

# Statement By The National Association Of Trial Judges Of Liberia On The 9 December 2020 Press Release Issued By The United States Department Of Treasury, re: Treasury Sanctions Corrupt Actors in Africa And Asia.

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On 9 December 2020, the Treasury Department of the United States of America issued a Press Release under the caption “**Treasury Sanctions Corrupt Actors in Africa and Asia**”, in which it accused the Liberian Judiciary of being grossly corrupt. In the referenced Press Release, particularly under the sub-heading “Corruption In Liberia: HARRY VARNEY GBOTO-NAMBI SHERMAN”, the Treasury Department inter alia alleges, that “*Harry Varney Gboto-Nambi Sherman (Sherman), now a prominent lawyer, Liberian senator, and Chair of the Liberian Senate Judiciary Committee, offered bribes to multiple judges associated with his trial for a 2010 bribery scheme, and he had an undisclosed conflict of interest with the judge who ultimately returned a not guilty verdict in July 2019. Sherman has routinely paid judges to decide cases in his favor, and he has allegedly facilitated payments to Liberian politicians to support impeachment of a judge who has ruled against him. The Treasury Department’s Press Release further claims that “Sherman’s acts of bribery demonstrate a larger pattern of behavior to exercise influence over the Liberian judiciary...”*”

The National Association of Trial Judges of Liberia (NATJL) is appalled and extremely disappointed by the widespread allegations made against Liberian judges as noted in the Treasury Department’s Press Release of December 2020, and unequivocally states that the referenced Press Release is not only short of certainty, specificity and truth-telling as legally and professionally required under such circumstances, but fails to offer a scintilla of proof, especially regarding the allegation that “...*Harry Varney Gboto-Nambi Sherman* offered bribes to multiple judges associated with his trial for a 2010 bribery scheme, that Sherman has routinely paid judges to decide cases in his favor; and that Sherman’s acts of bribery demonstrate a larger pattern of behavior to exercise influence over the Liberian judiciary...”

These allegations against Liberian judges are extremely damning and, inter alia have the proclivity to further derail public confidence, trust in the Liberian Judicial system, and adversely impact the investment climate. The NATJL therefore wishes to reiterate, that notwithstanding the extremely harsh economic and security conditions under which judges are obliged to carry out their constitutional duties, Liberian judges continue to be committed to the rule of law and the highest professional standards.

We are of the opinion that the Press Release issued by the US Treasury Department is a blanket indictment of Liberian judges, and fails the smell test of balance, and some degree of accurate reporting of the efforts by Liberian judges to perform their constitutional duties irrespective of the above-mentioned economic and security conditions.

Bribery, a felonious crime, is a grave criminal offence under the Criminal Procedure Code of Liberia. Therefore, the NATJL wishes to caution readers that, the sweeping allegations of bribery to Liberian Judges, contained in the press release issued by the Treasury Department of the United States, should in no form or manner incite public damnation and scorn of Liberian judges, We therefore call on the U.S. Treasury Department to provide substantial evidentiary proof of its allegation of bribery to Liberian judges, failing which we immediately demand retraction of the said allegation in a similarly issued press release.

Meanwhile, the NATJL assures the US Government and all of its agencies that it unreservedly avails itself, and would relentlessly lend its cooperation to working with the US Treasury Department through the US Embassy near Monrovia in ascertaining the specifics of the allegations contained in the referenced press release of 9 December 2020, and if need be, bring the judges involved to face investigation under the established investigative framework instituted by the Supreme Court of Liberia.

Ben Barco (Atty.)

Secretary

National Association of Trial Judges of Liberia (NATJL)

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Capitol Hill, Monrovia

Liberia