

“Gui-lah Non-Deh-wah-manh!”

A speech delivered in the Krahn Language at the 9th Annual Convention of the
Konobo Statutory District in the Americas

by



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(Above the theatre maestro performs as the minstrel in His “The Minstrel’s tales”

Centennial Memorial Pavilion, Monrovia 1992)

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Introduction

Chairman and members of the Board of Directors of the Konobo Statutory District in the Americas, Mr. President and officials of the national and local chapters of the Grand Gedeh Associations in the Americas, representatives of various county chapters, elders and citizens of Liberia and nationals from around the globe, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Tonight, my speech will be delivered in my native tongue, the Krahn language of Liberia. Later, I will summarize my speech and interpret it in English for those who do not understand Krahn. I am doing this to start a new literary and cultural revolution that will showcase respect and love for our rich cultural heritage and at the same time help us preserve what our forefathers have handed down to us over many thousands of years ago. Hence, in order to do this we must start from somewhere and that *somewhere* is tonight at the 9th Annual Convention of the Konobo Statutory District.

However, before I begin my lecture tonight, please permit me to salute all the illustrious sons and daughters of Konobo District for inviting me to be your keynote speaker. For, it is widely believed that **“If your own house does not sell you, outsiders will not buy you!”** Accordingly, I am exceedingly thrilled by your invitation and I hope the message I have coined out for all of us will inspire you to love your culture and history. Consequently, it is my expectation as well that you will do all within your powers (individually and collectively) to preserve our Krahn /Liberian heritage. For, we all originate from a particular heritage not of our own making but through divine providence. Therefore, what God has put together, let no man take asunder. Let us be united for in “union strong success is sure”!

Why I Stress the Importance of Speaking Our Traditional Languages in Public Gatherings

The reason why I stress the importance of speaking our traditional languages at public gatherings is because anyone who wishes to become the leader of his people should be willing and able to speak the language spoken by the people he or she wants to lead or represent in government. It may ensure and facilitate effective communication feedback mechanisms and prevent miscommunication between the ruled and their rulers. I stress this point also because too often Liberian politicians address their constituents and supporters in high flowing English (a foreign and ‘**official**’ language in Liberia) with no concern expressed whatsoever as to whether or not their messages are getting across to their constituents. As a result, the masses are left out of the loop: they go home from political rallies and/or listen to annual ‘messages’ delivered by the President of Liberia without understanding over 80% of what the President says. **Yet, they are the ‘people’ for whom and by whom the government is supposed to be run.**

In the final analysis, the people for whom the messages were intended are duped and so the policy of “**So say one, so say all**” endures throughout our history because what the *one person* (speaker) says in English is not interpreted in the languages of the masses that are being addressed by the speaker. For this reason, the constituents are unable to make informed decisions about policies that affect their daily lives. In other words, I strongly argue that the process of using a foreign language (English) that majority of the citizens of Liberia cannot read or write, is in fact one of our fundamental cultural problems that need to be immediately addressed.

Gui-lah Non-deh-wor-manh!

The title of my speech tonight comes from a Krahn parable that states: “**Gui-lah non-deh-worh-manh; yeh-wor, orh manh-orh-nan jonoon-do-dweh**”!

When literally interpreted, the above expression means: “The old one has nothing but his or her snuff cup”. Here, snuff cup represents the wisdom of the elderly. This belief came into being because back in the day majority of our wise old men and women widely used snuff cups to sniff their tobacco in order to put themselves in the right frame of mind so as to share words of wisdom with us. Thus, what this expression fully means is that: **never overlook an elder. He or she may not have all the wealth in the world to give you; but he or she may have wisdom that when shared with and warmly received by the young, it may lead to long life and prosperity in the near future for the young ones.** So, tonight, I am the old man with nothing but words of wisdom to share with you. Are you willing to listen to this gui-lah that has nothing? If it is okay with you, then let us proceed.

Once upon a Time!

Beyah-beyah omh po-dayh-garlayh, garlayh po-dayh dor-nah! The response is: “**Hin-junh**”! All this simply means “Once upon a time” followed by the response of the audience in the Krahn language. What a marked difference of communication between the two languages! However, let us continue with the story.

