

**A National Youth statement to eliminate the abuse of illicit drugs and substance abuse.
In commemoration of the International Day Against-Drugs abuse and illicit trafficking
YMCA of Liberia**

**Presented by: Ebenezer Saah Davies
President
National Youth Council of YMCA, Liberia**

Today June 26, 2023 marks another year to increase global awareness against illicit trafficking of drugs and harmful substance. It is observed to strengthen actions and cooperation in achieving a world free of drugs.

We are aware that the world drugs problem is a complex issue that affect millions of people, we remain keen and set ourselves to act, support policy to influence change and curb the negative effects that drugs pose. What set us apart becomes our attitude towards the problems that confront us.

Liberia is no exception to this menace. It is sad to note that few years ago, a study showed that Illicit Drugs and substance abuse was estimated to have 2 in every 10 youth in Liberia as users of narcotic substances. As each day passes, 3 in every 5 youth across our country will continue to account for direct and indirect involvement of drugs and substance abuse or being a victim of drug abuse.

We regret to inform you that we are losing the war focused on protecting the future. The value possessed in every youth cannot be harnessed with the prevalence of drugs abuse. The value in our youth cannot yield results when the ghettos become recreational center for our young people. The future we foresee in the youth of tomorrow is crumbling because of the effects of drugs. Kush has become a name in common places for the wrong reason.

It would interest you to note that Liberia has turned to a significant transit point of illicit narcotics. Our borders are porous, limited logistics supplies for law enforcers, the issues of security trust, abuse of power, no stringent law to curb the abuse and importation.

In 2022 October, it was a joyous news for all of us that a 100Million drugs was busted through the help of the US Embassy, and the joint security forces. There were hopes that people could be made to account for their actions. To us, the acquittal remains one of the worst news to have ever hit the country since the founding of this nation. The acquittal remains and undermine the huge fight against drug trafficking. The acquittal sends out a signal that our justice system, ports and borders are the best options for free passages to always be used for trafficking. The acquittal will continue to hunt our image as a country to now be seen like a drug-towing nation. By far the biggest hub and epic center for drugs.

We remain devastated that the wrong precedent has been set, a message that thugs can always come to Liberia, trade drugs at a free will and pleasure, when caught, the case get easily subjected for a non-guilty verdict.

It is glaring that anyone can ascribe and equate the drug case to the manner at which we deal with cases of corruptions based on friendship and interest. We have treated cases of sanctions as joke and have continued to present people with quantum character issues on a bid for key positions that remained tied to the country's future.

Now therefore, the Youth of YMCA moved and present a call to actions for the following: Youth accounts for over 75% of our population.

1. In as much as we focus more on first time voter, it's paramount that we do the same for first time users through actions that provide more information to discourage participation and involvement; Now therefore we call on the government through the Ministry of Education; the National Parents and Teachers Associations, Civil society organizations to assess the possibility to include into our national curriculum, the awareness on illicit drugs and substance abuse to enhance youth understanding on threats, the risks, and discuss grassroots solutions that discourage drug abuse.
In this vein we invest more in drugs-free clubs at our various schools etc.
2. That the fight against illicit drugs and substance abuse prevalent among youth of Liberia reflects a low scale involvement, now therefore, we use this medium to call for speed/fast, critical review that serve real life happenings for reform in the drugs policy and the passage of the National Drugs Law to justify national approach. We caution that the law also covers with harsh punishment for law enforcers, law makers who work directly and indirectly to contravene the laws for profiting, greed, interest, etc. if we will rebuild our image, we must deal with the interest, the 'alleged big hands, the cartels' etc. We must speak against lip service and any form of partisan attachment around the fight against drugs and substance abuse.
3. That we see illicit drugs and substance abuse as a national health issue, as we have jointly fought and defeated EBOLA, COVID, the same approach, attention, social distancing be applied to the fight of drugs and substance abuse.
4. That the government harness a people-centered approach on issues of prevention and treatment, justice.
5. That the government of Liberia increase its investment by providing more annexes to the Esther grant Hospital, a rehabilitation center for drugs and must be assessable in every county. As a country, we cannot continue to boost of 80 bedrooms in the only government facility providing treatment for victims. We call on the government to lead by examples and invest more in rehabilitation at all levels.
6. We cannot underestimate the effects of stigmatization; naming and shamming for victims across our homes. It is time we move to name and shame drugs traffickers, ghettos owners, cartels, hidden marketplaces. Our actions would support a community-based approach that reduces the work of law enforcers and put them on top of their games. '

7. The fight against illicit drugs abuse would make a difficult gain when users and traffickers are serving as law enforcers, policy makers etc. We use this platform to call the government of Liberia, the 54th legislature the National Elections Commission, to set-up a compulsory drug-free test as additional requirements for all candidates seeking accreditations for public officers. It's saddened that medical reports are easily manipulated to fit a specific circumstance.
8. We call on the government of Liberia to establish or setup National Anti-Drugs and Substance Abuse Ambassador (a person of influence/an icon) fuel it with support as the Peace Ambassador to lead and support anti campaign that safe-guide youth from drugs.

This is presented in the interest of over 75% youth population and the interest of those who have fallen prey and are hoping for redemption to get rehabilitated into society.

Let's us all join the fight against drugs in Liberia. It is time to Act now.!