

OPENING ADDRESS OF HER HONOR SIE-A-NYENE G. YUOH  
CHIEF JUSTICE, SUPREME COURT OF LIBERIA  
MARCH TERM A.D. 2025  
MARCH 10, 2025

Colleagues of the Bench

Former Chief Justices and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court

The Dean, Gentlemen and Women of the Supreme Court Bar

Fellow Citizens

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

*Introduction*

Pursuant to the mandatory provision of the Judiciary Law, Rev. Code 17:2.5, which states “the Supreme Court shall open for the conduct of business, the second Mondays in October and March of each year”, and in fulfillment thereto, we have again congregated within these sacred walls to commemorate the Official Opening Ceremony of the March Term A.D. 2025 of the Supreme Court, of the Republic of Liberia.

We accept this constitutional and statutory mandate with a sense of both urgency and resolve, despite the limited break we have had due to the extended duration of the October Term A.D. 2024, which was necessitated by numerous pressing matters. These circumstances required us to forgo the essential statutory respite from our constitutional duties. Nevertheless, our commitment to advancing the progress of our



jurisprudence motivates us, and it is with no hesitation that we are all present today to fulfill our responsibilities.

We extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Sr., President of the Republic of Liberia and Head of Government and Honorable Members of the House of Representatives and the Liberian Senate here present.

We heartily welcome former and retired Chief Justices and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court. We also welcome the President and members of the National Association of Trial Judges of Liberia (NATJL), which include Judges of Circuits and Specialized Courts who are here to grace this Opening Ceremony; and as I have consistently said, we thank you for continuously keeping our bond of fraternity alive.

We congratulate and welcome Counsellors Bornor M. Varmah and F. Juah Lawson, President and Vice President, respectively, of the Liberian National Bar Association (LNBA), and all other officers who were elected and recently inducted into office to steer the leadership of the LNBA; I herewith reaffirm the Supreme Court's continuous support to the new leadership of the Bar.

We also welcome the President and Officers of the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) and all Counsellors-at-Law to this opening ceremony.

We extend warm greetings to all our international and national development partners, members of the diplomatic corps represented here today by their respective emissaries. Thanks for your consistent commitment to promoting the rule of law thus ensuring adherence thereto and access to justice in Liberia.



### *Necrology*

As we reflect on the many blessings that God has abundantly bestowed upon us, with the most cherished being the gift of life, we also pause to remember those members of the Judiciary who have transitioned from labor to rest. Among them are Mr. Stephen K. Leaglor, Caretaker of the Karnplay Magisterial Court, Eighth Judicial Circuit, Nimba County; Mr. Jallah Facian, Bailiff of the Tenth Judicial Circuit, Lofa County; Mr. Morris S. Gomoeh, Caretaker of the Todee Magisterial Court; Mr. Amos Wopaye, Bailiff of the Bushrod Island Magisterial Court; Mr. Joseph A. Sellie, Jr., Recorder of the Monrovia Traffic Court, First Judicial Circuit, Montserrado County; and Mrs. Jerushia Adeola, Executive Secretary assigned to the Chambers of our Colleague, Mr. Justice Yussif D. Kaba. On behalf of the entire Judiciary, the Supreme Court extends its heartfelt condolences to the families of these devoted judicial workers and to all those who are grieving their loss.

### *From Whence We've Come*

The Latin phrase "Tempus Fugit," meaning "Time Flies," is one of those expressions that has transcended its roots to become part of our everyday language. Its truth, however, has never been clearer to me than today. Indeed, time flies.

I recall the day I was officially seated as the third female Chief Justice, as if it were only yesterday. Then, that is, on October 10, 2022, I delivered my first Opening Address for the October Term 2022 from this very seat, as Chief Justice. Today, I sit to address this esteemed body delivering my Opening address with mixed emotions, as this is my final in my capacity as Chief Justice, and because of my anticipated exit from the professional working relationships I have shared with my Colleagues



of the Bench and other staff of the Judiciary as both Associate and subsequently as Chief Justice, but with a deep sense of gratitude to God for sustaining me thus far.

As you are all aware, or should be, Article 72(b) of the Constitution of Liberia provides that "the Chief Justice and the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court and judges of subordinate courts of record shall be retired at the age of seventy provided, however, that a justice or judge who has attained that age may continue in office for as long as may be necessary to enable him/her to render judgment or perform any other judicial duty in regard to proceedings entertained by him/her before he attained that age."

