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**Press Statement**

**by**

**Honorable Morris M. Dukuly, Sr.  
Minister of Internal Affairs/Republic of Liberia**

**on**

**The Convening of the Inaugural Meeting**

**of**

**The Joint Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia  
and Cote d'Ivoire**

**in**

**Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, Republic of Liberia**

**Ministry of Internal Affairs  
Capitol Hill  
Monrovia, Liberia  
Saturday, October 12, 2013**

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**His Excellency, My Brother, Ambassador Soro;  
Dr. Francis Kaikai, Head of the Civil Affairs and  
his Colleagues of the United Nations Mission in  
Liberia;**

**Colleagues of the Independent National Human  
Rights Commission here present;**

**My Colleague Ministers of the Ministry of  
Internal  
Affairs;**

**Heads and Representatives of Collaborating  
Agencies  
of our Government;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press, Local and  
Foreign;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

**First, on behalf of my Colleagues, I would like to  
welcome and thank you, members of the Press,  
for responding to our invitation for this Saturday  
morning press conference.**

**Second, I would like to very warmly thank Her  
Excellency the Special Representative of the  
Secretary General of the United Nations and her**

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**staff led by Dr. Francis Kaikai, Mr. Adriano Cassandra and their Colleagues, United Nations Development Program, the Carter Center, ECOWAS, and Members of the Inter-Agency Working Group for the cooperation, support, and collaboration which have enhanced our collective efforts to organize and, in a few days, host the Inaugural Meeting of Chiefs and Elders of four border Provinces of Cote d'Ivoire and the four Liberian counties of Maryland, River Gee, Nimba, and host Grand Gedeh.**

**I would also like to warmly thank His Excellency the Ambassador of Cote d'Ivoire and his staff who have spent many hours and nights working with our Ministry to plan and strategize for activities for the Joint Council of Chiefs and Elders Meeting.**

**I would particularly like to thank my Deputy Ministers, Honorable Varney A. Sirleaf, and Honorable Amos Tweh, among others, and their staff along with our Colleagues of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Senior Deputy Chief of Protocol, Ambassador Nathaniel Jallah, our Rapporteurs**

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**and Facilitators, Mr. Wilfred Gray-Johnson, head of our Peace Building Office, for their dedication and hard work. They are the engines who have driven this process.**

**In no small measure, I would like to thank the Government of Cote d'Ivoire, and in particularly my Friend and Colleague, Honorable Hamed Bakayoko, the Minister of State, Interior, and Security, for their enthusiastic support and cooperation.**

**Finally, the biggest "thank you" is to my Boss, the President of Liberia, who in spite of her absence from Liberia on official matters on behalf of our Government, remained actively engaged with the Minister of State and the Acting Chair of the Cabinet, Honorable Edward B. McClain, Jr., and Christian Tah, respectively, regarding critical decisions affecting the preparatory activities for the meeting. On behalf of the Inter-Agency Team, including MIA Staff and our Partners, I thank you, Madame President.**

**Members of the Press, Ladies and Gentlemen:**

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**I have invited you here to officially inform you, on behalf of the Governments of Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire, that our two countries will next week, beginning on October 16, 2013, through October 19, 2013, convene the Inaugural Round of the Joint Council of Chiefs and Elders Meeting which will bring together Chiefs and Elders from four border Provinces in Cote d'Ivoire and four border counties of Liberia, as I have already said.**

**One of the first questions that I suspect you will be asking yourself now is: What is driving the two countries to convene such a meeting?**

**I have three answers with multiple parts that I offer you here:**

- **Our shared social and political history. Liberian-Ivoirian history is rich and replete with many pleasant memories. This history teaches even today that when we collaborate and cooperate, great socio-cultural, economic and political benefits come to our two countries and peoples.**

- **Our proximity as neighbors. As our most recent individual and collective national experiences remind us, anything that affects Cote d'Ivoire negatively or positively also impacts Liberia.**
- **Our common membership and leadership in two sub-sub- and sub-regional organizations: Mano River Union and ECOWAS. President Sirleaf chairs the Mano River Union and President Ouattara is President of ECOWAS.**

