

**Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Liberia Diaspora Project
Oral History Interview - Diaspora Public Hearings Participant
Project Organizer: The Advocates for Human Rights, Minneapolis, MN, USA
Funder: Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, MN, USA**

Interviewee (A): James Hunder

Interviewers (I): Laura Young, Ahmed Sirleaf

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I: In the process of helping us sort of, leave this one to him.....to sort of...to move you through but....yeah I just want to say thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us about interesting fact on your experience about the public hearing... and yeah, we are just really looking forward to hearing your thoughts and memories and yeah to be able to document your experience and

A: Ok, I will do my best.

I: You always do, thank you.

A: Oh well.

I: So, so, Laura is going to go over the documents that I sent to you...the agreement.....the information disclosure form.....also, you saw the questions.....they sort of are generic question that we sent and some of those questions will be the same, but feel free to go into more detail to talk about any of those questions and ideas that you have and once I have it you will be on your way...we don't want to keep you so long because we know you are a busy person.

A: Yeah well, thank God for your understanding...actually, at the office right now

I: Ok, we will go through it as quickly as we can....and Ahmed said he sent you the Oral History agreement form?

A: Yes I saw that....as a matter of fact, I got everything here.....I must admit though...I have not had the time to really, really review it as I should....I don't think that is going to be any problem.....I can still do it....you know.

I: Yea, that's great...and it is just a very short agreement...we just want you to know that we are recording this interview.....which is little different from what we did before...and that our plan is that we will post yours and these recordings on our website....along with the transcript of your testimony.....so people can see...you know...to have the opportunity to see.....you know...what you said during your testimony.....and they will also hear you talk about that process....what it meant to you and what it was like you to give that testimony....so..

A: True.

I: So, yea.....if you have any questions...or any thing like that, let us know...otherwise you can just send that form back to us whenever you get a chance to sign it....

A: Ok, I can do that....later on today...I can put it in the mail....

I: Great

A: Or, or do you want me to fax it?

I: You don't have to fax it.

A: Ok...I will just put it in the mail box for you.

I: Yea, yea, whatever is easier?

A: I will do that.

I: Ok.

A: Well great...

I: Ok...so....thank you again Mr. Hunder, really, for your participation in the whole TRC, truth and reconciliation commission of Liberia...Diaspora work ...and particularly your participation in the public hearing here in St. Paul, Minnesota...you coming out here to testify and share your experiences about what happened in Liberia and also what's happening here, that was very valuable to the community...not just Liberians, but to Minnesota and the American community in general...and in part that is what this oral history project is about to document that experience...because to Minnesota Historical Society, this was a historic event that occurred in St. Paul, Minnesota here....so this will be about, not about your testimony...your story per se....but about your experiences and feelings about the public hearing or thinking back recalling some of those emotions it brought to you during the decision process...what happened when you came to Minnesota...how you felt....the people you met.....what memories did that triggered to you....what impact did you see happened around you while in Minnesota...so just your answer...is what it is going to be about...

A: I see, ok.

I: So, why did you decide to participate in the public hearing? Knowing that this was a public event that will be documented? People will forever hear you, watch and listen to your testimony?

A: Oh, well first of all.....Ahmed and Laura, again I want to say thank you all for giving me the opportunity to allow me to share my view on this....and I thank the TRC, your work in the interest of Liberia has been something that we all peace loving Liberians be very proud of....and we must commend you all for what you people have done.....to carry on the TRC process [in the Liberian Diaspora]. The reason why I participated in the TRC public hearing is not so much personal.....I will say its two-folds.....it's personal and from a national point of view.....national point of view in that....like I said earlier the TRC effort, I think that it kind of help us as Liberians to recognize....to discuss and recognize those problems that cause our country to go the righter wing....that cause the civil strife....and to have the opportunity to be able to sit down and talk about those pass...is helpful.....in a way to help us to reconcile our differences....because there are so many things that if you don't talk about it.....sometimes you don't get to find a way for reconciliation.....so the TRC process was very much in that direction and that wish I really like about it.....and that is some of the reasons why I got courage to become part of itas you remember when the process started, we were contacted...organization was able to

organize a segment of that hearing [statement taking] over here...which kind of went well I hope...so again on a personal note...my involvement, my experience...the experiences that I had during and before the 1980 coup and after the 1980 coup...and all the other situation that followed thereafter....I believe that it was important for me to share that...even though some of them....really...really...it was very traumatic in a way...and so by me sharing those experiences.....it kind of help me in a way because I believe...it serve as some....it was therapeutic to me personally....I had to let it out.

