



Association of Firestone Residents in the Americas (AFIRA)
P. O. B o x 4 8 6
S u n P r a i r i e, W I 5 3 5 9 0

7/8/2023

INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF SAMUEL S.S. KIEH AS PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF FIRESTONE RESIDENTS IN THE AMERICAS (AFIRA) -LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Mr. Brad Richey – Keynote Speaker of the 8th Annual National Convention of AFIRA

Mrs. Chris Quiqui – Our installing officer and President of the Liberian Community of Kentucky & Southern Indiana/members of the Community Here present

Our Special Invited Guests: Dr. Sam Vorkpor and Dr. Joe Smith

Reverend George M. Warner, Chairman of the Advisory Board and members of the AB

Madam Cecelia Brown-Badio, Vice President of AFIRA and my fellow Executive Committee Members

My second to none dignified, distinguished, respectable members of the Association of Firestone Residents in the Americas (AFIRA)

Fellow Liberians, my dear Brothers and Sisters

I must begin my inaugural remarks by giving all praise, honor, and gratitude to the Almighty God from whom all good things come; who has brought us thus far for the last 15 years. Though our gathering this weekend in Louisville is being held under the auspices of the 8th Annual Convention and Reunion, our beloved AFIRA is 15 years old this month. Happy 15th Anniversary to all of you our members.

Let me use this medium to express our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to Madam Diana Sinue-Flemister, Chair of the AFIRA 2023 Louisville Convention and Reunion, Mr. Frederick Flemister and the entire Flemister family for their hospitality and warm welcome; our dynamic and able VP, Madam Cecelia Brown- Badio – Co-Chair of the 2023 Convention and our members of Region III for your hard work and tireless efforts in planning this year's convention and reunion as we recognize that hosting such a program entails a lot of sacrifices of time, efforts, and resources.

Though my wife is a member of the Association as well, but I must take this time to thank Mrs. Fata Watson-Kieh and our 4 boys for her and their unconditional support as we all try our best to work together not only to reach back individually, but to give back collectively to our Country Liberia in general and our beloved Firestone Community in particular.

To all our members (Alvin Logan, Sarah Lawrence, Selestine Salifu, Rebecca Chinco Zergbo, Raymond Flomo) as well as well-wishers (Weewee Zergbo, Helen Garwo, Mrs. Alvin Logan, Mrs. Augustine Morlue, Mr. Frederick Flemister) attending the convention for the first time, we extend you warm welcome and thank you for taking time off your busy schedules to be here.

Amidst the prevailing circumstances in this country creating constraints on financial and economic resources, your presence at this year's gathering is a clear manifestation of the love and commitment that you have for our common heritage- Firestone. We are also very grateful to all our members who for one reason or another could not be able to join us in person this year. We miss your presence here and pray that you will be able to join us next year. Since our ascendancy to the leadership of this unique organization, you have accorded us your unconditional cooperation and support. For that we are grateful.

I recognize that any of you are competent to lead this organization because we are children of Firestone and there has never, ever been a shortage of qualified and competent leaders amongst us. I, therefore, am indelibly grateful to you my fellow AFIRIANS for the continued confidence that you have reposed in our ability to lead this organization for another two (2) years. Thank you for your vote of confidence – I do not take it for granted. That is exactly why since our ascendancy to the leadership of this unique Association, we have taken our responsibilities seriously as a mark of justifying your confidence. Do not take my word for it – where is the evidence, where is the scorecard, where is the assessment, where is the evaluation that our administration over the last 2 years has justified your vote of confidence?? Look no further: what is the 'State of Affairs' of AFIRA?? I am proud and delighted to report to this convention and to all our supporters, well wishers and benefactors that **THE STATE OF AFFAIRS OF AFIRA IS STRONG, VIBRANT, IMPRESSIVE AND IS GETTING BIGGER AND BETTER.**

WHY IS THE STATE OF AFFAIRS OF AFIRA 'STRONG AND IMPRESSIVE?'

During the installation of our administration on July 10, 2021, in the great state of Minnesota, city of Brooklyn Park, we presented this leadership's platform contained in the Four Point Plan of Action aka 4 Pt. POA. Let us hold ourselves accountable by scoring the progress we have made on the POA:

1. **COMPLETION OF AFIRA'S SIGNATURE PROJECT – THE COTTON TREE PUBLIC LIBRARY IN AN APPRECIABLE TIMEFRAME IN 2022. [DONE]**
I need not bore you with the details of the Library Project, but I am very proud and delighted to report to you that on April 15, 2023 in the city of Cotton Tree, Lower Margibi County, Republic of Liberia – the doors to the first modern library were opened and dedicated to the people of Cotton Tree and the entire Firestone community and its surroundings and hence the people of lower Margibi County. Fundings for the construction of this project were provided principally by members of AFIRA. An undertaking that is uncharacteristic of many Liberian organizations. Since its opening, the library has been serving as more than just a learning center for our school children but also as a safe gathering space for our community members to connect, explore, and build relationships.
2. **CONTINUE CONTACTS /CONSULTATIONS WITH EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER FOUNDATIONS THAT AID IN FURNISHING AND EQUIPPING LIBRARIES AND OTHER LEARNING CENTERS IN 3rd WORLD COUNTRIES [ONGOING]** (Edutopia. MDT Foundation. Books for Africa. St. Stephen's Foundation, etc)

