

ADDRESS BY HIS HONOR YAMIE QUIQUI GBEISAY, Sr.

CHIEF JUSTICE, SUPREME COURT OF LIBERIA

DELIVERED AT OFFICIAL SEATING CEREMONY

Your Excellency Jeremiah Kpan Koung, Vice President of the Republic of Liberia;

Honorable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives;

Honorable Senate Pro Tempore and Members of the Liberian Senate;

My Esteemed Colleagues of the Honorable Supreme Court;

Retired & Former Chief Justices & Associate Justices of the Supreme Court;

Circuit & Specialized Court Judges;

Members of the Cabinet;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

President and members of the Liberia National Bar Association;

My Wife, my aged mother and my children and other Family Members;

Members of the Press; Members of the Clergy

Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen:

On behalf of my Colleagues and the entire Judiciary, I welcome all of you in the Chambers of the Supreme Court. Thank you so kindly for coming.

In accordance with the provision of Judicial Canon #2, to occupy any of the five seats of honor on the row of the Supreme Court Bench for the first time, the Chief Justice and Associate Justices must be commissioned and ceremoniously seated to enable them to participate in the deliberations of the

Court. In obedience thereof, this seating program today is the last step of the processes required for my Colleague, Mr. Justice Boakai Kanneh and I to formally sit on this Bench in our respective capacities to take part in the work of this Court.

Once again, we are thankful to the Almighty God who made everything possible for us. We pray for His continuous guidance.

As I said in my tribute to the outgoing Chief Justice, life is a stage or theater. When you are given the opportunity to appear on it, you must meet the challenge and perform to the best of your ability. So, I speak for my Colleague as well, when I say that we have come ready and prepared to perform.

We express profound gratitude to our Esteemed Colleagues on the Bench. From the time of our nomination to confirmation and commissioning, you have been with us every step of the way. Madam Senior Associate Justice, Your Honor Jamesetta Howard Wolokollie, whom I often referred to as doyen of the Bench, Mr. Justice Yussif D. Kaba, undoubtedly an erudite legal jurist of our time, and Madam Justice Cieaneh Clinton-Johnson, we say thank you for your support. The work of the Supreme is a collective responsibility, no one person knows it all, and no one person can do it all. Though I have been chosen as the spokesperson and administrative head, I am only one amongst equals. I have come with open arms as a team player. I will consult all of you from time to time on crucial decisions before they are made. I therefore ask for your continuous support. I have no doubt that together, we can make our Judiciary what it ought to truly be.

Members of the Bar, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, as you know, I am not a stranger to the Judiciary. I actively practiced law in our courts for seventeen (17) years, served as a Circuit Court Judge for seven (7) years, and served for three (3) years as an Associate Justice in this Court before my appointment as the Chief Justice. So, I believe I know the problems of the Judiciary from all perspectives. I will work along with the other members of this Court and the support staff of the Judiciary to find the solutions. As we take on the enormous task of leading our Judiciary, we pledge to administer justice to all without fear or favor in line with our Constitution and statutory laws in an effort to protect the rights of our people and safeguard our democracy. There are so many areas within the Judiciary that need changes and reforms which we intend to undertake; however, here are some key areas that will require our immediate attention:

1. We will cautiously continue with the Rebranding Program of our predecessor and will however, make appropriate changes where we think necessary. Personnel and infrastructure development efforts under the Program will continue. We will conduct what I call 'credential audits' to ensure that all staff of the Judiciary have the required academic qualification and experience to effectively perform their assigned duties. Concerning infrastructure development, we have observed that the lack of electricity is posing serious challenge to the courts, particularly in the rural areas throughout the country, including some newly built judicial complexes. Even though provisions were made for generators for these

courts, fuel consumption and maintenance costs for these generators are very high. As a consequence, most of the courts remain without electricity. We will make appropriate arrangements for the provision of solar panels as an alternative.

2. My administration will be robust and result oriented. Chief Justice Gbeisay will be a man of few words; I intend to talk less but do more. Therefore, much emphasis will be placed on performance. In this regard, we are transforming the Inspectorate Division of the Judiciary to the Judiciary Monitoring and Evaluation Division (JM&ED) to be headed by a Counsellor-at-Law. This Division will conduct constant inspection, monitoring and evaluation of all court facilities and personnel throughout the country. The Division will also be required to analyze the returns of all judges and magistrates and establish statistical data reflecting the number of cases disposed of by judges and magistrates and how many of these cases were confirmed or reversed by the Supreme Court. The Information compiled and collated by the Division will be essential in making critical financial and administrative decisions. In this new dispensation, we need to grade our judges and make the judiciary a performance-based institution.

3. I am aware that there are many good judges who have continued to make sacrifices over the years to improve the system. I am aware that the salaries and benefits of judges are still inadequate for our judges. I am equally aware that Liberian judges are not among the least paid

judges in West Africa. During my tenure, I will make appropriate representation to those responsible in the Government for increment in the salaries and benefits of judges.

In fact, we will demand our rights under the Constitution and ensure that the Judiciary is no longer a stepchild of the other two branches of Government. We are co-equal and must be seen as co-equal in all decisions, including financial administration. In this vein, we want to thank the Boakai Administration for commencing the implementation of the Financial Autonomy Act of the Judiciary.

