

OPENING ADDRESS OF HIS HONOR YAMIE QUIQUI GBEISAY, SR.
CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE HONORABLE SUPREME COURT OF LIBERIA
AT THE OPENING OF THE OCTOBER A.D. 2025 TERM
OF THE HONORABLE SUPREME COURT OF LIBERIA

His Excellency Joseph N. Boakai, President of the Republic of Liberia, my distinguished colleagues of the Bench, Mr. Speaker and members of the House of Representatives, Madam Pro-Tempore and members of the Liberian Senate, Retired and Former Chief Justices and Associate Justices, other officials of government, Mr. President and members of the Liberia National Bar Association, judges of courts of record and non-records, the Doyen and members of the diplomatic corps, heads of international organizations, Mr. Court Administrator, members of the judiciary family, leadership of the religious community, members of the press, distinguish ladies and gentlemen:

I deem it befitting that before proceeding to address you, we shall first express our gratitude to God our Father who control all human events, for His continued blessings toward us, and for an ever-watchful care over our nation. We acknowledge our sole dependence and reliance upon him, our divine Guardian for wisdom, knowledge and understanding, for strength and courage, for clear vision of purpose so that the task and problems confronting us may be cheerfully addressed and wisely resolved.

In the onward march of time, we have now arrived at the moment when, in accordance with law, we have met today for the opening of the October 2025 Term of the Supreme Court which is the first opening of the Gbeisay's Bench. It is my pleasant duty to report that since our last closing, this Court was constrained to open in two special sessions, the first of which saw the sitting of Mr. Justice Boakai N. Kanneh as the Fifth Justice of this Bench and your humble servant as the 27th Chief Justice of this Honorable Court. On behalf of the Bench, I have the honor to welcome Mr. Justice Kanneh. Regrettably, Mr. Justice Kanneh is unable to

be with us today due to his ill health. We pray for God's divine healing upon him to return to us with a clean bill of health.

Our vacation was also interrupted by a challenge to the result of the Special By-Election in District 5, Nimba County, in which one of the candidates appealed the decision of the Board of Commissioners of the NEC's, affirming the election magistrate ruling to this Honorable Court. In obedience to the statute that mandatorily requires this Court to hear elections disputes in seven (7) days upon receipt, the full bench was recalled, and the matter was heard, and this Honorable Court rendered its final judgment.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, during our last term of court, the cold hands of death struck few of our dedicated judiciary staff, to include the following: Alphonso N. Karto (Bookkeeper, Finance Department), Felton Harmer (Chauffeur), Lysender Ponpos (File Clerk), Roosevelt Weah (Bailiff) John Zogar (Associate Magistrate), Joseph B. Garner (Secretary), Draper Swen (Security), Boerge D. Saynan (Bailiff), Joseph G. Gibson (Deputy Marshall), and Benedict Juah (Security Supervisor). May the Good Lord have mercy upon their souls.

I am pleased to inform you that, during the March 2025 Term of Court, this Court successfully handed down fifty-seven (57) opinions. Currently, this Court has Four Hundred and Eighty (480) cases on its docket, out of the which, forty-one (41) were filed during the last term of Court. Our motion calendar stands at Seven (7), while seven (7) bills of information are pending before the Court. In line with this Court's current policy, these bills of information will be examined by the full bench to determine whether or not they have merit to warrant the issuance of the writs prayed for.

Distinguish ladies and gentlemen, you may recall that during President Boakai's First State of the Nation Address, he made the following remark "our justice system which is meant to protect the innocent and punish the guilty has been marred by inefficiency, corruption and

lack of public trust...”. In my opinion, this remark was a wake-up call to the judiciary for a meaningful reform.