On June 26, 2025, I will reach that age, and as per the dictates of the quoted provision of the Constitution, that date coming in the middle of a Term, I will continue until judgments are rendered in those matters heard during this Term. First and foremost, I remain profoundly thankful to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for guiding me through this remarkable journey by the Holy Spirit. Some of you may be surprised that the woman sitting before you, moving with confident stride of someone much younger, is approaching this milestone. (Smile) But yes, indeed, I have—by God's grace—and I embrace it with humility and joy.

Consequently, this Opening Address, my final address in my capacity as Chief Justice of this Honorable Supreme Court of Liberia, is in strict accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. This signifies that, by October 2025, a new Chief Justice would have been nominated by the President, confirmed by the Senate, and subsequently commissioned by the President of Liberia, to assume the leadership of this distinguished Institution.



I recall what seems like a moment ago that I returned home from abroad, where I fled the turmoil and violence in Liberia, seeking safety for my family and myself. It was then that I re-entered the practice of law, navigating the dual responsibilities of courtroom work and family life, all the while, holding on to the hope that I would someday contribute to the rebuilding of our beloved Liberia.

My journey took a turn when I was offered the position of Executive Director of the Law Reform Commission (LRC), despite my twenty-five years of experience as a lawyer. Some of my peers viewed the position as beneath me. However, I saw it as a stepping stone, part of God's greater plan for me telling me "not to despise small beginnings" (Zech. 4:10). Later, I was appointed as a Commissioner of the LRC. It is said that former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, on two occasions, requested the names of prominent and qualified female lawyers with "hands on ability" for possible appointments and on both occasions, my name was included. I was eventually nominated Minister of Labor by President Sirleaf, but after I had prepared for confirmation, my nomination was unexpectedly withdrawn. I remained steadfast, continuing my work as a Commissioner of the LRC until one Sunday in 2013, I received a call from my friend Amy Musu Jones, Resident Circuit Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit, Grand Cape Mount County, now of sainted memory. She excitedly informed me that, according to the radio, I had been nominated Associate Justice on the Supreme Court Bench filling the vacant 5<sup>th</sup> seat created by the appointment of my former classmate, of the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law Francis S. Korkpor, Sr., (now retired) as Chief Justice.

As an Associate Justice, I had the honor of serving on the Bench alongside Chief Justice Korkpor and fellow Associate Justices Kabineh M. Ja'neh, Jamesetta Howard Wolokolie, Philip A.Z. Banks, III and the



late Joseph N. Nagbe. Together, we continued the post war reforms initiated under the leadership of Chief Justices Henry Reed Cooper and Johnnie L. Lewis. We embarked on new projects such as the building of judicial courts and complexes in Grand Kru, Grand Gedeh, Nimba, and Bomi Counties; the establishment of Criminal Court "E" in both Bong and Nimba Counties; and the introduction of the Magistrate Sitting Program at the Monrovia Central Prison, among others.

When I ascended to the position of Chief Justice, I made a pledge that would guide my leadership: rebranding the Liberian Judiciary under the mantra "*Everyone Do His/Her Work as the Days of Warnings are Over*". I committed to ensuring an independent judiciary characterized by improved quality of judicial services provided in our courts across the country by elevating the quality of personnel (judicial and non-judicial), working to improve judicial infrastructure, encouraging a conducive work environment as well as strengthen our systems of monitoring and evaluation on job performances to ensure that professionalism becomes the hallmark at the Judiciary rather than "*business as usual or the buddy/buddy system*".

Holding to our determination for actions and not words, my fellow Justices and I instituted regular unannounced visits to Magisterial Courts within our respective areas of supervision to assess the conditions of work at these courts and ensure that magistrates and court staff are not only present and properly qualified to perform their respective duties, but also fulfilling their duties in full accordance with the law. The message taken to these magistrates, reminded that (1) they are month to month courts; (2) they have limited territorial and subject matter jurisdictions; (3) it is mandatory that they expeditiously dispose of cases; and (4) the legislative intent of the establishment of magisterial courts is to keep the peace within their respective magisterial jurisdictions.