I: So thank you for that....so, because this is recorded for so many audiences, we want to be sure people understand the context...so the 1980 coup...this was the military coup that happened on April 12, 1980 in Liberia, that overthrew President William R. Tolbert, correct?

A: That's correct.

I: Ok and you were in Liberia at that time?

A: I was in Liberia.

I: Ok, so you mentioned your decision leading into testifying...that it was two-fold...they came from a kind of several perspectives...the first one and the national...and you also talked about how it was helpful...you said helpful....can you talk about that help...was it helpful for you personally....you talked about your feeling healing wise.....people around you...or in the community which you live or was it helpful in your view just from the national perspective.

A: I believe Ahmed, it was helpful in both, both wayshelpful nationally because...for the people to have the opportunity to discuss things that happened...it was helpful to go through that discussion....because as the discussion....as we had the discussion...it gave people the opportunity to express and explain some of the experiences that they had and I believe that through talking about it.....it helped towards the reconciliation process.....because you can't reconcile if you don't know what you are reconciling about.....you have to talk about it...you have....some people have to go through some healing process and all those things....so it is a lot of different things that involve that require [letting out]...to complete the cycle of reconciliation...especially if you want to do it right.....it is lot that gets involved...so talking and discussion is one of the main thing.....and so for me personally...I, the experiences I had from 1980, from April 12, 1980, up to the time I left Liberia.....in 1985, it was a lot of things I kept inward that I never expressed it even to my close family people in Liberia.....so those experiences were imbedded in me for all these years, till we had the opportunity to have that discussion....at t that testimony in Minnesota, so I didn't talk about it....as God could have it....I thank God for his protection...because this could have been with some people...they had to go through some special treatment or all these different things, and as God could have it I never experienced anything otherwise it was just eating me out personally...but it didn't have any kind of effect on me to the point that I had to go out of my head till I get crazy....and thank God for that...it didn't, so that testimony in Minnesota was helpful because from that day, I felt much better...that I had it out....and through my testimony, I am hoping that people who didn't know...that were not acquainted with that particular testimony of mine...or that particular experience of mine....who didn't know the full story as to how some of those people were brutally murdered...things like that....things that I experienced...that I saw, at least from my testimony they will be able to know the truth, and that was the truth, it is the truth.

I: Mr. Hunder I think what you are saying is interesting and important...and I am wondering if you can talk a little bit about, more about, sort of how the process that you were going through

before making that decision to testify, you know, how you were feeling.....and each of those experiences impacting your life, and then, after the hearing, after you made that decision.....what have changed...how did you know that there has been that transition about the things you talked about.

A: Well what has changed for me personally, is that...is like I have a load on my head, towing it everywhere, once I had the opportunity to talk about it and to share that experience with others, it helped relieved me in a way that....like I said there were people who didn't know like for instance the case of...in my testimony I talked about Varney Dempster, how they got taken away from prison and how they were murdered, even though I didn't see them being murdered, but how they were taken from prison and those of others that I saw murdered in my presence...you see there were people...they were people...for that matter most people in the country, they didn't know how those people were killed.....but I was...I don't want to say privileged.....I had the opportunity to see it....to see, and so my testimony....I am hoping that share some light on that, to let people know how it really happened.....and I am sure I am one of the few that is now alive to be able to explain what I explained.....so it helps me in a way, it serves as a relieve in a way, to know that I was able to testify about that and as a result of that testimony, so I feel kind of like a weight being lifted off my head..... Off my hearth, that's how I feel now, so that testimony was very important to me...very, very important, yes.

I: You know thinking back to the public hearing, and thinking that you wanted to participate, what kind of process did you go through to sort of come to the conclusion that yes, this is the right thing for me to do? Was there anybody you talked to, or was there anything you considered? Or did you think about it a lot, was it something that was constantly on your mind, leading up to when you can here finally to testify, or were you just saying I m going to testify, and that's it?

A: Well, a very good question, I tell you what, like I said....it been on my mind and I've been wresting with it and I've been wondering and praying how and for the opportunity to be able to get to that point where I will be able to, to reveal what I've been thinking about, to reveal my experience, but again, one thing that I had in mind, If this, if the TRC had not happened was, I said to myself, one day, I will have to get this off my mind or my hearth, but t he only way to do it was to put it in writing, so I was thing about maybe publishing it in a way...because like I said, this was the opportunity that I considered a way to enlighten other people who didn't know, who where not there, so that was the only way to do it, so when the TRC opportunity came, I thought and said well, here is an open opportunity, that will really, really help...to be able to once and for all bring this to a closure in a way, you know, talking about it, professional who want to know and ask me questions, and through the questions and answer, I will be able to better know if I decide in the future if I decide to do anything else, I will able to know how then to go about it in a proper way, but I think the TRC process was one that, was the best way to go, not only for me, but I think for other Liberians who also experienced any of those things that I experienced.

