



The 40th anniversary of The World Conference of Mayors' inaugural meeting in Liberia and the working relationship built highlights the August 21-24 National Black Business Conference in Atlanta

By Walter Pritchard



The 124th National Black Business Conference, August 21-24 in Atlanta, holds special significance as it celebrates the 40th Anniversary of the World Conference of Mayors.

A highlight of this year's conference will be the special guest speaker, President Joseph Boakai, who became the 26th president of the West African country, the Republic of Liberia in January. Boakai's address will be August 23rd at the Pan African Diaspora Business Luncheon.

What is meaningful about President Boakai's visit is that it marks a milestone four decades ago. The World Conference of Mayors hosted its first national conference 40 years ago in Monrovia, the capital and largest city of Liberia.

Johnny Ford, who also served as co-founder of the preceding Black Mayors organization before founding The World Conference of Mayors, expressed his anticipation for this year's event.

"As we celebrate the historic 40th Anniversary of The World Conference of Mayors, we acknowledge the pivotal role Black mayors play in the economic development of cities, towns, and historic settlements," Ford says. "These legacies trace their roots back to the visionary leadership of Booker T. Washington and pave the way for the future of Black Mayors all over the world."

Ford adds that the WCM's relationship with Liberia is alive and well.

"We're still working together with Liberia, and we have a great history with the country," he says. "We're looking forward to building on that with more trade, education, cultural and business exchanges.

"There's a Booker T. Washington school in Liberia," Ford continues. "We want to encourage that school to link with Tuskegee University and other Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)."

The keynote speaker for the inaugural World Conference of Mayors in 1984 was then Liberian President Samuel Kanyon Doe. The gathering was held in a huge coliseum in Monrovia, Liberia.

Doe (May 6, 1951 – September 9, 1990) served as the 21st President of Liberia from 1986 to 1990. He ruled as Chairman of the People's Redemption Council (PRC) from 1980 to 1986 and then as president from 1986 to 1990. A coup began in December 1989 when anti-Doe forces successfully overthrew him. He was later captured and executed.

Ford remembers the turmoil in Liberia at the time because he was there.

"I was in Liberia at the airport getting ready to leave in 1989 during the coup. More than 100,000 people died," Ford recalls. "I got out just in time. I haven't been there since."

Ford adds the visit back to Liberia is in the planning stage for later this year.



The Honorable Johnny Ford

Ford is the former Tuskegee Mayor, now Councilman, President/CEO/Secretary General/Founder of The World Conference of Mayors, Inc. (WCM); Founding President/CEO, Historic Black Towns And Settlements Alliance, Inc. (HB TSA); Former Chair & Board Member, National Black Leadership Commission on Health (Black Health)

The National Alliance for Black Business (2022), co-founded by The National Business League[®] (1900), National Black Chamber of Commerce[®] (1993), and The World Conference of Mayors[®] (1984), is thrilled to cohost the NBL's 124th National Black Business Conference[®].

Anticipated to attract hundreds of Black-owned businesses, professionals, and elected officials from around the globe, the conference will serve as a dynamic platform for networking, knowledge-sharing, and forging strategic partnerships with city, state, national, federal, and global resources, and leadership. The event is hosted by local, Black-led business institutions, including the

Atlanta Business League, Greater Georgia Black Chamber of Commerce, and the Georgia Minority Supplier Development Council.

Part of the National Black Business Conference agenda will spotlight the profound impact of Black mayors in fostering entrepreneurship, economic development, and community growth, echoing the visionary principles championed by Washington. Established in 1984, The World Conference of Mayors serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of Black Mayoral leadership and economic empowerment within Black communities worldwide.

This year also pays homage to 50 years since the Southern Conference of Black Mayors held its inaugural National Conference at the Hilton Atlanta Hotel. Notably, Daniel "Chappy" James, the first four-star Black general in the Air Force and a Tuskegee airman, served as keynote speaker, setting the stage for the remarkable journey of Black elected leadership in the years to come.

The primary objective of The World Conference of Mayors, Inc. is to stimulate positive and constructive relations between mayors internationally, based on interlocking interests and concerns. Through a network of international municipal associations, mayors, and units of local governments, The World Conference of Mayors, Inc. plans designs, and manages a global, intergovernmental communications system, promoting trust, trade, tourism, technology, treasury, training, and twin city programs and services between mayors and cities of the world.

In April 1984, The Honorable Johnny Ford, then Mayor of Tuskegee, Alabama, and President of the National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc. (NCBM), convened mayors from the United States, Asia, the African continent, and the Caribbean Islands, in St. Louis, and organized The World Conference of Mayors, Inc. (WCM). This historic meeting occurred during the NCBM Annual Meeting, and Ford and other African American mayors throughout the United States enthusiastically welcomed the international mayors to St. Louis.

The World Conference of Mayors, Inc. strongly believes that leaders of local government working together can lead to a more peaceful world and facilitate economic prosperity for all. The World Conference of Mayors, Inc. has seven fundamental goals:

TRUST: To establish mutual trust, understanding, and respect between municipal officials around the world.

TRADE: To cultivate working relationships between cities which will lead to maximum trade (imports and exports) as well as investment opportunities.

TOURISM: To stimulate increased tourist travel between cities of the world

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER: To foster the exchange of technical assistance, expertise, and information for the mutual benefit of local governments.

TWIN CITIES: To establish twins of "sister" city relationships that will focus on cultural and educational exchange, thereby promoting goodwill.

TREASURY: To strengthen the cities of the world through effective monetary policies and practices

TRAINING: To train mayors to better manage the cities of the world.