OFFICE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
WAR AND ECONOMIC CRIMES COURT FOR LIBERIA (OWECC-L)
North Gibson Street (Old CID Road)
Mamba Point – Monrovia, Liberia
Cell #: (+231) 888-000-221/779-000-221 | Email: info@oweccliberia.org
www.oweccliberia.org

Office of the Executive Director

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY DR. CLLR. JALLAH A. BARBU (PROF.)
Executive Director, Office for the Establishment of the War and Economic Crimes Court for Liberia (OWECC-L)

At the Mano River Basin Interfaith Consultation
In collaboration with the Interreligious Council of Liberia (IRCL)

November 23, 2026;

Theme: "Faiths United for Peace, Harmony, and Security: Building One Region, One Future"

==========

Salutations and Opening

- Distinguished Leadership of the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL),
- Eminent Bishops, Pastors, Imams, Sheikhs, and Traditional Leaders of the Mano River Basin,
- Representatives of our Sister Nations of Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire,
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps and International Partners,
- Representatives of Civil Society, Victims' Groups, Women and Youth Organizations,
- Members of the Fourth Estate,
- Fellow Citizens, Brothers, and Sisters in Faith:

I respectfully greet you all this morning in the spirit of peace, unity, and shared humanity—*As-Salamu Alaykum*, and the peace of the Lord be with you all.

I am from the Office for the Establishment of War and Economic Crimes Court and the National Anti-Corruption Court for Liberia. We are leading the establishment of Liberia's first-ever criminal accountability courts in two very new areas of our existence – War crimes, crimes against humanity and violation of international humanitarian law; and Corruption. These atrocities have gravely affected our country and have caused the loss of thousands of lives and devasted our country. They continue to inflict pains on our body politic. We cannot forget the victims, Consequently, I beg you to kindly observe with me a moment of silence for all Victims and Survivors and everyone struggling the adverse effects of these inhumane human developments.

Thank You Very Much.

It is a profound honor to stand before this august assembly on this historic day, November 23, 2026, at the Mano River Basin Interfaith Consultation, convened in partnership with the Interreligious Council of Liberia. Whenever the moral conscience of our sub-region gathers under one roof, history takes notice. You are the shepherds of our souls, the custodians of our moral compass, and the bridgebuilders who stood in the gap when the storms of war threatened to consume our very existence.

During the darkest hours of the Mano River Basin conflicts, when state institutions crumbled and brothers turned weapons against brothers, it was the mosque and the church that opened their doors as sanctuaries. It was the Interreligious Council that risked life and limb to mediate ceasefires, comfort the bereaved, and remind us that we are one people bound by blood, history, and destiny.

Today, however, we gather not to negotiate a ceasefire from bullets, but to negotiate a ceasefire from a quieter, equally deadly war: **the war of impunity**.

For over two decades since the guns fell silent in Liberia, our nation has walked on a wounded leg. We have preached reconciliation, yet we have denied justice. We have prayed for national healing, yet we have left the deep infections of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and rampant economic pillage untreated. Today, I come before you not merely as the Executive Director of the Office for the Establishment of the War and Economic Crimes Court for Liberia (OWECC-L), but as a fellow Liberian appealing to the highest moral authority in our land: the faith community.

The Moral and Spiritual Obligation to Confront Impunity

My dear fathers and mothers in faith, neutrality in the face of injustice is not peace; it is complicity. Silence in the face of unpunished atrocities is not forgiveness; it is an invitation for history to repeat itself.

Across the Mano River Basin, our nations share intertwined histories. When Sierra Leone established its Special Court, the world saw that accountability was possible in West Africa. Yet in Liberia, the perpetrators of heinous atrocities—those who massacred innocents in churches and mosques, those who conscripted our children into killing machines, and those who looted the national treasury to fund bloodshed—have walked free, some even ascending to positions of power and prestige. Meanwhile, the victims languish in poverty, carrying physical scars and psychological trauma to their graves without ever hearing a gavel fall in their defense.

At the same time, a parallel monster has grown fat on the culture of impunity: **economic crimes and corruption**. Every dollar stolen from public coffers is a clinic without medicine, a school without a roof, a pregnant mother dying on an impassable road, and a young graduate condemned to hopelessness. War crimes and economic crimes are two sides of the same coin. Both destroy human dignity; both violate the sanctity of life.

As religious leaders, you hold a sacred mandate from Almighty God to be the voice of the voiceless. You cannot preach salvation to a hungry congregation while ignoring the thieves who stole their bread. You cannot counsel trauma victims to forgive while shielding the unrepentant perpetrators from the law. Addressing impunity is not merely a legal or political exercise—it is a **spiritual imperative**. It is the cleansing of the land so that God's blessings may once again flow freely over Liberia and the Mano River Union.

You have a Divine Mandates: Accountability in the Holy Scriptures

Some have argued—often out of fear, political convenience, or self-preservation—that pursuing justice will reopen old wounds and destabilize our fragile peace. They quote selective verses about mercy and forgiveness while conveniently ignoring the foundational pillars of divine governance: **Justice, Truth, and Accountability**.