I: Did you think about the potential consequences to family members or relatives to those who you testified about...or did you ever discussed that with immediate family members, or you don't have that kind of problem....because for others, they have to do that, they hold family discussion....or called to make sure that it was ok.

A: Well, I didn't really, like I said i kept this to myself all alone, and when the incident happened, when I left Liberia, or before I left Liberia, during my interaction, my assignment at the post of where I experienced all this gruesome situation, and at that time for security reasons, I didn't express that to any of my family, because like I said for security reasons, explaining it to any

body who may have heard that I was there, ok, their interpretation might be different, I was there and nothing happened to me? Then that means, I was part of the plan, you see? So, because of that, I didn't express anything while I was in Liberia, never, never, to anybody, even my wife, at the time though they knew I was assign to the post, but never knew what really took place....people who I interacted with where people who took messages for and things like that...you know, not to the extend to explain any other thing, other than, those are....if was for my own safety that I couldn't reveal that I heard or that I was on the scene, to witness anything like that....because it would have gotten to some other people, who may have thought that look, ok, if he was there, to see all these people brutalized like that, he had to be part of the group that caused their death.....so it was for my own security that I didn't explain anything about that, and then before the TRC, before my invitation to the TRC, I did not tell my family, most of my family were even surprised after they heard that I testified....but I thought it was the right thing to do, and of course later on I got commendation from my family saying that it was the right thing to do, and they were saying we didn't know you had all these things sitting around with you.....you know, you never told us...I said well, it was for my security and for your security....I didn't want to involve any of you people into anything that may have become the consequences of my making social revelation....so I just left it at that until the TRC time, and I proud about it, I thought about the consequences though, I though about the consequences, and I wonder what gonna happen after the TRC...what gonna happen? How are the hearings gonna be handled? Those things I thought about, but I realized that with a democratic system in place, those things gonna be handled in the proper way, so I didn't thing about any kind of repercussion like that, no I didn't think about that, I thought all alone that it was a nationally, national issue that deserved that kind of attention.....and I was glad to be a part of it.

I: Yea.....it's really important to hear about you and your family reaction about the process....what kinds of things did they tell you? Do you remember anything like their perception about your testimony or were there anyone among your family members that were unexpected or was a surprise to you?

A: Well, if anything I think they were more of surprised....I didn't hear from any of them about any kind of fear or anything like that...you, I think that if the TRC was been held under different kind of system, meaning in a different kind of government system...you know...like if the was a military state in power or something like that, perhaps it would have been.....it would have been different, people would have been much more reprehensible able it....but I think with the democratic system....people were much more comfortable....people have been much more comfortable doing something like that....would there been a military government, I don't even think the TRC was going to take that chance...people would have been very, very fearful of their lives and I think the attendance would have been very, very minimum....I think the success of the TRC so far right now is also based on the environment-country...I think that helps it, yes, so.....I was not fearful of any repercussions and my family was not...they were...the cry from my family was that oh my God, James I cant believe you went through all that and you didn't even tell us, yes, they were surprised about that.

I: Did you fell like you needed some kind of care before the hearing or like you said, you fell you needed to protect yourself after your testimony, what was your family concerned about in t that respect?

A: they were concerned because they did ask me, they asked me...my response was that God carried me through all this until I revealed it.....ok, so my head has been much of a spiritual, you know, spiritual about it, something like that...like I said, nothing, you know...I got no kind of

effect in a way...kind of...I hope so, because up to this time I don't feel anything, I hope there is not anything that will come later on...but no, prayers has been my therapy, really.

I: So as part of your preparation, you coming hear physically to participate was prayers. You know, your spiritual values outweigh any other character.

A: That's correct.

I: So.

A: Hold on one second ok?

I: Alright.

A: I'm back, I am sorry.

I: Oh, that's ok.

I: I just want to talk about your expectation for the process itself, the public hearing here in St. Paul, Minnesota...what was your expectation, what did you expect the process to look like?

