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Liberia: 'ONE Liberia' Jola House Host Youth & Women Empowerment Program

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ONE Liberia, a youth-led organization that is focused on youth empowerment and advocacy and Jola House, a social enterprise that empowers and provides income opportunities for women, hosted a Youth & Women Empowerment Awareness Event on Thursday, December 20, 2012 to showcase the work of both organizations.

Jola House, formed in 2012, works to empower women by teaching them how to design and sew and employing them to manufacture for export partners. Jola House currently employs 14 women and has plans to expand to 50 women in 2013.

Mrs. Elfreda Mayson started Jola House Foundation as a non-profit after returning home from the USA and saw realized the need to build the capacity of young women seeking jobs. The challenge was after training those women, there needed to be an outlet for them to work and use their new skills, so she launched Jola House, Inc. Jola House Inc. also works with international partners for distribution, including Voss Foundation which focuses on clean water in Sub-Saharan Africa and Ambler, a Canadian-based apparel company.

"Immediately coming to Liberia, I knew I wanted to work with young women," said Madam Mayson. "I saw the need for education and capacity building and giving women the opportunity to feel empowered. We look at Jola House as the innovation ground for young women to thrive. We are consistently looking for international partners to work with and distribute the products we manufacture, or manufacture products the organizations or companies need in a socially responsible way."

"ONE Liberia, on the other hand, is a youth-led organization started in 2008 and is focused on youth empowerment and advocacy. The organization uses a participatory and volunteer approach to build its base and expand its programs. ONE Liberia currently works in all 17 districts in Montserrado with plans to expand to Nimba, Lofa and Bong in 2013. Working closely with its district coordinators, the organization develops needs-based program that empower young people to solve the critical challenges in their communities.

"We truly believe that the name ONE Liberia is something that everyone could agree with – whether you are from the Bassa, Gio, Lorma, Congo or Kpelle ethnic groups, you would agree that Liberia is ONE! We also felt strongly that this message should be driven by the youth while working with them to create sustainable solutions in their communities," said Taa Wongbe, founder of ONE Liberia. "The people who live in a community understand the challenges and opportunities better than any on else, and are therefore rightly positioned to make changes that are effective and sustainable. We thought that blending community development with a national message of peace and reconciliation would be a win-win for Liberia."

The ONE Liberia model of sustainable long-term development focuses its efforts on the empowerment of socially conscious youth who will emerge as leaders and agents of positive change in Liberia. In 2010, the president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signed the ONE Liberia Unity Pledge and provided an inspirational video for the ONE Liberia National Unification Day Campaign.

The event which was hosted at Tides brought together other youth organizations and members of the press.

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