

## **Liberian/ Côte d'Ivoire Chiefs & Elders Gather for Historic Peace Meeting**



The Road to Lasting Peace: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia & the president of Côte d'Ivoire Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara on October 18, 2012 at the Felix Houphouët Boigny airport in Abidjan



Some Traditional Elders of Liberia



Kyaman chiefs of the Ivory Coast,

What is being billed as a milestone event will unfold between October 16-19 2013 when over 150 Chiefs and Elders from Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire meet face to face in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County.

Already, according to reports, some delegates from both countries are starting to arrive in Zwedru for a meeting officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs say: 'Will forever change the border areas along the Cote D'Ivoire, Grand Gedehlines forever.'

The Joint Council of Chief and Elders Meeting (JCCEM) as it is been hailed will be attended by community representatives, comprising of traditional chiefs, women's, and youth grouping as well as refugee leaders,

Also attending to participate in the four-day meeting will be County Superintendents (Liberia) and Préfets (Côte d'Ivoire) from the border regions. The occasion is expected to be graced by both Presidents Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and President Alassane Ouattara .

Liberia's Internal Affairs Minister Hon. Morris Dukuly and his Ivorian counterpart, La Cote d'Ivoire's Minister of Interior and Security, Mr. Hamed Bakayoko; other relevant Ministries, the UN Mission in Liberia,(UNMIL) and the UN Operations in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI),other development partners and Foreign missions accredited near Monrovia are also slated for historic meeting.

According to a concept document from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the overall objective of the meeting is to contribute to the strengthening of cooperation, collaboration and coordination for, amongst other things, coherence of information exchanges between civilian and security authorities along the border regions of the two countries; enhance peace building and stabilization in the region; and establish a platform for continual common border dialogue amongst the chiefs of both countries' borders as well as sustain the peace in

“There is no turning back now, we've come too far. There is a lot riding on this,” an Ivorian taxi cab driver recently remarked.

The Zwedru Meeting will be the culmination of a series of peace-pipe-smoking meetings held between the two countries since the border incident sparked off.

In April 5, 2013, a Four-Party Meeting between representatives of the Governments of Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, UNMIL, and UNOCI was held in Monrovia.

This meeting was held against the background of two previous High Level meetings respectively held on 2 May 2012 and 13 June 2012 to discuss issues relative to border security, justice, humanitarian and bilateral cooperation between Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire.

The meeting is a sequel to the first Quadripartite Meeting held in Abidjan on 13 June 2012 which discussed security matters along the two countries' border, the extradition of Ivorian of ex-combatants who fled into Liberia and were arrested as well as turnover of vehicles confiscated from Cote d'Ivoire and taken into Liberia.

Yet, the two countries have doggedly racked their brains to figure just how a solid relationship that existed between the two neighbors could had deteriorated to where we find ourselves.

The two countries enjoyed a cordial and tight bond for many, many years. According to report, the late William V.S. Tubman, whenever flying over La Cote D'Ivoire to other countries, would always interrupt his schedule to stop in Abidjan.

Tubman, on his way to a four-day state visit to Togo in 1966 broke his journey at Abidjan, for brief talks with President Felix Houphouët Boigny.

The informal talks were aimed at improving the strained relations between the Ivory Coast and Guinea, when ex-President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was overthrown.

There are also the strong linguistics bonds existing between the two countries. The Krahn ethnic group in eastern Liberia and the Guéré in western Côte d'Ivoire are closely related.

And not to forget: Aldolphus B. Tolbert, the son of the Late President William R. Tolbert, was married to Felix Houphouët Boigny's foster daughter, Daisy Daisy Delafosse.

As the Chiefs and Elders of both countries gather this week in Zwedru, stakeholders to this all important meeting are hoping that participants will dwell on those positive attributes that have steered the strong and friendly relationship between Liberia and La Cote D'Ivoire.

No wonder then, that the Minister of Internal Affairs, Hon. Morris M. Dukuly will host a major press conference tomorrow Saturday, October 12 to further highlight the importance of the JCEM.