A: Well, I tell you what....first of all, when, unlike other people, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to interact with your guys before I went to Minnesota.

I: When we came to Winston-Salem?

A: When I went to Winston, North Carolina.

I: When we took in your statement?

A: Exactly....so, I was comfortable, and I really appreciated the format, the professionalism that your people exhibited during here, so that's what even encouraged me to talk to lot of people and it really helps to take to lot of people to get involved in statement taking here, so that served as a basis for my expectation, so it wasn't anything less.

I: So, and of course there were, in preparation for that Winston Salem, North Carolina statement taking community activities, there were a lot of back and forth communication, you being a community leader....you are a community leader over there, unlike Minnesota, is that so?

A: That's correct.

I: So, in your coming and testifying, the role you played as a witness, and the statement giver, that was personal...but how did that impact your leadership or how was did it seem for your people seeing their [community] leader himself actively getting involved in the healing process?

A: Indeed it was very encouraging, it was very encouraging....that I got some real good expression of sentiment from my, from members from community...and some even called me a hero...and I was no, I m not a hero, why go calling me a hero...and they said well, from what you....from what we've read, from your statement, because some said they saw it on the internet, and some has been on the TRC website and read my statement, and most of them

have been like my family, and said Mr. Hunder I don't see how you went through his thing and without going through some clinical assistance....no, so I was like a surprise to them that no body can tell from my interaction here, from the time we've been together here around that I have experience anything like that.

I: You mean with that level of trauma?

A: Yes, so, that kind of gave them, when, after I, after they saw that, they kind of, in a way, they have respect for me already, I must give them that, but I think it kind of put me on a different level, I don't want to say a, for a better lack of word, I am going to say a from a higher level from how some of them looked at me.

I: So that in and of itself, that courage to participate built that special relationship.

A: Exactly.

I: Ok, so let's go back and talk about your thought process, your memories of what happened, who you saw, and sort of in details of when you were taken off the witness stand, they guys you saw that were Liberians, who did you see? Liberian members that who's present brought some kind of guilt?

A: Oh my God, I saw lot of people in that hall, like you said that brought some lot of memories back, some good and some not so good, I saw the former vice president, Bennie Warner, who also I believe he testified and the memory that came to me at the time, was, I may not have expressed that in my testimony, but I was at one point in time assigned to Bennie Warner when he was vice president.

I: He was vice president for Liberia under William Tolbert.

A: Right, under President William R. Tolbert.....I did serve as a special security service against assigned under his protective team under vice president Bennie Warner. I was with VP Warner, I believe for six or seven months, and when I left, I was reassigned, I believe I left VP Warner and I went to secretary of state-Cecil Dennis...and when I left Cecil Dennis, I of course I was reassigned back to the Mansion, and all this incident, Bennie Warner has just left the country that very day or week for a conference over here, and he came with some of my colleagues at the time, Rufus Tenet and Gibson....I believe his name, he was the commander.

I: You were in the special security service, right? That was the SSS.

A: Special security service, that's correct...that's where I worked, and the special security service assigned people...assigns body guards to these different VIPs...so that was my relationship with him...and we had a nickname that we use to call him, fuel-fuel, that's for VP Warner now, fuel-fuel, that's nickname came about, he was always rushing, you know, whenever he came, you know, whenever he want something done, he will say hurry up, hurry up, you know, it's a part of vernacular, I think the Kpelle tribe.

I: Fuel-fuel.

A: Fuel-fuel, meaning quick, quick.

I: Fast, fast, quick, quick.

A: Yeah, fast, so we just nicknamed him fuel-fuel, that's the kind of relationship we had, and we had a very wonderful time together, and of course...

I: When you met him, were you expecting him at the hearing? Or when you saw him it was a little bit of a shock to you?

A: It was a little bit kind of shock; no I wasn't expecting him there.

I: Ok.

A: We didn't talk about it, we were in communication, but I didn't know he was going to testify, and like I said people kind of kept it to themselves in a lot of ways.

I: Right.

A: You know, so you know, lot of people that I didn't know about that they were going to testify until I got there, and but the shocking one actually was, I have to say, there was one that I will say was not too good experience was the one with Ms. Tolbert, Wilhelmina Tolbert-Holder.

I: Oh.

A: That one, that one was really, really, it gets recounted every time, because I knew her very well, I worked with her dad the president...

I: So she was the daughter of president Tolbert, who lives in Minnesota, who also testified at the hearing.

A: What was that?

I: So I said Dr. Wilhelmina Tolbert-Holder was the daughter of late president Tolbert who was assassinated in the coup.