Both the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur'an are unequivocally clear: Almighty God is a God of justice, and He commands human societies to establish courts, hold wrongdoers accountable, and penalize crime so that evil may be purged from among the people.

Lessons from the Holy Bible

In the Holy Bible, justice is not an optional virtue; it is the very foundation of God's throne. As the Psalmist declares in **Psalm 89:14**, *"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face."* Notice the order: righteousness and justice form the foundation upon which mercy and truth stand. Without justice, mercy becomes cheap, and peace becomes an illusion.

In the Book of **Amos 5:24**, the Prophet cries out against a society where the powerful oppress the weak and escape punishment: *"But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream."* And in **Proverbs 17:15**, the Scripture gives a stern warning to lawmakers, judges, and leaders who shield the guilty: *"He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord."*

Consider the biblical story of **King Ahab and Naboth's Vineyard** in **1 Kings Chapter 21**. King Ahab coveted the ancestral land of an ordinary citizen, Naboth. When Naboth refused to sell his inheritance, Queen Jezebel orchestrated a sham legal process, using false witnesses to have Naboth stoned to death so the King could seize his property. It was a classic case of abuse of state power, murder, and economic crime. Did God tell the prophet Elijah to "let bygones be bygones" for the sake of national stability? No! God sent Elijah directly to confront King Ahab in the very vineyard he had stolen, pronouncing severe divine judgment upon him and his house. Why? Because innocent blood cries out from the ground, just as Abel's blood cried out to God in **Genesis 4:10**.

Furthermore, in **Romans 13:3–4**, the Apostle Paul defines the primary purpose of civil authority and the courts: *"For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil... For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil."* When the state fails to bear the sword of justice against warlords and economic plunderers, it abdicates its divine mandate.

Lessons from the Holy Qur'an

Turn to the Holy Qur'an, and we find the exact same uncompromising insistence on justice, accountability, and the rule of law—even when it implicates the wealthy, the powerful, or our own kin.

In **Surah An-Nisa (Chapter 4, Verse 135)**, Allah commands the believers: *"O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just."*

I urge you, look at the clarity of that command: *"even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives."* Tribal loyalty, political affiliation, or fear of powerful men must never stand in the way of justice.

In **Surah Al-Ma'idah (Chapter 5, Verse 32)**, the Qur'an establishes the supreme sanctity of human life: *"Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely."* And in **Surah Al-Baqarah (Chapter 2, Verse 179)**, Allah explains why legal retribution and accountability are essential for society: *"And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O you [people] of understanding, that you may become righteous."* Far from causing chaos, accountability preserves life because it deters future crimes!

Remember the celebrated account from the life of the **Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)** regarding the woman of the noble Makhzum tribe who committed theft. Because she belonged to a powerful and influential clan, prominent leaders tried to intercede with the Prophet to spare her from punishment. The Prophet (peace be upon him) grew visibly indignant and delivered a timeless sermon that should echo in the halls of the Liberian Legislature today. He said: *"Indeed, those who came before you were destroyed because when a noble person among them stole, they let him go; but when a weak person among them stole, they inflicted the legal punishment upon him. By Allah, if Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad, were to steal, I would cut off her hand!"*

My Distinguished Mothers and Fathers, and Women and Men of God;

That is the standard of both the Bible and the Qur'an. A nation where the poor man goes to prison for stealing a cup of rice, while the powerful man who steals millions of dollars or slaughters thousands of citizens is celebrated as a statesman, is a nation heading toward ruin. Your sacred texts command you to reject this double standard! Hence, you have a pivotal in nation-building and that extends to holding the Legislature to do the right thing for the Country at this time,

The Urgent Legislative Imperative: Pass the WECC and NACC Bills Immediately

This brings us to the critical juncture where Liberia stands today.

Following the historic signing of Executive Order No. 131 by His Excellency President Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Sr., our office—OWECC-L—has worked tirelessly, consulting with national stakeholders, legal experts, victims' communities, and international partners to design the legal and institutional frameworks required to end impunity once and for all.

Today, two landmark pieces of legislation lie before the 55th National Legislature:

1. **The Bill to Establish the Special War and Economic Crimes Court (WECC);** and
2. **The Bill to Establish the National Anti-Corruption Court (NACC)**.

Let me be clear and unambiguous: **There is no court yet until the Legislature passes these bills into law.** Rumors or misstatements suggesting that either, or both courts have already been established are false and misleading. The ball is squarely in the court of the Liberian Legislature.

Every day of legislative delay is another day of agony for aging survivors who wonder if they will see justice before they close their eyes in death. Every month of hesitation emboldens corrupt officials who believe they can loot public resources with total impunity.

Therefore, from this sacred platform of the Mano River Basin Interfaith Consultation, I call upon the Interreligious Council of Liberia and every Imam, Bishop, Pastor, and lay leader across our fifteen counties: **Rise up and press the Legislature to pass the WECC and NACC Bills immediately!**

Visit your Senators and Representatives. Speak from your pulpits and minbars. Remind our lawmakers that they were elected to represent the suffering masses of Liberia, not to protect the architects of our misery. Tell them that history is watching, the international community is watching, and above all, Almighty God is watching how they vote on these two historic bills.