During these visits, it was observed that, not only were the magisterial courts in very deplorable conditions, which pose serious health hazards to the Magistrates, staff and party litigants, but that these facilities did not represent the image of the Judiciary or the National Government. We also observed conducts being exhibited in some of these magisterial courts which the Supreme Court found to be unacceptable. For example, unnecessary delays in cases before our magistrates due to antics of lawyers intended to procrastinate judicial processes, the frequent deferral or granting of continuances in cases such as persistent non-support and summary proceedings to recover real property and even to our greatest dismay, encountering individuals representing themselves as lawyers and practicing before the courts which is an unauthorized practice of law.

The Supreme Court immediately took actions to arrest these unacceptable conducts by mandating that, (1) all cases of persistent non-support must be resolved within a maximum of two days; (2) all cases of summary proceedings to recover real property must be resolved within a maximum period of one month; and (3) a strict caution against all unauthorized practice of law. We have also taken significant steps to ensure that a more qualified and professional workforce is maintained and recruited here at the Judiciary.

One of my first tasks performed upon assuming this office was to personally carry out staff evaluation during my unannounced visits to courts and offices of non-judicial staff, and not being impressed with quality of staff manning the courts I visited, I had the personnel department carrying out staff evaluation nation-wide. We immediately conducted capacity building training, through the Judicial Institute, for those who were required to upgrade their competencies, and for others who were "untrainable", we had transferred to the maintenance



department as caretakers. We have also restructured our administrative structure, setting in place a more rigorous and competitive recruitment system that ensures only highly qualified and competent persons are recruited to the Judiciary.

The Dean, Distinguished Members of the Supreme Court Bar: The legacy of the Liberian civil crisis, though it ended many years ago, continues to impact the nation in various ways, particularly in terms of human resource capacity. The exodus of legal luminaries and other academicians during the conflict led to a significant brain drain, affecting the functionality of public institutions across Liberia. In order to ensure continuity and the effective operation of all branches of government and related institutions, certain provisions of laws pertinent to these branches were relaxed.

In the case of the Judiciary, we recognized the need to relax the provisions of the New Judiciary Law regarding the tenure of magistrates. This adjustment was made to ensure the continuity of the rule of law in Liberia and to preserve access to justice. Consequently, many magistrates, both Stipendiary and Associate, who were appointed and commissioned by former Presidents, have remained in their respective positions beyond the stipulated four-year term as outlined in the New Judiciary Law, Rev. Code 17:7.5. This was a necessary step to maintain stability and ensure the continued operation of the judiciary in the wake of limited manpower at the time.

However, recognizing the significant improvement in the Judiciary's human resource capacity over the years, particularly with the training of professional magistrates through the PMTP at the Judicial Institute and the admittance of more magistrates into the practice of law, it became essential to return to the proper application of the provisions of the New



Judiciary Law regarding the appointment of magistrates. To this end, the Bench, through the Office of the Court Administrator and in collaboration with the Circuit Judges, conducted a comprehensive appraisal of Two Hundred Sixty-Six (266) Stipendiary and Associate Magistrates whose commissions had expired and required renewal. Following this process, the names of those magistrates were submitted to the Office of the President of Liberia on April 16, 2024.

Subsequently, His Excellency Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Sr., President of the Republic of Liberia, reappointed Two Hundred Fifty-Nine (259) of the Two Hundred Sixty-Six (266) magistrates whose names were submitted by the Judiciary. This reappointment took effect on January 2, 2025, and to end January 2, 2029, for a term of four (4) years. Seven (7) magistrates were not reappointed for various reasons, *viz.*: some had been appointed to positions within the Executive Branch of Government prior to the reappointment process at the Judiciary; others had abandoned their respective assignments, hence they were not reappointed; some were reassigned within the Judiciary to serve as Public Defenders; a few resigned from their posts; and, in certain cases, magistrates were not reappointed due to their egregious and unethical conduct.

We extend our profound gratitude to the President for his cooperation with the Supreme Court Bench during this reappointment process. It is our hope that this collaborative effort between the Executive and Judiciary Branches of Government will continue, fostering a strengthened and unified approach to the administration of justice in Liberia.

The Dean, Distinguished Members of the Supreme Court Bar: It is with great pleasure that I inform you that, during the October Term of the



Supreme Court, A.D. 2024, sixty (60) attorneys-at-law were formally admitted to the Supreme Court Bar. These individuals met the requirements outlined in Section 17.6 of the New Judiciary Law, Revised Code (1972), which provides, in part, that any attorney who has been actively engaged in the practice of law for a period of five (5) years may petition the Supreme Court for admission as a Counsellor-at-Law. Upon successfully passing both the oral and written examinations administered by the examination committees appointed by the Chief Justice, the petitioners were granted admission to the Supreme Court Bar as Counsellors-at-Law.

