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Monrovia, 18-31 August 1964

STATEMENT OF
DR. WILLIAM V.S. TUEMAN
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

Mr. Chairman, Officers and Members of the United Nations
Conference on Social Defense, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Your presence in this part of Africa at this time is indicative of the United Nations' concern and interest in the welfare, safety and progress of Nations and Peoples everywhere regardless of clime, coast, race or creed. It therefore gives me great pleasure to extend to you a welcome on behalf of the Government and people of Liberia that emanates from a genuine feeling of fraternity, happiness and cordiality. It is our hope that your deliberations and decisions will see fruition in the attainment of practical formulas that will retard and diminish, if not halt, the great danger implicit in juvenile delinquency.

Mankind today lives in grave concern and in some degree of uncertainty about the security of life, limb and property due to the mounting wave of crime throughout the World. Juvenile delinquency has become a tragic phenomenon, and there is decidedly an

alarming deterioration in moral values. The allocation of a considerable percentage of the resources of Nations for the prevention of crime, the vast sums expended to track down criminals and bring them to justice, the number of institutions built for reformatory purposes and the vast programs for rehabilitation of wrongdoers, are facts known to everyone present here. These social evils are coeval with the history of civilization, but even after centuries of crime and the meeting out of punishment, the deterrents provided by society have not succeeded in stopping or diminishing the commission of crime. In fact, it is alleged that progress in civilization seems to have worked as much for the criminal as it has for society as a whole, since modern methods of communication and transportation are valuable assets in the organization of crime. The part which newspapers, novels, detective stories, the movies, the radio and television play, falls into the same category of mixed blessings. Obviously there is need today for a new social philosophy which will focus more on the latent good in the individual rather than emphasize his evil inclinations.

I have often wondered why Robin Hood, the famous outlaw, became the hero of pageant, myth, story and play. His courage

and fairness in outlawry made him the incarnation of beloved banditry, and dating from the days of the crusades the gangster idealization has come down to the present as a handover from the romantic life of that outlaw. What a strange contradiction of values at a time and in a society where we profess to set so much premium on the dignity of the individual!

What effective measures can society take to protect itself and ensure the happiness and security of its members? What kind of civic and religious instructions can we promulgate that these evils of society might be stamped out and the abilities and capabilities of man sublimated toward constructive ends? How can we psychologically condition the minds of youth to the fact that crime does not pay and that the way of honour is the only acceptable path that leads to recognized fame and fortune? Why is the crime wave rising in our society, especially among the youth today, when so much more is being offered them than ever before in the history of mankind? Unless we can find satisfactory and practical answers to these questions, we may be laboring in vain.

Statistics are appalling, but it is startling to realize that in almost every corner of the world today a picture of the reckless and daring gangster is being engraved in the idealizing

mind of the youngsters who, for the love of adventure and curiosity, begin to imitate these traits. Will the criminal or the Police win out in the end? Discouraging as this may sound, we know that organized Police of today have greater opportunities to combat professional crime, although a lot of this will be up to the attitude of the Public.

We may wonder whether to paint the criminal in his real light in the newspapers, to destroy his glamor in motion pictures, or to revise the story of Robin Hood, the debunking of the modern imaginary concept of the criminal. This may be a step forward, but more personal interest in and emphasis on family life and the rearing of children, insistence by parents and guardians upon the moral and spiritual values rather than the material; corrective measures by parents, institutions of learning and other organizations that have to do with the training and alluring of children during their formative and adolescent years, will be and should be the major step toward ridding society of the cankerous sore of crime.

In addition to these, since example is better than precept, parents, Guardians, teachers, and Sunday School Officers should

by their conduct, so win the admiration and respect of the children and youth, that their tendency will be toward emulating the virtuous qualities in parents, teachers and guardians rather than being diverted to delinquency.

It is our hope that in Liberia under the stimulus and guidance provided by the National Youth Organization, the program at Boys' Town in Schiefflin, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guide, the YMCA, YWCA, the Sunday Schools, Bible classes, civic programs and other institutions and programs contemplated to capture the imagination of the young and turn their energies and abilities into creativity and usefulness, this mounting crime wave will be diminished and prevented.

I congratulate the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa under whose auspices this conference is being sponsored and hope that the results achieved here will be fully implemented in time. The Liberian Government and people will do all within their power toward resolving the iniquities of this important social problem. Full cooperation will be given the Economic Commission for Africa and the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations in their endeavour to reform, revitalize and draw out

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the good that is in youth. We shall endeavour to uproot, by every reasonable and legal method that may be practicable, the causes of this evil and end the plague that besets the youth of this age — this dreadful plague which, growing out of the ruthless, irresponsible commercialization of means and media of communication, transportation, entertainment and unprincipled social practices causes them to be lost in the abyss of evil communication and contacts so prevalent in the World today, and which tends to corrupt good morals.

May God prosper the work of your hands for the redemption of the youth of the World.

Monrovia, Liberia
August 18, 1964