Transparency and the Right of the Public: Relocating the November 25 Senate Public Hearing

Furthermore, justice cannot be birthed in secret, and laws affecting the destiny of an entire nation cannot be scrutinized behind closed doors.

Under Article 15 of the Constitution of the Republic of Liberia, every citizen has the fundamental right to freedom of expression and the **right to be informed** about the workings of their government. The process of establishing the WECC and NACC belongs to the Liberian people – to the market women of Red Light and Waterside, the amputees and war widows in Lofa, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Maryland, Bomi, and all counties of Liberia; to the students, the youth, and the religious community. To ALL OF US. There is no argument that can defeat this and therefore there is no legislative prerogative that surpasses this ownership right.

Distinguished Members of the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia and Participants at this very historic Mano River Basin Interfaith Consultation, you have done well to hold this engagement in Liberia. The Country that in a few days, will be sitting at the helm of authority of the United Nations Security Council. Regardless of what people say or how people see this elevation, it is resounding for Liberia, for Africa because when Liberia speaks in that position, it speaks for all of Africa. This elevation arguably poses a great burden on Liberia and its leaders to lead with care, including ensuring that the Country takes intentional actions to address accountability and impunity, and ensure good governance, as a role model for the Continent. The litmus test at this moment is the establishment of the WECC and NACC, two compelling human rights protection institutions for Liberia.

In this regard, I am compelled to remind each of us here of this chilling upcoming situation. In just two days, on **Wednesday, November 25, 2026**, the Liberian Senate, through its Standing Committee on Judiciary, Human Rights, Claims and Petitions, is scheduled to hold a public hearing on the proposed WECC and NACC Harmonized Bills.

While we welcome the Senate's decision to hold a public hearing, we must raise a grave and urgent concern regarding the **venue**. Scheduling a hearing of such monumental national consequence inside the cramped confines of the **Senate Chamber Annex** effectively excludes the very public it purports to consult!

A small annex room cannot accommodate the thousands of victims, civil society actors, religious leaders, students, and ordinary citizens who have waited over twenty years to witness and participate in this moment.

A *public* hearing must be genuinely *public* - not a private gathering disguised under a public name. If the people are locked out due to lack of space, suspicion is bred, trust is eroded, and the legitimacy of the legislative process is undermined.

Therefore, buttressing my letter to the Honorable President Pro Tempore on this issue, I join my voice with victims' groups, civil society, and conscientious citizens to formally appeal to the leadership of the Liberian Senate:

"Relocate the November 25 public hearing to a large, accessible public space - such as the **Centennial Memorial Pavilion**, the **Samuel Kanyon Doe Sports Complex**, or the **Ministerial Complex – or at least, in a larger space at the Capitol Building, and thereby ensure full live broadcast across national radio and television so that every Liberian, at home and in the diaspora, can participate fully, observe the proceedings, and hold their leaders accountable!**

I urge the Interreligious Council of Liberia to support this call, add it to your consultations today, and mobilize your members to attend this hearing in full force, dressed in your clerical collars and religious garments, as a visible, peaceful testament that the people of God demand transparency, openness, and immediate passage of these bills.

OWECC-L's Commitment and Closing Wishes

Distinguished Religious Leaders, Partners, and Fellow Citizens:

As I conclude, let me reaffirm the unwavering commitment of the Office for the Establishment of the War and Economic Crimes Court for Liberia (OWECC-L). We recognize that legal mechanisms alone cannot heal a broken nation. Courts can punish the guilty and vindicate the innocent, but it is the church and the mosque that must mend broken hearts, foster genuine contrition, and guide our communities toward lasting reconciliation.

OWECC-L stands ready to work hand-in-hand with the Interreligious Council of Liberia and the entire Mano River Basin Interfaith Consultation Group. We commit to:

- Maintaining an open-door policy for regular consultations with religious leaders across all counties;
- Partnering with faith-based institutions in public education and awareness campaigns so that every citizen understands the mandate and operations of the WECC and NACC;
- Collaborating with your trauma-healing and peacebuilding networks to ensure that victims and witnesses are protected, supported, and treated with utmost dignity throughout the judicial process.

Together, **the robe of the Judge and the robe of the Cleric** can weave a new garment of righteousness, peace, and prosperity for Liberia and the entire Mano River Basin.

Distinguished Clerics and Members of the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia, I cannot thank you sufficiently for adorning me with the honor of addressing this very auspicious occasion hosting high caliber dignitaries of your kind. Thank you for this wonderful upliftment.

I wish you fruitful, Spirit-led, and courageous deliberations throughout this Interfaith Consultation.

May your resolutions shake the conscience of our leaders, comfort the afflicted, and usher in a new dawn where justice rolls down like waters and peace prevails forevermore.

May Almighty God bless the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia, bless the Mano River Basin, and bless the Republic of Liberia.

Thank You; *As-Salamu Alaykum*.