

**HIS HONOR CHIEF JUSTICE YAMIE QUIQUI GBEISAY, SR. MARCH TERM**

**A.D. 2026 OPENING ADDRESS**

Once again, our Lord has showered upon us blessings which have enabled us to convene this morning in this chamber in obedience to our Constitution and statutory duty to discharge the sacred responsibility and to justify the confidence reposed in us by the sovereign authority of our beloved nation.

Justice, which is the firmest pillar upon which this, and every nation on earth, rests its hope, is the greatest asset of any nation, for equal protection and peace. Consequently, we assemble here semi-annually not only to commemorate the opening of the highest court of our land, but to remind ourselves that we have a responsibility as judges, justices, and members of the legal profession to mete out justice to our fellow men, irrespective of race, color, creed, social status, religion, or political status.

Our weakness as humans, at times, makes us impatient at the slow pace of attaining justice, which is an indispensable goal of our existence as humans to whom the promise of prosperity, life, liberty, and happiness has been made not only to us by our Constitution, but by our Creator, the Giver of every perfect gift. Today, I am moved by gratitude to the Almighty God for the preservation of our lives as a people and nation-state, and have the honor to welcome Your Excellency Joseph Nyumah Boakai, President of the Republic of Liberia, to welcome my colleagues of the bench, to welcome the Speaker and members of the house of legislature, to welcome and congratulate the President and members of the National Trial Judges Association of Liberia and judges of court not of records, to welcome retired and former Chief Justices and Associate Justices, to welcome the President and distinguished members of the Liberian National Bar Association (LNBA), to welcome our development partners, to welcome doyen and members of the diplomatic corps, to welcome representatives of international organizations here present, to recognize the Court Administrator and the Judiciary Family, distinguished ladies and

gentlemen. May I also recognize the President and members of the bar association of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who are witnessing today's occasion.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, prior to the Berlin Conference of 1884, Africa was one Africa. Our Nigerian professional colleagues, you are welcome to this part of Africa.

It is my solemn duty to recall that during the interim past, the nation and particularly, the judiciary lost nine (9) of its dedicated staff to the cold hands of death to include: Michael P. Jallah, Recorder; Daniel P. Junes, Technician; Sumo Kollie, Security, Smith Marchall, Bailiff, Jerome S. Jabboe, Revenue Judge, Sinoe County, Brown Teah, File Clerk, Bickerson S. Gonquoi, Associate Magistrate, P. Kodea Menwongboay, Jury Clerk and Issac Quei, Clerk.

The judiciary also lost, Her Honor Casselia Liles Steward, former Judge of the Debt Court for Montserrado County. In addition, the Liberian National Bar Association (LNBA) also lost Counsellors-at-law: *John F. Josiah, Gbogoma D. Jones, Carlos B.Z. Smith, and Attorney-at-law, Wellington Nya Sendolo, and dear to our heart, the judiciary lost Cllr. George E. Henries, a former Solicitor General of Liberia and a former Associate Justice of the Honorable Supreme Court of Liberia.* Mr. Justice Henries continued to render pro bono services to the judiciary as Chairman of the Grievance and Ethics Committee and as a member of the judicial inquiry commission up to his demise. May his soul and the souls of all faithful departed rest in perfect peace.

During the period under review, the Bench successfully conducted a one-week Peer-to-Peer Review Training for the circuit and specialized court judges in Lower Buchanan, Grand Bassa County. The training emphasized judgment writing, professional ethics, and courtroom management, among other topics. The in-service training was necessary to sharpen our judges' knowledge and skills for maximum productivity. The training was facilitated by retired justices and experienced judges of the courts. The platform enabled our judges to drink from the fountains of knowledge of their colleagues and retired justices

of the Supreme Court. We remain grateful to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), which provided substantial funding for the workshop.

In the same vein, we are honored to report that we have received approval from the management of the National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL) to provide funding to facilitate the next training of our judges in the area of oil laws and other areas of priority to the judiciary, such as cyber-crimes, especially for our judges from the circuit courts. We encourage other public corporations to give back to society in a similar manner. The training will take place at the end of the February A.D. 2026 term of the Court.

We are pleased to report that during the period under review, the Chief Justice received an invitation from the President of the Supreme Constitutional Court of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia to participate in a Conference of Constitutional Jurisdiction of Africa (CCJA) under the theme “*CONSTITUTIONALISM AND STATE-BUILDING*”. The conference was organized by the Conference of African Constitutional Jurisdiction in partnership with the Ethiopian Constitutional Inquiry Council and the African Union Commission. The conference was intended to consolidate African constitutional institutions through the exchange of good practices, dialogue between jurisdictions, and the improvement of the quality and legitimacy of constitutional decisions. We honored the said invitation, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Liberia participated, and Liberia’s membership was endorsed by that august body for the first time.

