling theory to practice.

“Indeed transitioning from the classroom to the work room may not be as smooth and rosy as a young mind might have been led to believe. Being an honor roll student in university does not automatically transform someone into an honor roll professional in the workplace.”

As you begin your professional journey, I urge you to go to the workplace with humility, with dedication, with discipline, with patience, with patriotism, and, above all, with integrity. Develop good teamwork skills because you will find out in the professional space that success does not only depends on what you do but on what others do. It is often said that teamwork makes the dream work. Cultivate good attitudes in the workplace because the right attitude may largely influence your attitude.

My concluding words to you, our deserving cadets, is prepare to go work in a couple of days is this: Where you find darkness, spread your light; where you find laziness, spread your strength; where you find hopelessness, share your the hope; where you find indiscipline; spread your discipline; where you find disrespect, share your respect; where you find intolerance and envy, share your tolerance and love; and where you find wheeling and dealing, share your honesty and integrity.

To Minister Kruah and the team at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, thank you very much for designing and approaching this program with the seriousness it deserves. We know that executing such a massive undertaking is no small feat. And there will be lessons in implementation that we will have to learn from in the future. I assure that the the Ministry of Finance stands ready to support programmatic needs as we continue building Liberia's human capital pipeline.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is now my singular honor and privilege to officially launch the National Cadet Program under the Public Sector Investment Program of the Ministry of Youth and Sports for 2026.

May this program produce graduates who embody discipline, demonstrate competence, and serve with integrity. May these cadets become the professionals Liberia needs and the leaders Liberia deserves.

Thank you, and may God bless the National Cadet Program. May God bless our youth. May God bless the Republic of Liberia.