The details of the recent admissions are recorded in the Supreme Court Opinion: *IN RE: The Petitions of Stephen J.S.C. Kai, Andrew Nimley Bropleh et al., Attorneys-at-Law of the Republic of Liberia, Praying the Honorable Supreme Court of the Republic of Liberia for Admission to the Honorable Supreme Court Bar as Counsellors-at-Law*, Supreme Court Opinion, October Term, 2024. Welcome and congratulations to our newest Counsellors-At-Law.

Colleagues of the Bench, the Dean, Distinguished Members of the Supreme Court Bar: I am pleased to report that, despite the many challenges affecting the progress of key areas of the Judiciary, the judicial system remains fully operational. We continue to collaborate with friendly governments and international partners involved in rule of law programs, exploring ways to enhance the conditions within the Judiciary.

Our primary duty as judges is to hear and decide cases, and I am proud to say that Circuit Court Judges across the country have consistently received and executed their assignments, fulfilling the mandates contained within them and making timely returns. Similarly, Specialized



Courts and Magisterial Courts continue to perform their vital roles. At all times, we emphasize the necessity for fair and impartial decisions, for it is through these decisions that courts of justice promote peace and stability in society. Without this commitment, the consequences would inevitably be a breakdown of law and order, leading to chaos.

At the Supreme Court level, we are continuously tasked with making difficult and contentious decisions on high-profile cases. We are acutely aware of the gravity and far-reaching impact of our rulings, as the Court of last resort, from which there is no appeal. In our deliberations, we rely solely on the law, with the Constitution as our paramount authority, guiding not only the behavior of citizens and foreign nationals within our borders but also the conduct of the Government and its officials.

Over the years that I have served on the Bench, first as an Associate Justice and now as Chief Justice, my Colleagues and I have remained steadfast in our commitment to our primary duty—hearing and deciding cases in a fair and impartial manner. We are aware that our Opinions have been met with criticisms, often time I would say biased and unfair criticism, particularly in cases where political figures are involved, but I must remind us all that it is not our duty or responsibility to satisfy the interest of any party that come before the Court or even to like him/her or it; rather, we are obligated by law to make our decisions not based on sentiments or even morality, but by the dictates of the law *vis-à-vis* the facts and circumstances of the case. We remain resolute in our dedication to upholding the rule of law, regardless of external pressures.

Since my ascendancy to this office of Chief Justice, my Colleagues and I have made a decision to step up our workloads in order to reduce the number of cases pending on the docket of the Supreme Court. In this regard, there has been a steady increase in the number of cases heard and



determined from the March Term of 2022 to date. The records show that for the March Term 2022 a total number of 41 cases were heard and judgments rendered; for the October Term 2022 a total of 40 cases; for the March Term 2023, a total of 50 cases; for the October Term 2023, a total of 51 cases; for the March Term 2024, a total of 47 cases; and for the October Term 2024, a total of 76 cases.

We have also taken measures to ensure that the number of Bill of Information do not crowd the docket of the Court, by reviewing each Bill of Information filed before this Court to determine its merit before ordering the issuance of the writ. This is a significant departure from the past when every Bill of Information filed before this Court was docketed for hearing be it meritorious or not. As a result of such measures, we have realized a significant reduction in the filing and/or docketing of Bill of Information from as many as 30 during one term of Court to 4 at last term of Court.

As we continue this important work, I extend my deepest sympathy to those who may feel aggrieved or dissatisfied with our decisions. It is the nature of justice that not all will agree, that it is through the consistent application of the law that we safeguard the integrity of the judicial system.

As earlier stated, I made a solemn pledge that judicial rebranding would define my tenure, with a primary focus on judicial independence, professional workforce and the enhancement of judicial infrastructure. In fulfillment of this commitment, the Judiciary developed and launched a Five-Year Strategic Plan (2024-2028) under the theme: Rebranding the Liberian Judiciary, in February 2024. This plan was however revised later at the end of 2024 to align with the GoL's ARREST Agenda for



Inclusive Development (AAID), hence a revised date covering 2025 – 2029.

