

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at the Commissioning Ceremony of Chief Justice Francis Korkpor
&
Associate Justice Sie-A-Yeaneh Youh
of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Liberia
at the C. Cecil Dennis, Jr. Auditorium
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Monday, April 29, 2013**

Mr. Vice President;
Mr. Speaker;
Mr. President Pro-Tempore and Members of the Legislature here present;
Mr. Chief Justice-designate;
Associate Justices and members of the Bar Association;
Members of the Cabinet and Officials of Government;
Judges, Other Members of the Judiciary;
Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Members of the Clergy;
Members of the National Traditional Council of Chiefs and Elders;
Members of the Press;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;
Fellow Liberians:

With the commissioning today, we have fully put in place those who will guide the process of ensuring equal justice in our country. Our Constitution provides for three coordinate branches of government and vests the judicial power of the Republic in the Supreme Court.

The Constitution states: “The Supreme Court is the final arbiter of Constitutional issues with power to exercise final appellate jurisdiction in all cases whether emanating from courts of records, courts not of record, administrative agencies, autonomous agencies or any other authority both as to law and to fact.”

This power given by the Constitution is permanent as the Constitution also says: “Judgment of the Supreme Court shall be final and binding and shall not be subject to appeal or review by any other Branch of Government.” Moreover, the Constitution restricts the Legislature from making any law or creating any exceptions as would deprive the Supreme Court of any of the powers granted.

This is an awesome authority. But also an awesome responsibility granted to you, Mr. Chief Justice, and your Associates.

Liberia has not done so well in the administration of justice according, most notably, to the recent assessment coming out of the 2012 United States Human Rights Report. In that summary statement, which I quote, “The most serious human rights abuses were those tied to a lack of justice: judicial

inefficiency and corruption, lengthy pretrial detention, denial of due process, and harsh prison conditions, violence against women and children including rape and domestic violence.”

We could get angry over this characterization and blame it on lack of information or the cunningness of global politics.

But we should see this differently – as another wake-up call to all of us to introspect and address those long-standing shortcomings.

We recognize the challenges and constraints, resource scarcity, capacity weaknesses, cultural proclivity, and we applaud the progress despite these limitations.

But let us agree that more needs to be done, and I ask those of you primarily responsible – you Honorable Justices and the Minister of Justice – to intensify your effort to accelerate the reforms that you have been formulating.

I hope you will agree that the Executive has improved considerably the working conditions of the Judiciary in terms of compensation, facilities and logistics. We need returns on that investment to be manifested in equal and speedy access to justice for all. We need for the public to be informed on the workings of the courts. We need our courts to enjoy, consistently, the highest confidence of society and of litigants whether in civil or criminal matters. We need timely trials of those accused of violating the public trust. We ask you for a reconsideration of our request for a fast-track court to handle the large number of corruption cases. Indeed, we need the justice system to mete out transparent justice that protects the rights of our children.

We need the justice system to speedily free the innocent and convict the criminal. We need the justice system to symbolize and embody those things that are honorable, just and fair. We need these from you, Members of the Judiciary, because you are the ultimate guardians of the Constitution – that essential tool for resolution of disputes in our society, peacefully.

I urge you to be less lenient and more courageous. I, too, must do the same, for at the end of the day, I may take the blame, but the legacy so often referred to belongs not only to me, but to you.

We look to you to implement these measures and more that you would know are appropriate, relevant and needed to improve our record for access to justice.

Thank you for accepting this responsibility. Thanks to your families, your supporters for being able to give you the support that will enable you to carry out these responsibilities.

May God guide you as we go forward with what you do.