We would like to further report that during the term under review, His Excellency Joseph Nyumah Boakai appointed and commissioned five judges to enhance access to justice in the nation. These judges are: Her Honor Kuku Y. Dorbor, Judge of the Criminal Assizes “E”, Sexual offense court, Montserrado County; Judge Anthony Kollie, also Sexual Offense Court, 10th Judicial Circuit, Lofa County; Judge Eric Morlu, Debt Court Judge, 10th Judicial Circuit, Lofa County; and Judge Rennie O. Moses, Sexual Offence Court,

7th Judicial Circuit, Grand Gedeh County. The Judiciary welcomes these appointments, as they will bring access to justice and promote peace.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, we are also pleased to report that, during the period under review and in line with the judiciary's strategic plan, the judiciary was honored to host a groundbreaking ceremony for the judicial complex of the 10th Judicial Circuit in Lofa County on February 9, 2026. The President of Liberia, His Excellency Joseph Nyumah Boakai, was represented by the Vice President of Liberia at that colorful occasion in Voinjama, Lofa County.

Your Excellency, we will be remiss if we fail to applaud your administration for the steady upward growth in the annual budget of the Judiciary. It is an open secret that, prior to your ascendancy, the Judiciary of Liberia was allocated less than three percent (3%) of the Republic's annual budget. Your government has so far proven its genuine interest in the rule of law. It is often said that the safety of the State is the greatest law, and correspondingly, the safety of the legal profession is the greatest rule. The judiciary is undoubtedly the custodian of our democracy; when the law is neglected, the state is neglected." In the same breath, Your Excellency, let me again remind you that the unconstitutional deduction of judges' salaries and benefits under the pretext of harmonization in 2018 remains unpaid. The judges' complaint is pending before the Supreme Court, but the Court prefers to resolve this matter through cooperation and coordination among the three (3) branches of government; moreover, your government demonstrated good faith when it made a partial payment of said amount in 2024.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, as you may be aware, the James A.A Pierre Institute (JI), was primarily established to intervene and train in-service magistrates and college graduates to occupy the position of associate magistrates in the absence of law school graduates. The institute has, over the years, immensely assisted in training college graduates, enabling us to intervene in regions where the judiciary is finding it difficult for law school graduates to serve. We are, however, pleased to report that, based on our

statistics, Montserrado County has produced enough law school graduates who are willing to serve as stipendiary and associate magistrates. Consequently, the Administration of the Judiciary will institute a “dress-back-dress” policy, under which graduates of the Judicial Institute will be transferred to other locations and replaced with law school graduates. As a result of this policy, the Judicial Institute will no longer accept applications for Montserrado. We congratulate Montserrado County; statistics show that this trend will be followed by Nimba County sooner or later. We encourage law school graduates from other counties, especially from Lofa County, which has the largest bar membership, to take an interest in serving their own people, as Monrovia is not Liberia.

In an effort to regulate and improve the practice of law in Liberia, we have mandated that all law firms practicing in the courts of Liberia should, by the end the second week of March, submit the full name and current address of their law firm, along with the names of all lawyers therein, together with their contact numbers, and the names, positions, and contacts of all support staff in these firms to the Clerk of the Supreme Court. This information will be compiled into booklets and circulated to all courts in the Republic. This exercise is intended to enable our court’s staff (especially the bailiffs) easy access to law firms and lawyers, and for practicing licensed lawyers to also have access to one another. The absence of such information is making the service of precepts difficult for the courts. It is our hope that members of the Bar will cooperate because it is in their interest and in the interest of improving the standard of the practice of law in Liberia. We urge members of the bar to take note that this is a policy, not a request, and that it will be enforced to the letter. This measure is also intended to discourage the illegal practice of law by quack lawyers or impersonators.

In a similar vein, the Supreme Court, in an effort to improve, standardize, modernize, and regulate the practice of law in this jurisdiction, has set a committee chaired by Counsellor Pei Edwin Gausi and co-chaired by Counsellor M. Wilkins Wright, both former Associate Justices of the Honorable Supreme, Court to prepare a format for filing papers before the Supreme Court of Liberia. As it stands, lawyers practicing before the Court prepare their

briefs and other papers in any manner and form of their choice; some burying issues to be addressed by the court at the end of their papers, while others raise issues in the middle of their papers. The format is expected to reflect a precise, standardized method of writing for the Supreme Court, in line with international best practice, to establish uniformity in papers submitted to the Supreme Court of Liberia.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, our law requires that to enter the law practice in Liberia, one must be a graduate of the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law or any other recognized law school and that it is a policy of the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law that to enroll thereof, one must have a first degree in any discipline with a minimum GPA of 2.5 and also sit and successfully pass an aptitude test. In the face of these mandatory requirements, the office of the Chief Justice has received scores of applicants who obtained law degrees from abroad without first obtaining first degrees, praying to be admitted as attorneys-at-law.