However, I must hasten to say that some of our judges are not committed to duty. They fail to report to work on time, they come at will and leave at will and perform below standard. Our job is not a part-time job. There are some judges who even believe that a judge is untouchable or above the law. Such attitude and mindset are totally wrong and unacceptable; they will have no place under our watch. We will ensure that judges and court staff report to work on time and fully perform their assigned duties. I ask all judges to conduct themselves accordingly so that the friendship I have with them will remain intact, otherwise we will take appropriate actions. My administration intends to leave a legacy of discipline.

4. We will mandate the James A. A. Pierre Judicial Institute to conduct refresher training for judges as well as support staff. Where necessary, legal experts from within and without the Judiciary will be solicited to

work along with the Institute in developing special short-term training courses to sharpen the knowledge and skill of judges and court staff. We take particular note of some of our judges who often fail in their final rulings to clearly articulate the facts of cases, state the issues(s) presented and enter analytical rulings supported by current laws or precedence. We will no longer accept rulings of judges whose only reliance is found in the phrase “**in the mind of the court**” or “**law writers have said**”. These are not authorities to rely on. We do not know what is in the mind of the court. Judges must read extensively so that they will know and apply the relevant laws in support of the decisions they make.

5. We will mandatorily require that henceforth judges remain in their circuits at the end of the jury term to handle non-jury and administrative matters. In that way, the county attorneys and public defenders will be compelled to remain in their assigned areas instead of coming to Monrovia to wait for the next term of court. This is not fair, especially to our people in the leeward counties.

6. Under the law, the Supreme Court regulates the practice of law and conduct of lawyers. In this regard, we will initiate concrete steps to ensure that lawyers remain in line with the professional practice of law. We have observed many missteps and sometimes outright legal malpractices, especially by young lawyers who try to invent or manufacture evidence on behalf of their clients, where there is no justiciable contention. The Supreme Court though is separate,

independent and neutral branch of government, which principle, we will jealousy safeguard, but as a single government, we will equally rescue the legal profession, which in my humble opinion is rapidly falling apart. Some lawyers also use the remedial writs to delay cases. This is one of the causes of the huge backlog of cases on the dockets of courts, including the Supreme Court. When this happens, party litigants become the ultimate victims, and the public puts the blame on the Judiciary. This practice will no longer be tolerated.

7. The solo practice of law or one-man law firm is creating enormous problems for legal practice in our country. Under such practice, a single lawyer establishes a law office. Some do not even have an office attendant, as such, when the lone lawyer is out of the office, there is no one available to receive precepts from the courts or documents from opposing lawyers. And when that lawyer travels out of the country, he/she often informs the courts, including the Supreme Court, to postpone all cases he/she has in court pending his/her return. This is a bad practice which hinders the administration of justice. I will confer with my Colleagues as soon as possible for us to decisively address this unwholesome practice. Maybe a Judicial Order would suffice.

8. Land dispute matters have become a nightmare for our courts. We will work with the National Archives, the Liberia Land Authority and other related agencies to put in place mechanisms to detect and curb land fraud. If nothing is done, we will not be surprised if someone appears in

court with “original deed” for the land occupied by Temple of Justice itself or the Executive Mansion. We will give priority to cases involving criminal conveyance.

9. I assure you that during my tenure, there will be zero tolerance for corruption and ethical malpractice by judicial actors, whether a judge, a lawyer or support staff. We will work to ensure that the Judiciary is a place where justice is served to all, the rich or poor, irrespective of color, creed or political connections. Whether the constant talk of corruption in the Judiciary is real or perceived, we will put systems in place and take necessary actions as preventative measures. For example: a) signs and signages will be placed on judicial premises in the clear view of the public warning everyone against indulging in the offering or taking of bribes and other forms of corruption; b) CCTVs or security cameras will be installed in strategic locations and special cell phone numbers will be provided in all the courts in the Republic so that employees of the judiciary engaged in corrupt acts will be promptly reported to the office of the Chief Justice; c) Certain judicial officers, like the sheriffs and curators, etc., will be required to post indemnity bond, so that, if and when money entrusted to them is not accounted for, there is an avenue for refund; and d) we will reinforce the mandate and authority of the Judicial Inquiry Commission (JIC) and the Grievance and Ethics Commission (GEC) and make sure that their recommendations emanating from complaints against judges and lawyers are decisively and promptly acted upon.

My Colleagues, members of the Bar, ladies and gentlemen, as I said earlier, there are lots to be done to improve conditions in the Judiciary. The foregoing is just few of the key areas we will give attention to from the onset. In my ensuing opening address for the October Term, 2025, I will outline more policies and programs that we will embark upon for the betterment of our judicial system

As a man of few words, let me close these brief remarks by reiterating our pledge and assurance that under our watch, the Judiciary will be a true beacon of hope for all Liberian and residents of our Country. Everyone who is injured and distressed can rest assured that he/she/it will find justice in our courts. Here, we only look at the facts, evidence and the applicable laws as our guards, nothing more, and nothing less. If the private citizen or business entity comes to court with a good case, based on the evidence and applicable laws, we will so declare. And if the Government has a good case, we will make similar declaration in favor of the Government.

But let me sound a caveat, that matters involving the Government and private individuals or entities. We have observed that the accused are often represented by more qualified, better equipped and experienced and committed lawyers as compared to the Government, the accuser. We therefore urge the Government to first seek candid legal advice on all matters, collect the best evidence, employ the best legal minds who know the law and the nuances of court proceedings, and come to court ready and prepared to vigorously

prosecute causes. There is a maxim of law that the court will not do for the party litigant what they ought to do for themselves.

May God Almighty continue to bless the Judiciary and save the State.

I THANK YOU.