

**“Launching a New and Promising Chapter in Liberia-Ivorian
Collaboration and Relations”**

Opening Statement

by

**Honorable Morris M. Dukuly, Sr.
Minister of Internal Affairs, R.L.**

at

Formal Opening of the Inaugural Meeting

of

**The Joint Council of Chiefs Forum
Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County
Thursday, October 17, 2013**

Fellow Liberians:

Let me begin by extending our profound thanks and gratitude to Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, our President, for the outstanding leadership she continues to provide for Liberia and the foresight that she has displayed again, as the chief architect of this Joint Council of Chiefs Forum, which is taking place in this historic city of Zwedru.

Allow me to also honor our most distinguished guest, His Excellency Alassane Ouattara, President of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, for agreeing with our President that this meeting is so significant that it deserves his presence. We thank you Present Ouattara!

This meeting in Zwedru opens a new chapter in the long-standing relationship between the Government and people of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire and the Government of people of the Republic of Liberia. As you may know, the tides between our people predate the existence of our two states: before there became Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire, there were the Grebo's, Krahn's, and Gio's in this part of our world, who are of the same origins, but merely separated by a large river, which we today call the Cavalla. They were put here together by God! And as they say, 'what God has put together, let no man or no woman put asunder.'

Liberian-Ivoire relations reached even greater heights in the years leading to the independence of the people of Cote d'Ivoire from colonization by the Republic of France. During that period, Liberia, then the only independent nation in the West African region, ignored its size and resources and took great risks in bearing the torch for the liberation of Africa. By the grace of God, and the humanity and sense of justice of other champions of African liberation, and more importantly, the determination of the people of Cote d'Ivoire, this great people got the freedom they deserved on August 7, 1960.

In the years that followed the independence of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny embraced the friendship of our President William V. S. Tubman; and as their bond strengthened, our two nations grew in mutual respect, cooperation, and unity. During the tenure of President William R. Tolbert, Jr. who served for nineteen years as Vice President to President Tubman, a romantic flavor was added to the already strong Liberian-Ivoire relations when A. Benedict Tolbert, son of President Tolbert, took the hand of Daisy, daughter of President Houphouët-Boigny, into marriage. It is perhaps the deep admiration that President Tolbert had of President Houphouët-Boigny, while serving as vice president that

fashioned these personal bonds at the highest levels of our two governments.

This was good for Liberia, good for the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire and good for West Africa. For those of you who are old enough to remember this period, you may recall that when we spoke of the atmosphere that prevailed in this region then, we did not only speak of peace as we do today, we spoke of peace and tranquility,' a characterization that seem to have faded into memory in recent years.

This is why this meeting is important: it will help to remind us of what has been before, refocus our attention on what is now, and strengthen us to work for new and brighter day for our two countries. Your Excellencies, not since July 19, 1959, some fifty-four years ago, when President Tubman of Liberia, President Toure of Guinea, and President Nkrumah of Ghana met in Saniquili, few miles north of where we sit today, has a sitting President of our country met with the President of another county in one of our local cities, as we are witnessing here today in Zwedru. As that 1959 meeting sowed the seed of what today is the African Union, formerly the Organization of African Unity, an organization which has done so much good in uplifting the African people, we pray that this meeting opens a new page in the relationship between our two post-conflict countries.

We expect that this forum will provide an opportunity and a platform for representatives of our two countries, particularly our local officials along the Liberian-Ivoire border, to dialogue and consult on matters relating to the sustenance of the peace between us that has come about at a very high cost, including the loss of precious human lives. We are hopeful that the outcome of our deliberations will strengthen our friendship, bolster trans-border security and elevate our cooperation to a new level, in the interest of our people.

(closing point)

Excellencies, let me therefore wish you very