Once there lived all the animals in animal land. At that time Rooster was the chief of all animals. He was respected and adored by all animals, including human beings. All the animals feared Rooster because he had a red comb on the top of his head that seemed like lightning and a blazing fire to the animals. So the

animals ran away from Rooster when he approached them because the animals thought that the red comb over Rooster's head was lightning. Also, when Rooster crowed back in the day it sounded like thunder. For this reason, Rooster lived a majestic life while all the animals served him as their master.

But check this out!, Even though the red comb on Rooster's forehead was not a real fire as the rest of the animals had thought, only Rooster knew that secret but nobody else. However, one fine day Rooster, "Mr. Charlie Gboogor", burst out his own secret that nobody knew! It happened that one day Spider befriended Rooster because Spider wanted to know why an animal carried a flame of fire on top of its head and never got burned. It was at this time that Rooster confided in Spider, not knowing the grave consequences that would follow.

"Don't tell anyone" Rooster cautioned Spider. "What I have on my forehead is not fire; it is piece of my flesh. Feel it"

And Spider felt Rooster's comb and found out it was not fire!

By the break of the next day all the animals had found out Rooster's secret and since then Rooster became an ordinary animal like the rest of the others because he revealed his own secret to his enemies!

Interpretation of My Story

One good thing about African folklore is that they can be interpreted in so many different ways to suit the occasion. Hence, for an example, it is safe to assume that in the story above Konobo District is Rooster and Spider the greedy sons and daughters of the District and of Liberia, respectively. The individuals in question breached their culture and history in order to get a few shillings from foreign investors who come to exploit and not to develop our land.

As we all know Konobo District is of great significance to the Krahn people as are the other two districts (Tchien and Gbarzon). Konobo District comprises the Konobos, Twabos, Glios, and Putu people in Grand Gedeh County. Apart from the Gedeh Mountain that is located in that region of Grand Gedeh, Konobo District is respected for their great ancient masks, such as **Dweh-gleh** from Konobo, and **Gbay-gleh** from Putu; as well as the **Twabo "blon-nyloon"**. The Glios are great elephant hunters.

All these beautiful Krahn people were instructed by God, as were the rest of the other Krahn sects and all traditional ethnic groups in Liberia, to live together in peace and harmony. This has been the rule of law since the inception of forefathers' entry into the promised land called Grand Gedeh County. Also, the county was named Grand Gedeh and not "Grand Putu County" in order to honor the sacred mountain called Mount Gedeh that God put in our midst. For this reason, our ancestor went to make burned sacrifices to Yousuah at the foot of the Gedeh Mountain in ancient times.

The Gedeh Mountain Is a National Treasure and Shrine

The Gedeh Mountain is a national treasure and shrine, therefore, no one set of people in Grand Gedeh County or in Liberia can solely lay claim to the Gedeh Mountain, despite the fact that that national treasure is located in the Putu region of Konobo District in Grand Gedeh County. From time immemorial, the mountain in Konobo District has always been called "Gedeh Troo" (Gedeh Mountain) by all Krahns and not "Putu Troo" (Putu Mountain) as detractors of the Krahn people have coined in modern time. Mount Gedeh has always been a symbol of God's existence among all Krahns; and, people from other ethnic groups traveled hundreds of miles to consult with the Oracle at Putu in yesteryears. An oracle is a soothsayer, a sage, or a visionary. The Oracle at Putu lived at the foot of the Gedeh Mountain in the Putu region of Konobo District and people came from all walks of life with their problems to consult with the Oracle at Putu in order to find answers to their queries.

Signs of 'Divide and Rule' by the Status Quo

Regrettably in recent times there have been signs of 'divide and rule' by the status quo in collaboration with some greedy sons of Konobo District that fronted as 'legitimate' custodians of the Gedeh Mountain. And, in order to do this, these sons argued that Gedeh Mountain was no longer called Gedeh Mountain but "Putu Mountain" instead. Yes, it cannot be denied the Putu people live in proximity to the Gedeh Mountain but Gedeh Mountain was a sacred site for all of us the Krahn people and all Liberians that came from faraway lands to consult with the Oracle at Putu. For this reason, whether you live underneath or on top of the Gedeh Mountain, it does not give any group of persons the right to change the name of a sacred mountain after which the

great County of Grand Gedeh was named. That, in and of itself, is an abomination. Therefore, a sacrifice must be made to restore our heritage and respect for the Gedeh Mountain!