The Judiciary's five-year strategic plan, highlights judicial independence, human resource capacity development and enhancement, infrastructure development focusing on construction, furnishing and equipping a new Supreme Court, to decongest the existing overload on this Temple of Justice building, which is currently hosting many more employees and court users than it was

originally planned to host when it was constructed in the sixties. Additionally, the plan earmarks the construction of seven Judicial Complexes in counties, where these complexes have not yet been constructed by the Judiciary. Attention is also given to the construction, furnishing and equipping of Magisterial Courts, across the country to replace quick impact buildings constructed immediately after cessation of hostilities in Liberia to jump-start the court system but are now dilapidated and lack the required facilities needed to meet acceptable standards.

Rebranding the Liberian Judiciary also envisions the digitization of both our courts and administrative processes, addressing court judicial processes to include reviewing and updating the Rules of Procedures of Court, Judicial Canons and strengthening the Ethical Code of Conduct for Lawyers.

In line with our Rebranding vision, as articulated in our strategic plan, we successfully oversaw the completion and dedication of judicial complex in the 14<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, Rivercess County, and a court building in the 7<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, Grand Gedeh County. We also broke grounds for the construction of the judicial complex for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, Maryland County and I am pleased to report that work is fast



advancing to have that complex completed by the end of this year. The vision to provide suitable work environment at the magisterial level is projected to build 20 modern magisterial courts around the country within the next five years, proceeding in order of the judicial circuits, with the first two being built in Brewerville and Gardnesville, Montserrado County, the next to be built in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit of Grand bassa County and the next in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial Circuit, Sinoe County, and so on. These construction works of the magisterial Courts are scheduled to begin within the next two weeks and are expected to be completed by the end of June this year, or thereabout.

The Dean and members of the Supreme Court Bar, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the Liberian Judiciary has embarked on an irreversible journey to digitizing our court processes, moving from a paper-based to a paperless judicial service system. In our past two addresses before this Court, we expressed our determination to bring the Liberian Judiciary to par with the rest of Africa and the world through digitization. We also informed you that a proposal for phase one of the project was presented to the African Development Bank (AfDB) for financial support, which has now been approved by the Bank's Board.

The procurement and work plans have been developed and presented to the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning for implementation. We are therefore pleased to report that by the opening of the February 2026 Term of the Circuit Courts, **ALL** courts within the confines of the Temple of Justice namely, the 1<sup>st</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuits, all Specialized Courts and the Supreme Court of Liberia will begin the pilot phase of the digitized court system commonly known as the Electronic Case Management System (ECMS). This is a significant milestone in our Rebranding effort for which we continue to express our gratitude to the information of then Country Director (home) and the Board of the AfDB.



In my opening address of the Supreme Court for the March Term A. D. 2024, I informed this Body that the Supreme Court had constituted a Review Committee mandated to review the Revised Rules of Courts, the Code of Moral and Professional Ethics for Lawyers, and the Judicial Canons for Judges, with the goal of identifying challenges or shortcomings and to advance recommendations to align these instruments with current realities and where necessary to seek legislative amendments/enactments to both the Civil and Criminal Procedure Laws. The Supreme Court was compelled to extend the time frame for the Committee to formulate rules/legislations that will guide the Electronic Case Management System (ECMS) which is our e-justice system of digitization. For this reason, the workings of the Committee have been extended by additional months. However, the Bench has agreed to receive an informal presentation of the Committee's work thus far, which will be done by Retired Chief Justice Francis S. Korkpor, Sr., Chairman of the Committee.

Let me take this opportunity, as I will not have the privilege to do so at this occasion again as Chief Justice, to extend my sincere thanks to Retired Chief Justice Korkpor, Chairman of the Review Committee, Retired Associate Justice Gladys Johnson, Retired Associate Justice Philip A. Z. Banks, III., former Associate Justice M. Wilkins Wright, former Associate Justice P. Edwin Gausi, Judge Roosevelt Z. Willie, Judge Ousman F. Feika, Judge Golda Bonah Elliot, Cllr. Cyril Jones, Cllr. Betty Lamin-Blamo, Cllr. Ruth Jappah, the President of the LNBA and the Dean of the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law who agreed to embark on this mission, without requesting any compensation from the Judiciary. We also take this time to thank the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) for its immense aid to the Committee upon hearing of the Committees' members sacrificial efforts by promptly



providing some necessary working tools. We, on this Bench, are exceedingly grateful to you all for your service to our country in this manner. Thank you very much.

