

# Youth Leadership

*In Conflict Resolution, Peace Building and Governance*



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As the writer of this essay, what most youth of my age have known in Liberia is war, violence, and insecurity. I have been growing up in a hostile society where only the moral and religious principles of my parents have guided me to this day.

The civil conflict that erupted in Liberia in 1989 was characterized by forcing several youths to join fighting groups. Many of these youths, both boys and girls, who could have developed into leaders of the future of Liberia, became embarrassed by their participation in the conflict. They were drugged and forced to do horrible things to their neighbors, peers and elders. These acts were widespread through the country.

As youths, it is our task to ensure that such terrible things do not happen again in this country. We are to make sure that conflicts are resolved, peace maintained and good governance practiced. Therefore, conflict resolution, which is a long process, must be addressed in a positive way. One way in which youths can engage in conflict resolution is to tell each other of the dangers of war by the effect we see around us today. This can be done through youth's leadership forum, small discussion in schools, churches, and communities. Another aspect of conflict resolution is for youths to learn to tolerate one another in spite of tribal, racial, religious, and political background. Once we consider that we are all Liberians, growing up to be the next generation of leaders in Liberia, conflict amongst us will be a thing of the past.

When conflict is avoided amongst youth, peace is what must be built and sustained. Peace does not necessarily mean the absence of war. Peace must be built to maintain social, economic, political and democratic values in the society. When peace is maintained, the hope of the future of the youths can be secured. There will be opportunity and ability for more good roads, hospitals, clinics, telecommunications facilities, and many other things that benefit the nation and its people, especially the youths. The building of peace in Liberia will change most of our young people from being bread winners of

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their families through selling on the streets or being early job seekers. When youths work towards building peace, young girls will value education and move away from being young mothers and wives against their will. The absence of basic social support has made many young girls to engage in early sex, thus teenage pregnancy. Peace is one major factor that brings credibility to any nation. Only youths can work amongst themselves in ensuring that peace is sustained, youths of other neighboring states and the world at large will regard Liberia as a place of peace and respect. When we work towards building peace, investors will have confidence in doing business in Liberia which in turn will create job opportunities for qualified youths and other citizens in the nation.

The custodian of peace is good governance. All youths are required to support good governance in Liberia. There can be no governance if youths become lawless, and disrespectful to higher authority. As youths, the first step to good governance begins in the home. It is our attitudes of obedience, respect, orderliness at home that will be measured as we go into wider society. Lawlessness in any governable society by youths is not to be encouraged. All states are governed by rules and laws that must be adhered to by every citizen. The youths have been used to exercise lawlessness in the society for too long now. It is time that we move from being agents of trouble to agents of positive change. Another duty that is expected of youths in the governance process is the respect for constituted authority. Authority comes from God, and those that are in authority must be respected if good governance is to take root in Liberia. When respect to authority is exercised, the youths of the nation will lay the foundation of good governance and peace for the future.

While youths are expected to positively support the efforts of our leaders through respect and dedication, the leaders in turn have to ensure that the youths are brought up in an environment where the rule of law comes first and corruption and other practices are not part of the governing process. The government is to ensure that the court system is well in place so that it can serve as a center to give right to those who seek justice. The security sector must also be improved as a means of governance. The extra powers of the police or the military will have to be checked. The security must be seen as a place of hope and not frustration.

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Protection must be given to those who are engaged in trade and commerce in Liberia. Tax laws that hold back progress in the business area must be reviewed and corrected. Free speech and a free press are very important elements of any good governance structure. These issues must be respected at all times. The youths must be encouraged to express their views on critical national issues at all times without any form of intimidation or molestation.

Youths are to constantly monitor the acts of government and condemn acts that might bring embarrassment to the governing process. This can be done through youth leadership groups who in every aspect are the previous jewels of the nation. Youths are to condemn any form of forced enlistment in any subversive military activity against constituted authority. As part of the good governance process, youths are expected to render voluntary services in the areas of health, sanitation, and community development in their respective communities. Youths should therefore work towards making other meaningful contributions through peace, conflict resolution, and development to the society and that should be felt wherever they may go as the leaders of tomorrow. These positive attitudes will make youths to love their country and be prepared for leadership role through examples.

The essence of this essay has been to discuss Youth Leadership through Conflict Resolution, Peace Building and Governance. In this essay, I have discussed the role of youths in the prevention of conflict through dialogue and acceptance of others. The experience of our civil war has taught us a lesson to see the need to maintain peace by developing the attitude of respect for the rule of law and constituted authority, as well as ensuring that good governance is practiced both by the youths and the leaders of the state through a strong social, democratic and legal system. When the action of the youths of Liberia is directed in the few positive points made above, the role of the youths in leadership, conflict resolution, peace building, and governance will be strengthened.