

February 8, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As community, religious, and faith-based organizations dedicated to serving and advocating on behalf of the Liberian community, we write to bring to your attention an urgent issue facing Liberians living in the United States. Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) status, which by your order of March 23, 2009 currently protects certain Liberians from deportation, will expire on March 31, 2010. **We ask that you extend DED to those Liberians for an additional 18-month period so as to ensure that they are not forcibly removed from the United States.**

Many Liberian refugees who fled civil war and human rights atrocities between 1990 and 2003 made homes in the United States. Now, for some of them, because their status is expiring, they are in danger of deportation to a fragile country and separation from their families, livelihoods, and communities.

The Historical Relationship Between the United States and Liberia.

The United States has a special historical relationship with the Liberian people. In 1822, a group of former slaves from the United States arrived in what was to become Liberia's capital city, Monrovia—named after U.S. President James Monroe. The first eight presidents of Liberia were born in the United States. The Liberian flag is patterned after our own. The national language of Liberia is English. Liberia has been a strategic and military ally of the United States, particularly during World War II when Liberia provided access to rubber and served as a troop transit point for American forces, and during the Cold War when Liberia continued to stand with our country.

But when Liberia descended into havoc between 1979 and 2003, hundreds of thousands of Liberians were forced to flee. Horrific violence and human rights abuses, including mass executions, torture, dismemberment, rape, looting, banditry, and the widespread use of child combatants, traumatized the Liberian population and left the country's infrastructure in ruins.

It is not surprising that many Liberians came to the United States during that period. As many as 270,000 Liberians now reside here lawfully, with large Liberian communities situated in California, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. While most have obtained legal permanent residence, the Department of Homeland Security estimates that approximately 3,600 have only the temporary legal status that is conferred by DED.

The Current Situation of Liberians in the United States.

In metropolitan areas with large Liberian communities, the expiration of DED would harm certain sectors of the economy, such as long-term healthcare institutions, that employ large numbers of Liberians. Entire neighborhoods would be affected by people leaving their houses, apartments, and businesses behind upon mass deportation.

At the same time, according to the government of Liberia, private remittances from Liberians in the United States to Liberia average \$6 million a month, providing a critical lifeline of financial assistance and economic stability that would be ruptured if the DED Liberians were deported.

Also at issue is family separation. Liberians who sought protection in the U.S. have painstakingly rebuilt their lives following the trauma of war. They married and raised families here—including both U.S.-born and Liberian-born children. Forcing the return of those under DED would tear families apart.

The Current Situation in Liberia.

The devastating effects of the Liberian conflict continue to be felt there. Recognizing this, on July 16, 2009 you declared a continuation of a national emergency for the United States with respect to the security situation in Liberia. At that time you wrote of “a legacy of destruction that continues to undermine Liberia's transformation and recovery” and that poses “an unusual and extraordinary threat to the foreign policy of the United States.” Liberians should not now be sent back to a country where their lives would be imperiled and their arrival would further destabilize the fragile peace.

The Liberian government needs time to rebuild the infrastructure and social services necessary to support its population and to establish a stable and secure democracy. While Liberia has made strides in its poverty reduction strategy, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon noted in 2009 that “limited national institutional capacity across all sectors remains a serious constraint, not least since most public institutions, at national and local levels, have had to be completely rebuilt after the conflict.”

Please Act Now.

Liberia is not yet ready to receive and absorb 3,600 American residents. A mass deportation of those DED Liberians would wreck their families, crush their lives, deprive America of their productive work, strain the Liberian economy, and destabilize that country's governance.

Please act immediately to ensure that Deferred Enforced Departure for Liberians is extended for an additional 18 months beyond March 31, 2010.

Respectfully,

Ally Organizations

The Advocates for Human Rights
American Immigration Lawyers Association

Minneapolis, MN
Washington, DC

American Jewish Committee	Washington, DC
Casa de Esperanza	New Jersey
Center for Victims of Torture	Minneapolis, MN
Church World Service, Immigration & Refugee Program	National & International
The Episcopal Church	Washington, DC
Friends Committee on National Legislation	Washington, DC
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society	New York, NY
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota	St. Paul, MN
Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project	Minneapolis, MN
Jewish Community Action	St. Paul, MN
Jewish Council on Urban Affairs	Chicago, IL
Justice & Peace Committee Sisters of St. Joseph	West Hartford, CT
Justice Commission Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet	St. Paul, MN
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service	Baltimore, MD
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office	Washington, DC
Multicultural Ministry Network Episcopal Diocese of MN	Minneapolis, MN
National Council of Jewish Women, Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN
National Immigrant Justice Center	Chicago, IL
National Immigrant Solidarity Network	Washington DC, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago
National Immigration Forum	Washington, DC
North United Methodist Church	Minneapolis, MN
Peace and Hope International	Minneapolis, MN
Scott D. Pollock & Associates, P.C.	Chicago, IL
Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield	Massachusetts
St Mary's Episcopal Church	St. Paul, MN
St. Philip & St. Thomas Episcopal Church	St. Paul, MN
UFCW Local 789	South St. Paul, MN
Liberian Organizations	
AAFACD, Inc.	St. Paul, MN
ACERO	St. Paul, MN
Chicago Lone Star Soccer Club	Chicago, IL
Grand Kru County Dev. Assoc.	Maryland
Liberia Association Of Michiana	South Bend, IN
Liberian Community in St. Paul, MN (LCM)	St. Paul, MN
Liberian Human Rights & Refugee Welfare Org.	Brooklyn Center, MN
Liberian Ministers Association	Minnesota
NC African Services Coalition	Greensboro, NC
Organization of Liberians in Minnesota	Brooklyn Center, MN
Organization of the Liberian Community in Illinois	Chicago, IL
River of Life Open Bible Church	Brooklyn Park, MN
Union of Invincible Eleven (IE) Majestic Sports Ass.	Maryland
Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas	Minneapolis, MN
United African Organization	Chicago, IL
United Nimba Citizens Council (UNICCO)	New York, NY
Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment, Inc.	St. Paul, MN
Zoe Geh District Initiatives	Brooklyn Park, MN