

PETITION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA

A Cry to Save a Dying Generation and Protect Our Future

Mr. President,
Honorable Speaker, Deputy Speaker, and Distinguished Members of the House of Representatives,
and
Mr. Vice President, Madame President Pro Tempore and Distinguished Members of the Senate.

It is with heavy hearts and trembling voices that we, concerned citizens and residents of the Republic of Liberia, bring this petition to you in this moment of national emergency. Our ultimate goal is to engage the Government in putting in place several measures to fully and viciously attack the menace of illicit drugs that has taken over our nation, through legislation, financial investment, treatment, and education.

Our beloved Liberia is bleeding from within. Communities are living in fear, despair, and hopelessness. Every day, we witness the heartbreaking sights of our family and friends lying on street corners like the living dead. Young people with bright futures – doctors, teachers, engineers, and leaders – are being swallowed alive by the scourge of drugs. Across the nation, the same story echoes – marijuana, heroin, kush, cocaine, amphetamine-type stimulants (including tramadol) and intravenous drugs have invaded our land, destroying families and tearing apart the social fabric of our nation. Many of these illicit drugs cost as little as L\$150 each and cause zombie-like disorientation, organ damage, psychosis, illnesses, and deaths. We see parents bury their children as a result of drug overdose, and cry every day as their children roam the streets, begging and stealing, just to feed an addiction they cannot control. This has become the “New Normal” in Liberia. Many people do not realize the dangerous and uncontrollable pathway to drug addiction. Although the first decision to consume an illicit drug is a choice, battling and overcoming addiction is one of the most difficult things to do.

According to the Global Action for Sustainable Development (GASD) April 2023 Report, Monrovia and its surroundings account for about 65% of the substance consumption spaces, with over 866 ghettos where illicit drug activities are carried out, that serve as home to an estimated 100,000 plus chronic drug users.

While the victims of drug addiction waste away, the real enemies who are the drug traffickers and dealers walk free, shielded by weak laws, easy bail conditions, lenient sentences and accomplices in positions of authority. They profit from the destruction of our children, the tears of mothers and fathers, and the collapse of our communities. While families grieve and communities are collapsing, traffickers continue to operate with impunity. This cannot continue! We refuse to idly watch an entire generation perish! We refuse to remain silent any longer! Today we marched not only in protest but in purpose, not as victims but as visionaries.

Article 11(c) of the Liberian Constitution obliges the government to ensure that “all persons are equal before the law and are therefore entitled to the equal protection of the law.” Protecting us, the youth and our communities from the deadly grip of drugs is not just a moral duty of the Government, it is a Constitutional obligation.

Therefore, we, the people of Liberia, demand immediate and decisive actions by our government to save our nation from this menace.

To the Legislative Branch of Government, we demand that you:

1. Amend the current Drug law through citizens participation, to:
 - a. impose a minimum twenty (20) years to life prison sentence for anyone found guilty of drug-related felonies of the 1st degree. The current law prescribes 10 – 20 years for first-degree drug-related felonies. These light sentences have failed and the law must be a true deterrent;
 - b. make rehabilitation mandatory for apprehended drug users on bail or imprisoned. While the current Drug Law allows for drug users to have bail when apprehended in the act, bail without rehabilitation perpetuates the vicious cycle. Additionally, the current law provides that when convicted, the judge MAY order rehabilitation as an alternative to imprisonment, rehabilitation must be mandatory for drug users even if convicted and imprisoned.
 - c. direct the Executive to confiscate and sell/auction all assets and properties acquired through the illicit drug trade, and redirect these resources to mental health and rehabilitation programs;

- d. include carriers of passengers and cargo by land, air and water being liable for the transportation of drugs on their carriers. That airlines and ships on which traffickers transport drugs are fined US \$100,000 for first offense, US\$250,000 for second offense and a total ban for third offense, while vehicles, bikes, pehn-pehn and other land carriers are confiscated, sold and proceeds transferred to mental health, prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration programs.
2. Amend the Customs Tariff Code to reduce or remove tariffs on the importation of drug treatment supplies;
3. Establish a specialized court to fast track drug-related cases.
4. Establish the Liberia Drug Prevention, Rehabilitation & Reintegration Agency as proposed by Global Action for Sustainable Development to be the statutory body to lead and coordinate national efforts at addressing the issue of drugs through prevention, rehabilitation, reintegration and prosecution of offenders.
5. Reduce your salaries and benefits and increase funding for the At-Risk Youth & Rehabilitation programs.