A: That's correct.

I: She also testified to the public hearing here in St. Paul, that's the one you referring to right?

A: That's the one I m referring to; I believe we testified the same day.

I: Yeah.

A: But her presence over there was, like I said, a replay of everything that have occurred and I that was really, really touching, because I knew her very well, I worked with them closely.

I: What part of it was it? Was it a sad awakening of memories for you, for the family per se, for president Tolbert himself, for the country or for the daughter?

A: It was a sad awakening for me in a lot of ways, in some of those ways you just mentioned, for the country first, because we didn't have to go through that, it would have been a peaceful transition, people would have let the constitution take it course, and we didn't do that, so as a result we are suffering the aftermath of what occurred, and on the other hand for the family of

William Tolbert, and also for William Tolbert himself, like I said I knew him, I worked with him closely, I have the opportunity to travel with him far and near up in Liberia, places where we didn't have road, he was responsible getting roads there....miles, and miles, he used to walk up there himself.

I: The president himself, walk up country?

A: Yeah, the president himself use to walk up where there was no road, like Vahnhu, near the Sierra Leone boarder, made it his duty to go there, and for each time of course, before he made such a trip then of course the public works ministry and other ministries involved, would have to build a road in those areas, there were people living in Vahnhu and they didn't know they were part of Liberia, and they were using the currency from Sierra Leone, I am saying this to say that this was a man who loved and cared for Liberia, and he had a lot of dreams for that country and all was shattered in no time, so the feelings that occurred to me was the regret that incident brought on the country.

I: Did you think that, did you feel sorry for the immigrant community here, the Liberian immigrant community here in that process as you recall your experiences working with president Tolbert, or vice president Warner or foreign minister Cecil Dennis, in all the high profiled Liberian government officials you worked with as a security personnel, once you watched the president's daughter testify, did you consider that something like this shouldn't have happened, were you saying that oh my God, this thing is responsible for all of us being in America here, and our being here, can you reflect upon that, I mean on the here part, on the community here in America in general, specifically in Minnesota or North Carolina?

A: Yeah, well, most Liberians and as closely related as we are to the U.S., from the U.S we get our education from here, but most Liberians will tell you that, from in the past, Liberians will come to the states, get their education and go right back, so what this 1980 coup and later on the war cause us, cause a different feeling and a situation that we Liberians not used to, ok.

I: So Liberians only came here got their education and went back, never stayed as immigrants as we are now seeing?

A: Yes, but then here we are as refugees, we don't have the, for some, they don't have the opportunity to go back home, for some, they don't have the right papers, after spending ten, twenty, twenty five years to get your paper to go back home, and for some people to get their paper it takes longer time than others, so they can't get the education, because for you to go to school, and be able to pay instate fee, you got to get your paper right, and to get your paper right, it takes you five ten years, you know, you aging and after all that is time to go to school, so, you know, we, it's a lost generation almost, in that way

I: So it's not all roses?

A: No.

I: Clearly, it's distressful, emotional distress, lots of family separations and all of that. So you are saying being here as refugees because of what happened in Liberia and what happened with president Tolbert and the coup in 1980, everything that was happening that you talked about at that public hearing just brought it full cycle for you, you know, look at all these people here, they are suffering.

A: Yes, these are people, for all of us, there are some people that that psychological effect in a way that here we were in Liberia, we didn't have every thing going for us, it was peaceful, and we were kind of living a good life without any kind of trouble or something like that until the coup, but before then, people had their little job and thing, they were in some position, taking care of family, educate their family abroad and all these different things and some of these people over here today as refugees, with their education and everything, and you start life all over. My first job here, I served as a, on the hospitality, they have some big title for it, technically what it was, it was, I was a night cleaner, sweeping the kitchen in the hotel, that was my first job.

I: House keeper things.

A: House keeper, yeah....I was in the kitchen, I used to help the dish washer and I will clean and mop the cooking line in the hotel...I mean, there are pots that you could roll me in two or three times that I had to clean, getting into those things, you couldn't even see me when I am washing the pot.

I: So after having worked as the security of some president.

A: And not only security officer, I rose to the rank of Captain.

I: Captain?

A: Captain of the Special Security Service.

I: What is the equivalent of the special security service?

A: That is the equivalent of the Secret Service here.

I: Secret service here in the United States.