In view of the above, the Supreme Court constituted a twelve (12) man committee headed by Professor Cllr. Emmanuel James to review and advise the Supreme Court as to the admissibility or non-admissibility of these applicants. The Committee, composed of twelve erudite and experienced lawyers, has submitted its advisory report to the Supreme Court. In an effort to entertain diversity of opinions on this all-important matter, the Supreme Court also communicated with the Dean of the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law (LAGLS) and the President of the Liberia School of Law (LSL) to also provide their views on said report to enable the Supreme Court to make an informed decision.

As you may recall, during my seating and the subsequent opening address of the October 2025 Term of Court, I promised to establish the Judicial Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability Department (JMEA), to police the performance of Judiciary employees and ensure accountability. True to my words, we have established the division and staffed it. We have also seconded a judge and a Counsellor-at-Law, and hired a monitoring and evaluation specialist to boost the department's performance. In recognition of these

efforts, the IDLO has offered collaboration with the Judiciary, and we have begun to see the positive impact of the division on our system. We would like to commend our judges, who are now regularly reporting to work on time, thereby setting a standard for the support staff to follow. As a result, we have begun to observe differences in the courts' performance. We have also observed an upward movement in court fines and fees collection. In this vein, we hereby call on all lawyers, as arms of the court, to join us in the fight against corruption in the judiciary by reporting shady deals and unethical practices directly to the Judiciary Monitoring and Evaluation and Accountability Division or through the whistleblowing process. As an arm of the court, we are obliged to set a standard above reproach and invite integrity to the Judiciary in line with our sacred oaths.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the rules governing the practice of law in this jurisdiction were last visited in 1999, about 26 years ago. Quite obviously, some components of the rules were no longer applicable to contemporary reality. In recognition of this problem, the Supreme Court, acting by and through Madam Chief Justice Sie-A-Nyene G. Yuoh, my immediate predecessor and Chief Justice emeritus, constituted a committee headed by retired Chief Justice Francis Korpor with fourteen other legal luminaries of our time to examine and re-draft the existing rules. I am pleased to report that on Friday, March 6, 2026, the committee submitted its final well-documented, scholarly report, which I can only refer to as a reservoir of knowledge. The report will be validated by the full bench of the Supreme Court as soon as possible and subsequently adopted for our use. We want to extend our thanks and appreciation to the chairman and members of the committee who performed this herculean task marvelously, without compensation.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to report that during the period under review, in line with the Supreme Court policy to examine attorneys-at-law who have practiced law for five years and met additional requirements to be admitted to the Supreme Court Bar, the Supreme Court established an examination committee headed by Cllr. G. Moses Paegar and Cllr. T. Negbalee Warner. Fifty-Seven (57) applicants sat the

examination; out of said number, twenty-one (21) attorneys at law successfully passed the exam, and two (2) attorneys-at-law who met the requirements for dispensation were granted dispensation by the Court, making the total of twenty-three qualified counsellors-at-law who were admitted to the Supreme Court bar. Out of the twenty-one (21) applicants who passed the exam, only two (2) were female. The above performance in the examination leaves more questions than answers; in other words, the rigorous practice of law by lawyers in this jurisdiction needs to be reinforced. The fact that there were only two females also poses a challenge to gender equality and equity. While the bench is interested in increasing the number of female judges in this jurisdiction, we encourage our female lawyers to take an interest in courtroom practice.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, for the October 2025 term of court, this Court successfully adjudicated and rendered final judgment in sixty-three (63) cases, among which was the most talked-about contempt proceedings against Mr. Justin Opa Yeazean of Ziah Town, Tappita District, Nimba County. In this Court landmark opinion delivered on February 13, 2026, the Court interpreted Article 15 (a) of the 1986 Liberian Constitution together with Article 5 and 14 of said Constitution.

