



REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

# JUDICIARY BRANCH



OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR  
JUDICIAL PUBLIC INFORMATION

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**SUPREME COURT OF LIBERIA REACTS TO U.S. TREASURY DEPARTMENT STATEMENT ON  
BRIBERY OF JUDGES BY CLLR. H. VARNEY G. SHERMAN**

On December 9, 2020, International Anti-Corruption Day, the United States Treasury Department, in a statement captioned: “Treasury Sanctions Corrupt Actors in Africa and Asia”, placed the Global Magnitsky Designations on several individuals in some countries including Liberia. In the statement, the United States Treasury Department declared that Counsellor Harry Varney Gboto-Nambi Sherman, a prominent lawyer, Liberian Senator, and Chairman of the Liberian Senate Judiciary Committee, “offered bribes to multiple judges associated with his trial for a 2010 bribery scheme and had an undisclosed conflict of interest with the judge who ultimately returned a not guilty verdict in his favor in 2019. “

The Statement further said that Counsellor Sherman has “routinely paid judges to decide cases in his favor...” and that his “acts of bribery demonstrate a larger pattern of behavior to exercise influence over the Liberian Judiciary and the Ministry of Justice.” The statement, no doubt, casts serious doubts and aspersions not only on the integrity and credibility of the Counsellor named and the judges alluded therein, but also on the Liberian Judiciary as an institution responsible for the fair and impartial hearing and disposition of cases. The statement is of outmost concern to the Judiciary.

Until now the Judiciary Branch, headed by the Supreme Court, has withheld comments and reactions to allow for consultations with the US Embassy near Monrovia for the benefit of receiving more information on the matter. Following these consultations, the Judiciary wishes to make it emphatically clear that as an institution, it has zero tolerance for bribery and all other forms of corrupt practices. As such it does not and will never allow or condone the act of any lawyer, party litigant or whosoever desiring to “exercise influence” over it.



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One of the core policies of the Judiciary, the effectuation of which became very necessary especially at the end of the civil war, is to eradicate corruption and ethical misconducts of judges and lawyers. Pursuant to the power conferred upon it under *Article 75 of the Constitution of Liberia, (1986)* to make rules to regulate the practice of law and conduct of judges and lawyers, the Supreme Court has promulgated Judicial Canons to govern the conduct of judges and Code of Moral and Professional Ethics to govern the conduct of lawyers. The Judicial Inquiry Commission (JIC) and the Grievance and Ethics Committee (GEC) have been established by the Court to investigate ethical violations by judges and violations of the Code of Moral and Professional Ethics by lawyers. These bodies were expanded under the current Bench of the Supreme Court to include prominent Liberians from the civil society – members of the clergy from the Christian and Muslim religions, members of the press, educators, and human rights actors, etc. The obvious intent is to promote fair play and transparency and engender public confidence in the judicial system.

Over the years, reports of ethical transgressions against judges and lawyers have been scrupulously investigated by the JIC and the GEC and appropriate actions taken. Such actions have ranged from ordering restitution, imposition of fines, suspension, disbarment and forwarding to the Legislature, names of judges for impeachment in cases of egregious acts, etc. By these actions, the Judiciary has regularly and systematically sanctioned its members and weeded out those whose acts are inimical to its core values.

However, in all cases, before appropriate sanctions are applied, a formal complaint is filed, the accused judicial actor is furnished with a copy, investigation is conducted by the body responsible, and hearings are conducted by the Supreme Court concerning recommendations from the JIC and GEC. This is an essential requirement to accord the cardinal principal of due process. But in the instant case, the information contained in the statement issued by the US Treasury Department,



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without more, is insufficient to serve as a basis for sanction against the referenced judicial actors.

The Judiciary renews its commitment to fight corruption in the judicial system of Liberia and will continue to collaborate and work with friendly governments and international organizations, including the American Bar Association (ABA), to curb practices of corruption. In this regard, it calls on all persons, citizens, and foreign nationals in and out of Liberia with knowledge concerning the issues raised in the US Treasury Department statement, or with knowledge of any other ethical transgressions committed by judges and lawyers to report same to the office of the Chief Justice for appropriate action(s).

SIGNED

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