A: I had the opportunity to, when I was in the SSS back home, I had the opportunity to study in Romania, I had the opportunity to study in Israel, I had the opportunity to come here for security training, we had several field service training, so a beautiful life and looking up to that my career, even when I came after all those things, the first thing I did was to enroll and got my three Associates in Police science, because that was my desire that was my dream that I was going to go home and of course continue in my career, you see.

I: Wow that was a difficult transition.

A: Very much.

I: In thinking, so you repeat that hundreds of times with other Liberians.

A: Exactly.

I: That's sad.

A: That's very sad, and the thing about it is when you explaining your story to one person and you hear the other person's story, its even more down heartening, and with me what I saw, the incident of the coup, what followed immediately at the post and family that I saw suffering in

Liberia, I saw that part, but those who lived through the war, oh my God, explaining their story, I just say but mine is nothing.

I: Right, there's different layer of problems actually.

A: Very much.

I: So coming back to the public hearing in St. Paul, of course we heard some of those things you've mentioned, the distress, the associated targeting, what happened in Liberia, what's happening here in the United States, the effect of the war, all of that, what was going through your mind, what was it like to be sitting out there, participating in a national conversation here in the United States in a foreign country talking about your country what has happened there and the future of that country, what were you feeling?

A: Well at that forum, one thing that occurred to me is that I was thankful to God to live to see that day, to live to be apart of that testimony...like I said it was a special therapy for me spiritually and other wise and I was there it made me feel important in a way that I was privileged to be at that forum to give my testimony I believe there was other thousand of us Liberians who wanted to do likewise and for different reasons they fell-out on that, perhaps it could be like me for all those year with my experience I didn't share with anyone else, I don't know their reasons after all those years, they decided to keep quite, but again I can't knock on them because it could be the same reason why I was holding on to mine, but I felt relieved that I had the opportunity to take part in that forum and among other people, hearing other people testimony, and especially where we had the hearing, I think was a very unique opportunity, especially having it here in the United States.

I: It was a very grand scene, Hamline University, the big music concert hall, in St. Paul the capital city of Minnesota where there is a significant Liberian population, and some of the people said that was the largest population of Liberians outside of West Africa, so that gave it some significance, didn't it?

A: It does, it really did, it did, and I also it gave me another perspective of the whole thing to feel that America continues to be care about the well beings of Liberians, of Liberia, despite the fact that some people are quick to blame the United States for what happened in Liberia, some even say the United States was responsible for what happened in Liberia, talking about the coup, and how the coup happened, that the U.S. intelligence was responsible for it and involved, well but to see that the kind of involvement, the kind of concern of the people of this country, the kind of investment, the time, the money that invest in the country, that invest in the people, the empowerment and concern about peace and reconciliation in the country, that is paramount, that is something that we should hold on to that special relationship, it's a continuation of the meaning of our special relationship.

I: In a way that was reassuring, despite all.

A: Exactly.

I: The stress and suffering, even here in America as refugees that you described earlier, so but to turn around and see the America people support and specific involvement in that area, care about the country, that must have made you to fell somehow reassured.

A: Exactly.

I: So the public hearing itself, was it what you expected after hearing all those people testified, you mentioned former vice president Warner and Dr. Holder Tolbert, Liberian citizens and Liberians in the Liberian diaspora, was it what you expected or what was it like, off course after the hearing, what was your feeling?

A: Well, what, in terms of mine?

I: In terms of, ok, where I am going is in terms of you have expectation because you had exposure from staff and volunteers from the Advocates of human Rights, an organization that was assisting the Liberian TRC implement diaspora work here, so you have that exposure when you talk about earlier on right, and then you came, you met people that you didn't expect you will meet, then you listened to testimony that brought back memories, I am saying, did you say wow, this is fine or I wish they would have done it this way, it would have been much better, what was that, your expectation, I just want to get a sense of expectation verses the reality of the TRC public hearing.

A: Yeah, my expectation here was, like I said, what I expected at the forum at the TRC hearing, it kind of remind me about what can happen if you go about things the most peaceful way, and what I mean by that is that had we as Liberians like I said early go according o the constitution, what happened in Liberia on April 12, 1980 would have been avoided and what happened after that the coup, what cause the civil strike would have been avoided , if Liberians had come together to say to make an educated choice after taking among themselves and find out the right way to approach a problem, so maybe those conflict would have been avoided , we didn't, but then the TRC and that's what I appreciated about the TRC forum, it gave people the opportunity to sit and talk about their experience and through the questions there was people that was reminded on things that they have forgotten and so my expectation of the TRC is that all those testimony that was asked, questions that was given and questions that was answered will better prepare us to go about the true reconciliation.