These entities will require verifiable evidence that the physical infrastructure is completed before they assess and determine how much assistance they can provide. Today, I am excited to report that the St. Stephen's Foundation has asked me to make arrangements to pick up 7 cartoons of modern books in various subjects with an additional 1000 pieces of assorted books to be ready for pick up in the month of August. I must also extend our gratitude to our Sister Patricia Deoud who recently purchased 3 laptops to be used in our computer room. Our thanks and appreciation also to Mrs. Fatima Johnson-Garwo who was able to secure 18 desktop computers for the library. Thanks also to Mr. Emmanuel Ujay Porte who was able to obtain some assorted books to be used as reference materials at the library. Contacts and consultations remain ongoing as. Stay tuned...

3. **UNDERTAKE A VIGOROUS RECRUITMENT EXERCISE TO INCREASE OUR MEMBERSHIP BY AN UPPER TRESHOLD OF 25% WITHIN THE FIRST 90 DAYS OF OUR ADMINISTRATION[**DONE**]**

Our many thanks to Ms. Esther Garwo and all the members of the Membership and Mobilization Committee as well as each one of you who heeded the administration's call of 'each one bring one.' At the time that this exercise was launched, the target was to recruit 7 new members in order to meet the 25% realization. We remain very proud to report that in less than 60 days of the administration, we met and exceeded the target of 7 new members. The Membership and Mobilization Committee will provide exact details of the number of new members who have been recruited in the last 1 year. Please let us continue to market and advertise our Association and increase our membership as this organization belongs to all of us and the more people we bring on board, the more help we could be to our brothers and sisters back in Firestone by undertaking more projects of consequence.

4. **SOLICIT AND DEVISE IDEAS ON ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INCOME/REVENUES TO SUSTAIN THE ASSOCIATION AND UNDERTAKE OTHER FUTURE PROJECTS [**ONGOING**]**

This administration is indelibly grateful to the Planning and Social Committee under the chairpersonship of Mrs. Barnelia Kumeh-Goll and especially Dr. Beyan Sana who has suggested and led many successful fundraising activities on behalf of the Association. We also express a deep debt of gratitude to Marie Scott who initiated the 'birthday donations to AFIRA' Project that has helped raise some money for the organization. However, none of these would have been possible without the generous support of all our members. **THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH.** Detailed information on how much was generated from these efforts will be contained in the financial report...

Fellow Members, with this scorecard of all our first term priorities either completed or headed in the right direction, **WHAT THEN IS OUR ADMINISTRATION'S PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS?** I now present you our leadership's platform contained in the Three Point Plan of Action aka 3 Pt. POA:

1. UNDERTAKE A CAMPAIGN TO PURCHASE SOLAR PANELS TO RUN OUR COMPUTERS, AIR CONDITIONERS, LIGHTS, WATER PUMP AND OTHER EQUIPMENT AT THE LIBRARY
2. SOLICIT MEDICAL/EDUCATIONAL SUPPLIES AS WELL AS OTHER RESOURCES TO MEET SOME OF OUR COMMIMENTS MADE TO CLINICS/SCHOOLS IN THE FIRESTONE COMMUNITY AND ITS SURROUNDINGS AND THE HARBEL COMMUNITY CHURCH. FOR SOME OF US HERE WHOSE FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH FORMAL EDUCATION WAS IN KINDERGARTEN AT THE CLUBHOUSE WITH TEACHER/MOTHER EVA WILLIAMS – KINDERGARTEN AS YOU KNEW IT IS NO MORE. IT IS NOW NEAR CAMP 3 IN A BUILDING THAT CAN PASS FOR ABANDONED AND DILIPADATED. HER DAUGHTER SISTER EPHEMIA SAMBOLA IS STRUGGLING TO KEEP THE LEGACY GOING. SHE NEEDS HELP.
3. IN FURTHERANCE OF OUR EFFORTS TO CONTINUE TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE FIRESTONE COMMUNITY AT HOME – IDENTIFY WAYS TO COLLABORATE WITH LIKE MINDED ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS FIRESTONE DESCENDANTS ASSOCIATION (FIDA) AND DEVELOP OUR SPORTING TOURNAMENT INTO AN ANNUAL EVENT THAT WILL BRING SCHOOLS TOGETHER TO COMPETE FOR TROPHIES AND OTHER PRIZES.

Fellow members, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen – the needs in our country are many, but the laborers are few. We cannot be all things to all people – but we can be something to some people. There is always room and opportunity for improvement. Will you join me in BUILDING A BETTER AFIRA TOGETHER?

LONG LIVE AFIRA, MAY GOD BLESS THE WORKS OF OUR HANDS AS WE STRIVE TO CHANGE THE LIVES OF MANY BY BUILDING A BETTER AFIRA TOGETHER.

MAY GOD BLESS EACH OF YOU.

THANK YOU!!!

Samuel S. S. Kieh
President - AFIRA