It is important to say, at this point Mr. President, that in spite of this Branch of Government being the first to develop and launch a well-articulated vision for the development of the Rule of Law Sector in our country and the realignment of that vision plan with your ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID) in which one of the Rs represent the RULE OF LAW, the Judiciary is yet to see its Strategic Plan captured in this overall development agenda being executed by the Executive Branch under your stewardship. As a matter of fact, the limited interest or the lack thereof for the Judiciary's Strategic Plan as exhibited by the responsible agents of the Executive Branch is of grave concern to us.

One such instance where officials of both the Ministries of Finance and Development Planning and Foreign Affairs have either deliberately refused to perform their tasks or have chosen to ignore the Judiciary, is in regards to this very building in which we sit at this moment. Since the March Term 2023, we have consistently spoken of the structural condition of this Temple of Justice building and the urgent need to construct a new Supreme Court Building and decongest this building. I personally led a team from the Judiciary and the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning to discuss our infrastructural challenges with the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China. The Ambassador intimated his country's willingness to support the Judiciary in developing its infrastructure, but only asked that we develop the structural designs and submit them to the Embassy through the Ministries of Finance and Foreign Affairs as that is the diplomatic channel established for any government to government assistance.



Mr. President, it will interest you to know that since July of 2023, these technical drawings, designs and detail works had been completed by the Judiciary, but officials of the ministries responsible for transmitting these technical documents to our Chinese partners for necessary support are yet to transmit same. While we await their action to garner additional support, we will begin to make the necessary financial allocation, through the Judiciary's budget, for the construction of a new Supreme Court Building, beginning with the 2026 National Budget. It is our hope that we can complete this project within a span of three (3) budget cycles.

The Dean and members of the Supreme Court Bar; distinguished ladies and gentlemen: the day on which I assumed this office, I stated that *my gender does not diminish the duties ascribed to the Office of Chief Justice, or the expectations of judges, lawyers, party litigants, judicial personnel and other persons interacting with the Judiciary*. Therefore, it became my binding duty to ensure that this Branch of Government rises to its cause and assumes its position as a co-equal branch of the Liberian Government.

Over the years, the Liberian Judiciary has been challenged due to the lack of adequate budgetary allocations which undermined the independence of the Judiciary. However, I reminded all of us as judges that upon acceptance of being appointed and commissioned, we willingly signed up for and accepted these challenges by solemn Oath to serve as judges. Every one of us, be it a Justice of the Supreme Court or judge of courts of records, swore by holy writ to administer justice and dispose of cases without delay, fear or for favor. Judges should never be deterred from the task at hand, or lower their standards, or deviate from their core values and judicial obligations they have sworn to perform. In this regard, we must always be ready and unhesitant to perform to the



best of our abilities, irrespective of rainy or sunny days. Hence, I reecho the words of Chief Justice A. Dash Wilson Sr., in his Opening Address, March Term A.D. 1968: “the position of a judge is a sacrificial one, dominated only by the observance of his sacred oath of office, patriotic loyalty to the administration in power and a conscience that guides him continuously against injudicious speculations and gamble.” 19LLR 517 (1968). Judges cannot be seen picketing, indulging in threats of violence or unethical acts as we are the custodians of the law.

On the other hand, there had been deliberate refusal on the part of the other two branches of government to adhere to the mandate of the Law affecting the budget of the Judiciary as mandated in the Financial Autonomy Act (2006) to the extent that past Ministers of Finance would write a letter to the Chief Justice, similar to all other spending agencies of the Executive Branch, dictating the amount allotted to the Judiciary in the National Budget for that fiscal year and for what purpose such allocations must be used. In short, it was the Minister of Finance who set the budget for the Judiciary, a conduct that was clearly in violation of the Financial Autonomy Act (2006), hence *ultra virus*.