For clarity, we deem it necessary to quote the said Article 15 (a) of our Constitution. It provides: ***“Every person shall have the right to freedom of expression, being fully responsible for the abuse thereof.”***

In the Court’s determination, nothing in this world is absolute; so, it is with Article 15 of our Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech. The authors of our Constitution, in their wisdom, set a limit, that limit being ***“being fully responsible of the abuse thereof.”***

In other words, the authors of our Constitution contemplated and anticipated the abuse of the freedom of speech. The February 13, 2026, opinion made it clear that engaging in vulgarity, profanity, and naked abuse and description of women’s private parts on social media is an abuse of the freedom of speech as guaranteed by Article 15 (a) above. The Opinion declared that this was not, is not, and could never have been the intent of

Professor Dr. Amos C. Sawyer, Mr. D.K. Wonsehleay, and the gallant men and women who authored our Constitution. Article 15 of our Constitution was intended to allow positive engagement and the exchange of ideas for the healthy growth and development of our democracy, because agreement and disagreement are integral parts of democratic governance.

Article Five (5) (b) of the same Constitution provides that: **“the Republic shall preserve, protect and promote positive Liberian culture, ensuring that traditional values which are compatible with public policy and national progress are adopted and developed as an integral part of the growing needs of the Liberian society.”** This provision empowers the government to preserve positive customs and traditional values for us and our generation unborn.

Article 14 of the Constitution also read thus: **“All persons shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment thereof except as may be required by law to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.”** Clearly, the authors of our Constitution give a caveat **“except as may be required by law to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.”**

The use of vulgarity and profanity is certainly not a positive value to be preserved by the government. The use of these words on social media by a Liberian citizen is a total madness and degrades Liberia and Liberians, thereby shaming Liberia as a member of the comity of civilized nations. As a native man born in a village, I can recall vividly that when a grown man stands out publicly in a traditional town and utters such degree of profanity as uttered by Mr. Yeazean over the years, he is immediately restrained by the men of the village and taken to the shrine of the elders, and thoroughly reprimanded; the same applies to the women. The Supreme Court Opinion has therefore clarified in no uncertain terms that vulgar language, profanity, and the outright abuse of men and women

in Liberia is illegal, wrongful, and was never the intent of the writers of our constitution. Non-lawyers, please note that when the Supreme Court speaks, it automatically becomes law with the force and effect of any law passed by the legislature. Anyone who has evidence that Chief Justice Gbeisay or any member of the Bench is corrupt has a right under the freedom of speech to criticize and persuade the legislature to impeach the justice concerned and subsequently subject him/her to prosecution.

In said opinion, the Supreme Court of Liberia, in its power as final arbiter and interpreter of our Constitution, determined that it has the power and authority not only to punish contempt, but also to determine what constitutes contempt, and that the action of Mr. Yeazean in attacking Justices of the Supreme Court Bench without evidence and raining insults was intended to bring the Supreme Court to public disrepute and erode public confidence in the Court. Consequently, Mr. Yeazean appeared before the Court in line with due process of law, pleaded for the mercy of the Court, and based upon his plea, the Court adjudged him guilty of contempt.

The Court, however, tendered justice with mercy and sentenced him to six months' conditional imprisonment. Mr. Yeazean will serve his imprisonment term; at the end of which he will publish, in three widely circulated newspapers for five (5) consecutive days, an apology to the Supreme Court and the Liberian people; following which he will also file a behavior bond clearly committing himself never, ever, to use such vulgarity and profanity against any person.

We acknowledge with thanks and appreciation, Counsellors Tiawan Saye Gongoloe, Kanio Gbai Gbalah, Arthur Johnson, Lawrence Suah, Saymah Serena Cephus, and all other counsellors who went the extra mile to educate the Liberian people on contempt proceedings. The power of the Court to protect itself through contempt proceedings is horary with age for centuries now.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, you need not be told that our country has been perceived in recent history as a lawless nation in the sub-region. Something has to be done to bring our people to civility. Now that the Supreme Court of Liberia has unequivocally defined the limit of our freedom of speech, there is a common saying that one parent cannot train a child. In its power to interpret the Constitution and the laws of Liberia, the Supreme Court, having clearly declared that profanity and vulgarity are not freedom of speech, we now encourage the other two branches of government to employ appropriate disciplinary measures to discipline those in their employ who may want to use vulgarity as a means of expressing themselves, to bring them to book. In my humble opinion, there is absolutely nothing in the law that gives any government official, irrespective of his/her status, immunity for using vulgarity and profanity in the public glare against any Liberian. The Court is open and prepared to take action when properly in venue before it, as the inherent power of the gavel is to discipline and preserve law and order.

With these brief remarks, we hereby declare the March A.D. 2026 Term of the Honorable Supreme Court of Liberia open.

May God bless us all and may He continue to bless our beloved nation.

I Thank You!