I: What is that reconciliation, what did it mean to you and what do you want to see or what have you heard, you as a community leader in Winston Salem, North Carolina and you must many ears, what you are hearing people say if reconciliation.

A: Well, reconciliation some people attach different meaning to it in some way there are some Liberians that you will sit with and talk in different way, it also depends on how and who was in involved in what that caused the conflict, if you talked to some Liberians that their family was brutally, gruesomely murdered in their presence, some will, you can feel that hurt, that they don't even want to discuss reconciliation, some want to revenge, there are some again, I think it depends on the personality, that experienced the trauma, the same tragedy and will tell you look for the sake of the country, for the sake of our country, the best way go about this is to let bygones be bygones, lets get together and rebuild our country and rebuild our community and rebuild our mind set, the way we think about each other, so that's the kind of reconciliation we patriotic Liberians will like to see. A Liberia, where [there is sincere] reconciliation where there will not be a repeat of what occurred in Liberia or a reconciliation where what forced us to be refugee in foreign countries, or what force the Kru man to hate the Khran man, the Khran man to hate the Gio man, [will not repeated].

I: All the divisions.

A: All the divisions....we like to see a reconciliation where we don't look back, but when we think about what caused us to destroyed ourselves, and our own country and hopefully we look at that lifespan and be able to build upon that and work forward, and that's where the TRC, the work of the TRC became very, very paramount, in that, some of our children for the sake of our prosperity, children or some of us who witness what happened or who were not there but through the efforts of the TRC, those written information, our children or some of us who were not present will be able to read that and from reading, and experiencing what it is and knowing what it is will help us not to go back on that.

I: So it is important that something is documented?

A: That it is documented very well and honestly too, not making lies, or lying on family, but being like the acronym, like they say about the organization, truth, let the truth be told not making false statement just because someone wants to write something or that they want to see their name, you know in print. No, but be factual, that will truly help our reconciliation process.

I: Again back to the hearing, after you had testified, did you wish you have the opportunity to say something else, was there something that you might have left out , which you regretted or that you were happy that you didn't say?

A: A question was asked, well two things that up to this time I still have not been able to compile and I regret for that I want to write down the list of political prisoners that were in there, not only the civilian population , but even the military, those that were there during the time I was assigned to the post stockade, ok, I tried to recollect that, and I hope that one day I will be able to still compile that and be able to pass it on to the TRC, that's one thing. The second thing was that a question was asked and I still believe I still remembered the questioner, and I believe it was Commissioner Coleman. The question was that if the security at the time did their work if it was so, why was the president killed? When Commissioner Coleman asked me that question, I felt for the kind of passion I had for my career or the kind of relationship I had with my VIPs which happened to be the late president Tolbert and above all, for the love that I have for my country....I wish I could have done anything to avoid what happened.

I: So it brought some personal emotions for you?

A: Yes, that question hit me.

I: It hit you because you had responsibility?

A: Exactly.

I: To save the president's life?

A: Exactly, that question still bothers me, it still bothers me, its like, I m telling you, some of these things are really, that suppose to be bothering me up to this time it didn't, but that question, I take very personal because I love my career and because I love my country.

I: But some say, even in the public hearing, and we are almost done here Mr. Hunder, just touching bases.

A: Ok.

I: Just a quick follow up because you were passionate about this particular question.

A: Yes.

I: And I wanted to know the other things that you regretted saying or that you left out, so that you are clarifying.....but some say that nothing the security, the Liberian security could have done, because as to alluded to earlier, there are allegations that there were foreign forces, foreign intelligence people involved, so it was almost pretty planned, some say that, so I mean, did you think about that or you still blame yourself, say you know what we could have prevented it.

A: Well, in a way I blame my self not as an individual, but as patriotic Liberian, yes, from the point of view as patriotic Liberian, I think we should blame ourselves, because no matter what, if we Liberians, like the Liberian people there is a saying if the house don't sell you, the street will not buy you, so if we were at patriotic and believe in the democratic process, we should have gone about this the proper way, we didn't do that, and as a result it made the work of the security apparatus even difficult, so how did they succeed, is because we bought into it and because those who we not as patriotic bought into it in reflection of all of us that we didn't do our job, so that's what that question bring about and kind of resurface the whole thing, hey because there would have been a failed coup, if the security, if our military was not part of it, some of our military was not part of it, or if it was revealed or hinted to people in authority, but look what happened, you have an enlisted men, uneducated and easily influenced, so they were easily targeted to carry on whatever aspiration they had.