**These two organizations are devoted to preserving and enhancing peace, security and stability, regional integration, socio-economic development and advancement of their peoples, as well as laying the foundation for increased bilateral cooperation and collaboration in the critical area of peace-building and establishment of**

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**the platform for dialogue between and among their citizens.**

**Secondly, it is security. Security and stability in Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire is security and stability in the MRU and in ECOWAS. But security and stability are not enhanced when two peoples, really one people, do not communicate or talk to each other, or when sections of their populations bear fears about their personal security and wellbeing.**

**Therefore, by bringing together Chiefs and Elders along our common border, we begin the slow but steady process of building bridges of cooperation, bridges of communication, and bridges of genuine people-to-people interactions and relationship building.**

**Thirdly, our two Leaders, Presidents Sirleaf and Ouattara, are internationalists and champions of south-south and regional cooperation. Their positions on these issues and on the larger question of peace, war, security, and international cooperation are enhanced when**

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**other leaders see them working to bring their countries and peoples together.**

**Fourthly, our two countries share a long, porous, and fragile border. The implications and the responsibilities that UNMIL's transition, which is in process, devolves on our two Governments, are clear, present, and pressing.**

**The next question, as I am sure you, distinguished members of the press, are asking, is: what is the objective of the meeting?**

**The Governments of Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia seek to achieve the following objectives:**

- **Strengthen our cooperation, collaboration and coordination in the area of information exchange between our civilian and security authorities in the border regions of the two countries.**
- **Enhance peace-building and stabilization in the region.**

- **Establish the platform for continued dialogue among our Chiefs and Elders in our two countries.**

**These are our general objectives. But we do also seek to achieve several immediate goals:**

- **We seek to enhance cooperation between civilian and security authorities at our common border, particularly on matters relating to cross-border security.**
- **We seek to plan and to implement trans-border “Palaver Hut Talk” involving Chiefs and Elders from our two countries focusing on building relationships, fostering and strengthening peace, security and reconciliation among our two peoples and within our individual countries.**

**In fact, I have invited the Leadership of the Independent National Human Rights Commission because our two Presidents plan**

**to officially launch our National Palaver Hall Talk in Zwedru on October 19, 2013.**

- **We seek to formulate and operationalize appropriate response mechanisms to address risks and challenges that impact continued peace, stability security, and hence the socio-economic development and prosperity of our two countries and peoples.**

**Do I believe that a single four-day meeting of Chiefs and Elders of our two countries will immediately achieve all of these goals? No. But this is the beginning. It is for us here at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and our Partners a happy and hopeful beginning. It is my personal hope that that when the Chiefs and Elders – and all of us say our good-byes to Zwedru, Grand Gedeh, we will at least be able to say with confidence that we have laid the foundation for the following eventual outcomes:**

- **We have started the process of improving relationships that will inform a new spirit of**

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**peace, cooperation, and reconciliation among the peoples of our two countries led by our Chiefs and Elders and our National Authorities.**

- **We would have started the process of building an inclusive mechanism of dialogue that will be responsive to the peace, security and reconciliation needs of citizens, particularly in trans-border communities in both Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire.**

**Now, let me say a word, or as much as can be said at this time, about the program. It formally starts on the morning of October 17, 2013. The Chiefs, Elders, and other participants arrive on October 16, 2013. The two Presidents will be in Zwedru to witness the signing of the Joint Communiqué, which we believe, will be issued by the Chiefs and Elders. The meeting will close on October 19, 2013.**

**Finally, let me speak to my Colleagues in Government - and to our Partners. Zwedru is not a very big city. My staff is already concerned that a major accommodation challenge will face them. My**

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**appeal to members of Government who wish to be in Grand Gedeh to witness this historic and significant program is this: For the sake of your personal convenience, please plan to arrive on the morning of Saturday, October 19, 2013, and also plan to depart on the same day.**

**The Legislative Caucus, the leadership and citizens of Grand Gedeh – and the other three participating counties, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation for all that you have done and continue do to ensure a successful and rewarding Chiefs and Elders Meeting in Liberia. This is an historic and opportune moment. I am therefore personally pleased that Grand Gedeh has seized it as the host.**

**Again, I thank you very much for your presence and for your support.**