Besides, let it be made categorically clear and known that the Gedeh Mountain is a national treasure that belongs to the government and people of Liberia and not solely to the Krahn people or any group of Liberian politicians and gravy seekers. As such, all Liberians are entitled to benefit from the resources derived from the exploitation of the Gedeh Mountain, just as all Liberians benefited in the past from Bomi Hills before it became “**Bomi Holes**”, or from Mount Nimba, and the Bong Mountain, respectively, when these mountains were being exploited by foreign investors in the past. In view of the foregoing, there is a dire need to renegotiate the contract that was signed between Liberian government officials and the so-called Putu Iron Ore Incorporated that were ridiculously awarded huge portions of the expected proceeds while Grand Gedehians and the rest of the Liberian people are left in the cold. This is unacceptable. Therefore, I ask that the contract be re-negotiated forthwith to make sure that the best interest of the Liberian people and nation is secured!

Stop the Blaming Game Because Your Own Sons and Daughters Are the Ones Killing You!

Over and over again most Liberians have been playing the blame game. Those from the indigenous sect have argued that the Congor and Americo-Liberian people are responsible for their suffering. However, what they have failed to realize is that today their own children are the ones who are also in power, most of them lawmakers. These native lawmakers sit supinely and watch their parents, brothers and sisters and fellow countrymen and women daily die of hunger and diseases: they go without food; without good hospitals and paved roads; without electricity; and no safe drinking water. Also, what most indigenous Liberians fail to realize today is that the majority of our lawmakers are sons and daughters of native descent. They outnumber the Americo-Liberians in the Legislature, so stop the blaming game because your own sons and daughters are the ones killing you.!

So, if these native sons and daughters were truly patriotic and if they have feelings for their mothers who sold bitter balls at Rally Time to send them to school; or, if they have love for their fathers who brushed farms to grow crops to feed them and to pay their school fees when they were in school, then how come the same system for which we have blamed the Congors and Americo-Liberians still lingers on? How come there has been no change in the lives of ordinary

Liberians when Country men and women in the Legislature have the power to redeem their own mothers and fathers from economic, social, and political degradation or suffering by passing laws that will bring about positive change in Liberia?

How come these so-called sons and daughters of native descent sit in Legislature year in and year out without passing one bill to curb corruption and/or to make sure roads leading to their villages and towns where their constituents live are paved; or that hospitals and schools in their various constituencies are well equipped? So, stop the blaming game and talk to your sons and daughters who are suppressing you! Do not vote for them because they are your relatives or friends or because they bribe you with money. Rather, be firm in your decision to elect your next set of leaders by finding out what their contributions have been in the past.

Your Votes May Make a Difference in 2017

2017 is a very crucial time in our nation's history. At that time, Liberians will again be going to the polls to vote for their new leaders. Therefore, the decision you make at the polls in 2017 will make a vast difference in bringing about the change we want. It will either prolong or curtail our suffering. But in order to be successful at the polls we must be united with one purpose: to get out of office those who have suppressed us over the years in order to put in a new batch of devoted and patriotic public servants that will put Liberia above their personal interests. I advise that you do not be like the frogs that ended up electing Black Snake as their President of Frogsville simply because the frogs hated each other. That is why I say your vote will make a difference in 2017 because if you make the right decision, we may all be able to get back on our feet again, instead of one set of people eating while the majority starves. If we truly believe we want progress in Liberia, then we must cast our votes not for those that bribe us with a few dollars and cents and then leave us to suffer later after they have achieved their political objectives. But rather, we must support those who like the old ones have nothing but their snuff cups or wisdom to share with us. Thus, through their wisdom and love for country and fellow countrymen and women, we may all benefit and make progress together.

Conclusion

I would like to close by saying a big "Thank you" to the officers and members of Konobo District for their support and for inviting me to be your guest speaker. Remember that "**Gui-lah non-deh-worh-manh; yeh-wor, orh manh-orh-nan jonoon-do-dweh**"! I thank you.