Quite recently, when I appeared before the Liberian Senate, their questions and comments coincided with my own thoughts about the reform of the judiciary. So, the reform of the judiciary is a national concern and should be treated as a national priority. In light thereof, we have continued to say again and again, and it is befitting to reiterate that no meaningful reform of the judiciary is possible without adequate budgetary support, and that since the Legislative and Executive Branches of Government are charged with the responsibility to allot the content of our National Coffers, the reform of the judiciary by parity of reasoning rests with both branches of government. We here see the urgent need to reform the judiciary, and we are ready and prepared to proceed without further delay.

On this note, we will be remiss, if we don't openly express thanks and appreciation to the administration of Your Excellency for augmenting the judiciary 2025 budget, following persistent advocacy by the Yuoh's Bench. This government has also substantially complied with the Financial Autonomy Act of the Judiciary during this current budget period, which has not happened for a protracted period.

Achievements

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, this two-month-old administration has commenced in its weak way with the reform process. Immediately upon taking office, we realized the delay in disposing of cases, especially in some of the major courts in Montserrado County. Particularly, we realized that in the Commercial Court, there are three judges but only one court room facility was available to preside over matters. The commercial court which was intended to expedite commercial activities and impact the economy has been moving at a snail pace. We, therefore, immediately partitioned the court room into two courts, to enable two judges to handle matters simultaneously.

Due to the slow pace of cases in the Commercial Court, lawyers have been avoiding the court. To some extent, the judges therein have been relaxed. Consequently, the court currently has thirty-six (36) cases on its docket which indicates that each judge may have a total of twelve (12) cases, if evenly divided. It is my hope that these cases will be expeditiously determined and cleared out of the court's docket within no time with this new arrangement.

In the same vein, we have observed that the Criminal Court "E", the Sexual Offences Court has a total of one hundred and six (106) cases on its docket out of which One Hundred and ninety (190) accused persons are behind bars, because, generally, sexual offenses are non-billable. Some of the accused have been behind bars for close to ten (10) years. This claimed the immediate attention of the Gbeisay's Bench, in that, while it is true that rape is a serious capital offense, to have One Hundred and Ninety (190) accused people in prolonged pre-trial detention who innocence or guilt have not been established, borders seriously on the question of the detainees' fundamental human rights. What happens when at the end of the day, some of the pretrial detainees are found to be innocent? This is worrisome. They certainly would have been punished for crime they did not commit. Predicated upon this, we immediately also ordered the partition of Criminal Court "E" which by law is also presided over by two judges, so as to provide two separate courtrooms for both judges to preside over cases at the same time, thereby reducing the number of pretrial detainees charged for gender and sexual offenses. We are considering similar action at the Criminal Court "D" (armed robbery court) which also up to last Friday, has two hundred and nineteen (219) persons in pre-trial detention.

In a related development, the officials of the Ministry of Justice met with the Chief Justice on September 24, 2025, to strategize the overcrowding of the Monrovia Central Prison. We discussed temporary solutions. However, I reminded the Ministry Officials that the population of Liberia stands at five million plus. So, to have a prison facility of an entire country not

exceeding one thousand three hundred and fifty (1,350) is unrealistic, especially, considering that this government is fighting crime; to include drugs, corruption, etc., I further reminded the Justice Ministry officials that Liberia is a post war country and most of the young adults today were born or grew up in violent environment; therefore, it will require time to reduce our crime rate.

I pleaded with the Minister to realize that the construction of prison or correctional facilities is part of development and contributes to peace and security. The lack of adequate prison facilities in Liberia is troublesome, because, if a magistrate fails to remand a violent criminal who presents no criminal appearance bond, the magistrate is accused of bribery. On the other hand, if he sends the criminal to jail, he is told that the facility is overcrowded. This makes our job very difficult, Honorable Attorney General.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the Judiciary is the end user of the law as promulgated. So, we are in the better position to know the challenges we face in interpreting the law. In line with the spirit of coordination and cooperation among the three branches of government, we have constituted a committee to draft a bill to be forwarded to the Legislature via the Executive Branch for the establishment of family and children court. There exists an urgent need for a family court. At the moment, the issue of family which includes marriage, divorce, separation, children support, adoption, guidance of children, custody of children, etc. is being handled in bit and pieces by the Probate court, Civil Law Court and the Juvenile Court of Montserrado County, all of which are not only over crowded, but lack the requisite training, support and expertise to handle family matters. We call upon our national and international development partners for their support in this endeavor.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, in an effort to battle corruption in the judiciary, we have established a division referred to as Judicial Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability Unit in the Judiciary. The division will monitor, evaluate, and ensure accountability in all facets of

