



Lawyer Jails for Contempt

The Monrovia City Court at the Temple of Justice has ordered the immediate imprisonment of Attorney-at-law J. Jefferson Cheeson at the Monrovia Central Prison for two days after finding him guilty of contempt of court.

Stipendiary Magistrate His Honor L. Ben Barco handed down the sentence on Wednesday, August 19, 2026, citing Cheeson's public remarks on the widely broadcast Spoon Talk Show.

The lawyer had accused the magistrate of bias in a pending case, a move the court ruled was scandalous, undermined its authority, and violated professional ethics.

During the contempt hearing, Cheeson’s counsel pleaded for leniency, noting his remorse, lack of prior contempt record, and the isolated nature of the incident. However, court-appointed counsel argued that his conduct constituted a grave violation of Article 74 of the Liberian Constitution, which criminalizes contempt of court, and breached the sub judice rule by commenting on an undetermined matter.

Magistrate Barco emphasized that while Article 15 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, it requires responsibility, particularly where expression undermines public order or judicial integrity. He cited Chapter 12 of the New Judiciary Law, which empowers courts to punish contemptuous acts that impair respect for judicial authority.

The magistrate noted that summoning a defendant, even one who is a lawyer, is a lawful procedural duty, not evidence of bias. By choosing to politicize the matter on the radio rather than appear before the court, Cheeson breached his professional obligations and disrespected judicial authority.

“The court finds that respondent’s public statements constitute gross contempt of court in violation of Chapter 12 of the New Judiciary Law, the ethics governing the conduct of lawyers, and controlling precedent. His conduct undermines the dignity of the court, scandalized its presiding magistrate, and interfered with the administration of justice. It is hereby adjudged that J. Jefferson Cheeson is guilty of contempt of court and condemned to prison for two days,” Magistrate Barco declared.