

**World AIDS Day Testimony by Stephen K McGILL
Executive Director: Stop AIDS in Liberia (SAIL)
Saturday December 1, 2018, Antoinette Tubman Stadium
(ATS) Sport Ground, Lyne Street, Monrovia, Montserrado
County, Republic of Liberia.**

**His Excellency George Manneh Weah
President of the Republic of Liberia**

**Her Excellency Jewel Howard Taylor
Vice President of the Republic of Liberia**

**Members of the 52nd Legislature in the Liberia Parliament Including the House of
Senate and Representatives of the Republic of Liberia**

**The Diplomatic Co and Bilateral Partners in Liberia, (SIDA, The Swedish
Ambassador, The US Ambassador and all other Embassies in Liberia Present),**

**The Global Fund Country Team and Member of the Liberia Coordinating
Mechanism LCM /CCM Liberia (Our Humble Chairman Cllr. Tewon Gogonlo and
all Executives)**

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and all Line Ministries in Liberia

Representatives of the Joint United Nations Team in Liberia OneUN

**Ambassador Clar M. Weah
First Lady of Liberia**

**Dr. Whelimina Jallah
Minister of Health and other officials of the Ministry of Health**

**Officials of National AIDS Commission (NAC), National AIDS and STI Control
Program (NACP) distinguished invited guests, Health Care Workers, HIV Peer
Educators and Navigators, our able Foot Soldiers and Team of SAIL Members far
and Near ladies and gentlemen.**

Today marks yet another significant milestone in the global AIDS response, as we commemorate the 30th anniversary of the first World AIDS Day campaign. The global AIDS response over the last 30 years has seen remarkable progress in reduction of new HIV infections and number of HIV related deaths as a result of the historic increase in the number of people living with HIV that are receiving lifesaving antiretroviral treatment

(ART). New HIV infections have reduced from 2.7 million in 2010 to 1.8 million in 2017. Similarly, the number of people living with HIV that are on treatment has phenomenally increased from 6.6 million to 21.7 million resulting in a reduction in HIV related deaths from 1.8 million to 940,000 during the same period.

I am happy to be here today to receive this award and share my story with you as a person living with HIV, and an advocate for the rights of people living with HIV, and other key and vulnerable population groups.

Twenty-One years ago, (In 1997), while living as a Liberian refugee in Nigeria, I was diagnosed with HIV. I asked the UNHCR to repatriate me to Liberia in order to come home and die in dignity. I remember vividly the ELBC News on the evening of my arrival and newspaper headlines, which read, "*some refugees brought home were HIV positive amongst other diseases*". I made it my personal duty to educate Liberians on HIV and AIDS and volunteered my services at the catholic hospital and other health centers like Firestone hospitals, working with health care workers to care for people living with HIV and AIDS as a positive care giver and peer counselor in a very highly stigmatized environment.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

In 1998, Ford Foundation in Nigeria, with support of the Institute of International Education (IIE), offered me a small grant that facilitated the establishment of Stop AIDS in Liberia (SAIL), an organization that over the past 20 years has become the voice of marginalized and vulnerable populations in Liberia. Over the past 20 years I have dedicated my life supporting and ensuring that all Liberians have access to HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support services in an environment free of stigma and discrimination.

It is a great honour that all the hard work and struggles over the past 20 years has been recognized. I am highly elated to be called an HIV and AIDS Champion in Liberia. I will

like to dedicate this award to all our fallen Shrero and Hero in the Fight against AIDS in Liberia and those who are creating an enabling environment for a Liberia free of HIV and AIDS:

The late Ms. Kpana Jallah the first woman to come out, Sah Joe first President of Light Association, The late Dr. Sawo of NACP, Josephus Dahn, Prince Miller, Deckotee , Mr. (Prine N of Positive Living Association), The late Mr. Ernest Johnson of Clara Town who led SAIL into the Clara town community to create awareness for in and out of School Youths, the late pastor Paul Okolo of the Monrovia Christian Church and head of Hope Worldwide Liberia, My late Mother and father Mr. and Mrs McGILL, corner of Center and Water Street AKA Landing States opposite 99 Steps, the late Barrister Ben Nwuogu, Dr Brisbane of firestone hospital, the late Dr. Borbor of JFK –head of IDC, and the late Mrs. Patti Cho of ELWA and Shalom.

Ms. Rebecca Dennison of Women organized to Responding to Life-threatening Diseases (WORLD) in Oakland California my first mentor and counselor over the phone via collect Call back then, Mrs. Isabelle Nwuogu of UNHCR- Nigeria, Dr. Kenneth Ofofu Bakor of UNAIDS Nigeria, Ms Peal Nwashilee of Stop AIDs Nigeria, Mr. Rudolph Thomas of USAID –Liberia, Ms Olive Yongor Morris, Mr. Robert Mezzeh, Mr. Joseph S McGILL, Mr. Harry T. Conway, Mrs, Amelia Gayflor Attie, Mrs Mariam M Subah, Dr. Isabelle Simbaye, Dr.Lilly Sanvee, Mrs Elizebath Sawyer head counselor at the Catholic Hopsital, Dr. Stepen B Kennedy (PIRE), Rev. Prince Koon of NACP, Mrs. Jessie Dunkin, Mrs Juanita Robert Ramirez, Mrs. Sara Bayselow Nyantee, Mr. Joejoe Baysah, Today Finance Minister Samuel Tweh of the Student Anti AIDS Group at the University of Liberia, Police Director Paul Mulbah who saved my life from the angry crowd during an interview on DC 101 Radio Station when I first broke silence on the Radio in Liberia, Dr. Mohammed Khalife Bility, Dr Camanor, Mr. Ernest Gai, and Mrs. Korto William of Actionaid Liberia,

Ms. Jackline Toe, Ms Lovetta Wanner, Ms. Cynthia Yah Gonleh of Liberia Women Empowerment Network (LIWEN), Mr and Mrs Sonpon Sieh, Dr Garbor of (NACP), Dr. Manma Baysay, and Staff at the Chest Clinic Redemption Hospital, staff at IDC JFK, and all other staff in the ART centers across the country supporting People Living with HIV in Liberia .

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want you to reflect on the following today and the days after:

- Do you know your HIV Status, when last did you test for HIV?
- Do you know that starting treatment for HIV early (immediately after diagnosis) reduces the chances of transmission of the virus to your loved ones and improves survival?

Although a cure for HIV is not yet available, current treatment options significantly extend life expectancy. In fact, most HIV positive individuals who are adherent to treatment live as long as their HIV negative counterparts.

I urge all of you to get tested today, know your status, and take action to protect your future and that of your loved ones.

Together we can end HIV as a public health threat in Liberia by 2030.

The time to act is now!

Thank You