the Judiciary. This process will watch-dog the performance of our judges in particular, the magistrates and the entire judicial staff. The JME&ACD will be empowered to visit all courts with or without notice, observe court proceedings in and out of open court, judges' chambers, clerk offices, sheriff offices, take note of all activities, including photographing or recording when necessary; check court records to ensure whether or not court legitimate fine and fee, cost of court etc., are collected and accounted for. In other words, the JME&ACD, under my administration, will be the powerful judicial police in ensuring performance and accountability.

CORRUPTION MUST GO OR CORRUPT PEOPLE MUST GO!!!

Having observed over the years the dismal performance of some of the judiciary staff, this administration, immediately upon taking office, instituted a personnel verification and credentials audit of all of its staff to ensure that firstly, the personnel on our payroll are available and that their credentials align with their duties and their compensation are commensurate with their qualifications and experiences. We extend thanks and appreciation to the Director General and the dedicated men and women of the Civil Service Agency, who accepted to perform this task for us on pro-bono. The Civil Service team has already completed the central office of the Judiciary in Montserrado County and submitted its report to the administration on September 22, 2025. I can therefore say without fear of contradiction that some of our staff were totally out of place. The exercise revealed gross disparity in salaries and benefits. For example, the Chief Clerk of the Supreme Court, who is a higher-ranking staff, next to the Court Administrator, and a Counsellor at Law earns far less than many subordinate but favored staff who perform minor duties. Some of the staff of the Judiciary, without any justification, had their salaries and benefits raised far above their bosses and colleagues doing the same job with the same qualifications. Some bosses earn seven times higher pay than their immediate deputies with the same qualifications. Under my watch, this will not be tolerated in spite of ongoing negative social media propaganda. The correction and or re-classification of this process has commenced under the watchful eye of

the CSA. People who are not accounted for have been blocked. Staff far beyond retirement ages have been notified that their employment will not extend beyond December 31, 2025.

In addition, far from witch-hunting, but consistent with promoting the integrity of the Judiciary and in line with international best practice, this administration on September 4, 2025, invited the General Auditing Commission (GSA) to commission an audit of the immediate past administration's stewardship. We deem it proper to do so for the sake of the record, because in this country, the general notion is that everyone who serves in government is corrupt. We have also instructed all our judges and magistrates who have not declared their assets to do so within thirty (30) days or face administrative consequence.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, my administration in an effort to reform, improve, and restore the integrity of the Judiciary landed running. Over the past eight weeks, we met and had conversation with the general staff of the judiciary, the magistrates, judges of records, the executive council of the Liberian National Bar Association (LNBA) the Public Defense, the Liberia Land Authority, the in-service Magistrates of the Louis Authur Grimes school of law and the new recruits of college graduates to serve as Associate Magistrates. And most importantly, we met and had conversation with the committee of Liberian legal jurist constituted by the Supreme Court to examine and modernize the rules of all our courts (Judicial Canons) and the rules governing the moral and ethical conduct of lawyers. We take our hats up to Mr. Retired Chief Justice, Francis S. Korkpor's committee, which comprises of some of the best legal minds of our time, such as Retired Associate Justice Banks, former Justice Pei Edwin Gausi, former Justice M. Wilkins Wright, among others etc. The committee is performing all these tedious tasks of providing professional legal service on a pro-bono basis, thereby giving back to society.

The Chief Justice also visited Lofa, Bong and Nimba Counties from September 26 to 29 to abreast the legal communities of his policy of discipline, commitment to duty, and zero

tolerance on corruption and straight adherence to the moral and ethical conduct of lawyers and the Judicial Cannons that governs Judges.

