



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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MARYLAND/LIBERIA SISTER STATES DELEGATION TO TRAVEL TO LIBERIA ON A FACT FINDING MISSION

Annapolis/A delegation of business, civic, and education leaders will visit the Republic of Liberia

June 6 - June 15, 2008. The delegation plans to officially consummate the State of Maryland, USA/Republic of Liberia Sister States relationship. This relationship was established on August 27, 2007 via a Memorandum of Understanding signed by Maryland (USA) Governor Martin O'Malley and Liberia's Superintendents Ranney Jackson and Sie Teba Neufville of Bong and Maryland Counties. (refer to list of delegation members)

This trip will foster our relationships and is aimed to revitalize the historic ties between the State of Maryland and the Republic of Liberia. The goal of the mission is to provide the participants with first-hand information, access to government officials and one-on-one meetings with leaders from Liberia's business, education, arts and healthcare communities.

On June 10, 2008 the delegation will meet with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. Johnson-Sirleaf is the first elected female president in the history of Africa. In January of this year, the Liberia Sister States Program launched its first project by sending a team of engineers from Engineers Without Borders to conduct an assessment of Liberia's roads and infrastructure.

"This is definitely exciting. The Liberia Sister States Program is the newest and most accomplished. It is the only sister state relationship with Liberia, and Maryland's first with the continent of Africa," said Mendy Nitsch, who also serves

as Executive Director of International Affairs for the Office of the Secretary of State.

Liberia, known as the gateway to West Africa, has an extensive historical relationship with the State of Maryland. In the 1830's the Maryland legislature created the Maryland State Colonization Society and allocated \$200,000 to return freed blacks to Africa. Those freed blacks settled in Maryland County, Liberia.

A country rich in natural resources, Liberia suffered a costly civil war in the last century for almost twenty years under the authoritarian rule of Charles Taylor. Since the inauguration of President Johnson-Sirleaf on January 16, 2006, the Harvard educated economist has brought massive economic resources to her nation to reinvest in the new Liberia. The United States has assisted in this effort by providing debt forgiveness to Liberia.

"This trip symbolizes more than a mission, it is an historic journey for us. Our forefathers took incredible risks as trailblazers to build a nation. We follow in their footsteps as modern day trailblazers to help rebuild Liberia." said Sharon Pinder, Executive Chair of Maryland/Liberia Sister States Program and leader of the mission.

Pinder knows intimately the value of the relationship between the Maryland and Liberia. About a decade ago while volunteering as Education Committee Chair for the Woodholme Foundation – an at risk youth scholarship organization – she met a young female political refugee named Biah. Pinder and her husband took the young Liberian into their home and adopted her. Today, Biah holds a BS in Public Health from Delaware State and is a Registered Nurse at the Washington Hospital Center. This is her first trip home since she witnessed the massacre of her family.

THE DELEGATION From the State of Maryland (USA):

1. **Sharon R. Pinder**, *Executive Chair – MD/Liberia Sister States Program*
CEO of The Pinder Group www.thepindergroup.com
2. **Dr. Robert L. Wallace**, *Chair – Commerce and Infrastructure Sub-committee*
President and CEO of the BithGroup; www.bithgroup.com
3. **Dr. P. Bai Akridge**, *Chair –Education Sub-committee*
Interim Executive Director of Higher Education for Development (HED); www.hedprogram.org
4. **Biah Kun**,
Registered Nurse -Washington Hospital Center; www.whcenter.org
5. **Dr. Joseph T. Isaac**, www.bccc.edu
Executive Director, Baltimore City Community College;

6. **Morris T. Koffa**, www.liberiaenvironmentalwatch.org
Environmental Engineer, Department of the Environment,
Government of the District of Columbia;
7. **Dr. Emmanuel Acquah**, www.umes.edu
Executive Director for International Programs,
University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES);
8. **Luana Christine Kiandoli**, www.wramc.amedd.army.mil
Chief Medical Technologist, Walter Reed Army Medical Center;
9. **Annette Smith Rich**,
CEO Rich Roofing, LLC
10. **Senator (Retired) Michael Bowen Mitchell**, Bowen Enterprises

The Liberia Sister States Program consists of 40 volunteer citizens and some other members include: Dr. Alain Damiba, Vice President of JHEIPIGO, a Johns Hopkins Medical Affiliate; Dr. David Terry, Executive Director of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum; Charles Minor, Ambassador of Liberia; Anthony Robinson, Esq., Executive Director of the Maryland Business Enterprise Legal Defense and Education Fund (MBELDEF); Shelonda Stokes CEO of greiBo media; Nancy Wallace, High Street Partners; Dr. George Reid, MD Higher Ed Commission ; Darrel Mobley, Engineer SHA; Dr. John Aje, UMUC; Lou Haber, CEO Distribution Postal; Daubney Cooper, LDIF; Roberta Brown, Leader of the Marylanders for Progress and Mike Posko, Chief Administrative Officer of Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse. Posko was one of the engineers deployed in January to conduct the infrastructure assessment.

The Maryland Sister States program is part of the International Division of the Maryland's Secretary of State's Office. The award-winning Maryland Sister States Program was established in 1980 to provide a forum for the promotion of international cooperation and understanding. Through broad-based citizen participation in a wide variety of exchanges in areas of mutual interest, the Sister States Program offers opportunities to develop partnerships around the world. The Liberia Sister State Relationship is one of ten relationships on five continents. It is the first with the continent of Africa. Others include China, Japan, France, Korea, Poland, Russia, Mexico, Belgium, and Brazil.

For more information on the Sisters States Program, contact Mendy Nitsch, Director of International Affairs of the Secretary of State's Office at 410-260-3865.

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