I cannot but underscore, once again, the protection of judicial independence by restating section 21.3 (1) (2) of the New Judiciary Law as revised in 2006, which provides for the Financial Autonomy of the Judiciary. The law states:

1. “*The Supreme Court shall submit to the Bureau of the Budget annual estimates of the expenditure and appropriations, supplies, and services, including personnel, as well as funds appropriated for retirement pensions and death benefits necessary for the maintenance and operation of the courts.*”



*Supplemental and deficiency estimates may also be submitted from time to time for the same purposes, according to law.*

*All such estimates shall be included in the National Budget estimates **without revision**, though subject to any recommendations by the Bureau of the Budget, ( now part and parcel of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning) which may be included with the transmittal of the National Budget estimates from the President of Liberia to the Legislature for action.*

- 2. Upon the passage into law of the National Budget all appropriation of funds to be expended by the Judiciary Branch shall be disbursed by the Ministry of Finance to the Judicial Branch by four quarterly installments. The first of such installment to be disbursed at the beginning of the first quarter of the year after the passage of the budget and quarterly thereafter – in any event each installment must be disbursed to the Judicial Branch within fifteen (15) days of the beginning of each quarter.*

*All such funds shall be deposited in bank account(s) which shall be operated and administered by the Judicial Branch, under the overall supervision of the Chief Justice and according to the budget.” (Emphasis mine).*

All persons, whether legal or otherwise must agree that the essence of the above quoted law is to protect the Judiciary from undue financial or political influence from the other two Branches of Government while at the same time maintaining a strong efficient and robust Judiciary. Even the caption of the Judicial Financial Autonomy Act states that “it is to



provide financial autonomy to the Judiciary.” This is why, I have maintained, and do re-iterate here today, especially for the protection of the independence of this Branch of Government going into the future, that this Bench will not allow, and that No Bench must allow, the Judiciary to be treated as a mere government agency within the Executive Branch, or subservient to the Legislative Branch of Government. The Judiciary is a Constitutional Branch of the Liberian Government, and its budget, fiscal allotments, and salary disbursements are not subject to the whims and caprices of Ministers, Directors, and Supervisors of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP). Therefore, we must always insist on the strict adherence and compliance to the Financial Autonomy Act (2006).

I am pleased to report that through discussions with His Excellency, the President, the leadership of both Houses of the Legislature and officials of the MFDP, we were able to ensure a strict compliance with the Financial Autonomy Act (2006) in the formulation of the 2025 Budget of the Judiciary and the National Budget. Budget estimates were formulated and submitted to the MFDP by the Supreme Court through the office of the Chief Justice; the MFDP and the LRA instituted engagements with the Judiciary on its budget estimates and through this consultative process, an acceptable budget estimate was submitted to the Legislature based on resource considerations.

We are also pleased to report that this budget process, which was in conformity with the law, enabled us to amicably resolve the legal dispute between the judges of Courts of record and the government surrounding the harmonization of these judges’ salaries and benefits, by restoring the judges’ salaries; provide vehicles for judges which were far overdue; carryout the construction of court complexes and magisterial



courts as well as enhance the human resource capacity of the Judiciary by conducting training and employment of competent personnel.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my Colleagues on the Bench, the distinguished members of the Supreme Court Bar, the National Association of Trial Judges of Liberia, the Liberia National Bar Association, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia and to all those who have supported me throughout this remarkable journey, particularly the Court Administrator and her team of hard-working support staff; as we near the finish line, I still look forward to your support.

It is also my sincere hope that the vision of Rebranding our Judiciary lives on through the execution of the Five-Year Strategic Plan particularly the commencement of construction works on the New Supreme Court Building, the construction of the remaining six judicial complexes, the construction of the planned eighteen magisterial courts within the next five years and completion of the digitization of the Judiciary across the entire country.

I look forward to coming in these sacred walls, sitting alongside my colleagues on the far right of this room and hearing that the Liberian Judiciary has elevated its human resource capacity through the restructured administrative organogram, being in line with the Rebranding agenda, where clerks of Circuit Courts and Specialized Courts of the circuit level are lawyers and those of Associate Magistrates are college graduates with certified training from the James A. A. Pierre Judicial Institute. All these, are not only possible, but very cardinal for the effective and efficient administration of justice within our Republic; and this can only be achieved with passion and determination of the new Chief Justice and the Bench as well as continual financial support and



commitment from the Executive and Legislative Branches of Government.

*Conclusion*

I now declare the March Term, A.D. 2025 of the Honorable Supreme Court opened. May God save the Republic and preserve and sustain the integrity and dignity of this High Court.

\*NOTE: Response from the Dean of the Supreme Court Bar and the President of the Liberian National bar Association.

I shall now invite Retired Chief Justice Francis S. Korkpor, Sr., Chairman of the Review Committee to make his presentation on the progress of the work thus far.