To the Executive Branch of Government, we demand that you:

1. Issue an Executive Order to declare illicit drugs a national pandemic like Ebola & COVID, and implement the following actions to give substance to the Order;
2. Declare August 7 annually as Liberia's National Anti-Drug Day;
3. Establish a joint Presidential Anti-Drug Task Force (PADTF) to include Civil Society and religious institutions, AFL, LNP, Liberia National Bar Association(LNBA) to work along with LDEA; with the responsibility to create awareness, set up a call center, follow up on drug-related cases from reporting to prosecution, set up community drug taskforces and ensure the implementation of the President's mandates. Mr. President, like Ebola it is time to include the AFL in this fight to save our nation.
4. Include in the President's Legislative Agenda,
 - a. empowerment of law enforcement agencies, through adequate budgetary allocation and plans, to fight the war on drugs and strengthen border controls;
 - b. Increase budgetary allotments to at-risk youth programs. The budgetary allotment for these programs was drastically reduced to Nine Hundred Fifteen Thousand United States Dollars in FY2024 and Five Hundred Thousand United States Dollars in FY2025. This signifies a trend of lower priority being given to the threat to at-risk youth when compared to FY2023. With the looming crisis that illicit drug use has created, we would think the Government would be taking the opposite trend of increasing funding for such programs;
 - c. Establish and provide budgetary allocation for regional National Rehabilitation Centers and programs throughout the nation and in the prisons; and;
 - d. Provide budgetary subsidy to private rehabilitation centers;
5. Make drug rehabilitation at Government facilities free of charge. Many of the persons afflicted are unable to afford to get the necessary help and this makes the problem worse because it costs less to get access to most drugs than it does to get clean;
6. Issue an Executive Order to remove tariffs on the importation of drug treatment supplies. This will help to lower the operational costs of rehabilitation centers and enable them to provide low cost or free care to substance abusers;
7. Establish the Anti-Drug Fund and set aside a portion of taxes collected from the importation and sale of alcohol, smokes (cigarettes, hookah, cigars, etc.), and gambling to be put in this fund for the work of the Presidential Anti-Drug Task Force towards substance abuse education and public awareness programs;

8. Mandate the Ministry of Education to integrate mandatory education programs on illicit drugs in the curriculum for schools – how it starts, the negative impacts, and how to avoid it; from primary to tertiary levels.
9. Mandate the Ministry of Health to regulate the establishment and operations of Rehabilitation Centers, ensuring that centers are operating in line with international best practices.
10. Mandate the Liberia Telecommunications Authority sector to work with GSM companies to (i) establish toll free hotlines -for people to anonymously provide intelligence and leads on drugs operations and activities in the various communities and (ii) to provide amber alerts to the public on drug operations. Offer incentives for information leading to the arrest and verified offenders;
11. Mandate the City Corporations to address the issue of “unfinished buildings” in communities that are prone to being use as drug dens by drug dealers.
12. Mandate the Ministry of Youth & Sports to provide opportunities for employment and vocational training opportunities for survivors.
13. Mandate the LNP to enforce the ban on alcohol, cigarettes and smokes to children under 18 at all entertainment centers.
14. Mandate the LDEA working with Immigration at the airport to implement immigration screening processes of all government officials and VIP luggage entering and leaving the country, with few exceptions., and
15. Institute a mandatory drug testing in schools and prior to employment;

We are not asking for vengeance. We are asking for justice and protection. We rise in alarm as illicit drugs ravage our children and communities. You must act, for if you fail to do so, Liberia will lose its next generation. Our schools will be empty, crime rates will continuously increase, and our nation will sink deeper into poverty and despair. But if you act now, you will be remembered as the leaders who stood up to save Liberia’s future.

God is watching. The children of Liberia are watching. Liberia cannot rise while her children are falling. We trust that you will hear this cry and act with urgency to protect Liberia’s future. We are ready, willing, and able to participate in any Government efforts where we may be of assistance. We demand a drug-free Liberia. May God bless you, and may God save the Republic of Liberia.

THIS PETITION IS SUBMITTED TO YOU BY **SAY NO TO DRUGS CAMPAIGN** ON BEHALF OF THOUSANDS OF LIBE4RIANS SEEKING AN END TO THIS PANDEMIC.