In these meetings, we emphasized that there will be total eradication of the commercialization of the courts process, and the unauthorized fees being currently charged by some Judiciary employees, especially the office of the clerks of court, sheriffs, bailiffs, and court recorders will be seriously reprimanded when discovered. In this direction, we realized that there exist fora for the redress of complaints against lawyers and redress of complaints against judges, but none for complaint against judiciary staff.

My administration has therefore established a permanent committee to investigate all judicial malpractices by the court's staff promptly and make appropriate recommendations for disciplinary action. The committee headed by the Assistant Court Administration has been provided with two mobile phones and four contact numbers which are being distributed and placarded in bold writing at all court facilities throughout the country to enable aggrieved lawyers and party litigants to summarily file their complaint using SMS and WhatsApp messages.

Let me reiterate that employees of the judiciary who are not satisfied with the present salary structure have the liberty to seek alternative employment or engage in business, as the Liberian business climate is virgin.

During the period under review, we recommended the total of fifty-five (55) magistrates, and one circuit judge for the Sexual Offense Court in Lofa County to his Excellency President Joseph Nyumah Boakai for appointment. Thank you, Mr. President, for these appointments.

I am pleased to inform you that the construction of a judicial complex in the Fourth Judicial Circuit in Happer Maryland County is reportedly at 70% complete. The payment is also 70%

complete. We have also completed the construction, furnishing and dedication of the Gardnersville and Brewerville Magisterial Courts. In the same vein we have also completed the renovation of the Paynesville Magisterial court.

Before I conclude, permit me to once again thank this government for the financial support which led to these success stories. However, we need to remind you, Your Excellency, that we are pleased with all these positive developments, but we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied, until a modern Supreme Court as indicated in our five-year strategic plan is constructed. As you are aware, the present building was constructed in the 60's and was not intended for the number of occupants we have today. I therefore seek your indulgence, Your Excellency to present to you an architectural design for the proposed modern Supreme Court of Liberia. We earlier informally approached the Embassy of People's Republic of China, and we were advised to submit a design via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr. President, you are the embodiment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we hope and pray that the modern Supreme Court will become part of your legacy prior to 2029 and that you will honorably dedicate a modern Supreme Court of Liberia where I will honorably retire.

Finally, let me say that from where we sit, we are eager to see access to justice through quality legal education wherein competent first-rate legal practitioners will be produced to bring credit to our profession. The prestigious Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law, as we all know, has been the sole provider of legal education in our country for over seventy years and has done very well in fulfilling its mission under difficult circumstances, however, the increase in our population over the years has created huge demand for legal education and access to justice. Hence, I am truly gratified that some Liberians, many of whom we all know have taken the initiative to establish a new law school, known as the LIBERIAN LAW SCHOOL, to help address the challenge. I have the honor to congratulate the proprietor, faculty and staff of the Liberian Law School and I have no doubt that their efforts is a win-win proposition for the legal

community in Liberia and the nation as a whole. The establishment of an alternative law school in our country should be viewed as a positive development in that it will foster healthy competition in legal education that will benefit our country and its people. In this light, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Liberia Law School on its historic victory at the recently held ECOWAS moot court competition in Cote d'Ivoire where it came first in the competition. All Liberians should take justifiable pride in this remarkable achievement which I am convinced is an indication of greater future achievement. By extension, the Liberian Law School victory is a victory of the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law, in that the proprietor and nearly all the professors at the Liberian Law School are graduate of the famous Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law.

Distinguish Ladies and Gentlemen as I indicated earlier during my seating remark, this Chief Justice is a man of few words. Since we have not done enough, we need not say much. We welcome all lawyers and party litigants to this October 2025 Term of Court and pray that God Almighty will guide all of us and give us wisdom in the performance of our duties.

The October 2025 Term of Court is hereby declared open!

Thank you!