I: You talking about the soldiers?

A: The soldiers, the 13 actually.

I: Thirteen of them Armed Forces of Liberia who staged the coup?

A: That's correct, those enlisted men, those few enlisted men, and off course little on the number increased to 17, but originally they were not 17, so that how they were able to target those people, those enlisted men, military guys to be able to carry on this, because had they talked to people who knew better, I am sure we would have had a failed coup.

I: So along those lines, where there things that you heard or learned for the first time during the public hearing that surprised you that you didn't know, that when you heard you were like wow....the question that Commissioner Coleman asked you shocked you right, it impacted you because of your professional background and your responsibility then, but generally, from other witnesses or commissioners did you learn anything new that as a Liberian you didn't know or that you only learned for the first time?

A: Oh yeah some of the testimony and the...they had to be very few....like for instance the gentleman that said he was some kind of role model to Doe before the coup or something like that.

I: Kolongo Luo?

A: Kolongo Luo, yeah, you know so some of those things, some part of his testimony, I may have had the opportunity to hear some of it through rumors, through conversations at the Executive Mansion, but lot of, there were a lot that was said that I have already heard about,

that's one thing working in the security agency, there is a lot that you can hear that other people may not easily hear, then again it depends on what kind of information and of course it becomes what we called in security compartmentalizationso if it is compartmentalized in a way that this agency is restricted from hearing such and such, its not actually supposed to be like that because if information are dissimilated in a right way, lot of things can be stopped.....but you have some agency holding back certain information from another agency but then of course that happens everywhere, not only in Liberia, you have situation like that, yeah there was lot of things that I heard it felt like a reminder talking about it, so I said oh I did hear that somewhere sometime ago, you know.

I: Yeah, that was it, talking about his experience with Master Sergeant Samuel Doe prior to the coup, how he help him and for someone who works in security sector that was something that caught your attention.

A: My attention because when Luo became I don't know what position he had, I had some of his country men on my shift, at that time I was shift commander, so I had some of his country men on my shift and I found out from them little on after they removed me from the mansion and replaced us with the tribal people Krahn or what not, but little on some of them me that after he got his position and that's how he was elevated to that position because he used to take care of Doe. So like I said when he started saying those things about what happened and his interactions with Doe, so it kind of reminded me of some of those conversation and lot of others that I heard about, I heard their testimony it served as a reminded, so I said oh, I did heard that sometime ago and of course there where some that made statements I didn't agree with and I think at one point I even rebutted one of those statements, somebody, I think it was the same Luo that mentioned some name and trying to connect that person with something that I knew that that person wasn't connected to or part of and my that rebuttal.

I: Doing the public hearing?

A: Yeah at the public hearing.

I: You made that rebuttal?

A: Yes.

I: So finally, I want to say thank you for your time. A lot questions here, lets bring it back to the community where you live, here Minnesota there are few Liberian communities as a result of every thing we've talked about, have you been involved with any reconciliation, TRC related or not, activities that will bring community cohesion, bring about people's transitioning into t he broader American society either in North Carolina or through the internet, or on the phone, here in Minnesota and in other places since you testified--- have you been actively involved?

A: You mean into any reconciliation?

I: Any activity that you view that could bring reconciliation or unity, and I know you are person with a community organization over there, so definitely, it is just something I wanted you to elaborate on and share your experience.

A: Well, let me correctly say my activities here always involve reconciliation, always involve concerns for the people and always involve bringing people together in a way you have to apply some reconciliatory strategies. This is so because bringing people from different backgrounds

together, there's a lot involved in it and making them to understand if you want them to , making them to have the kind of support and for the community to be able to succeed, it requires bringing all these different people from different background together even though we are all Liberians but knowing that we are from different, different ethnic background and stuff, so it requires some work, and that work is what we have been by the grace of God successful at in a lot of way, but the TRC process I think it kind of serves as an eye opener, it really helped to see, think on a broader level so it has been very helpful for me and since I've been back I haven't had a forum where I have to handle a dispute or any thing like that, no, but what we'll be doing is that we have just stepped up our approach from that experience, from Minnesota, it enabled us the opportunity to step up our way of approach to bring the community more cohesive.

I: You have new strategy for community engagement?

A: Exactly.

I: When the conversation started we were like you know, thank you so, so much, this is as I always told you, this is leadership again, because you mentioned the importance of documenting this is exactly what this Oral History project is about, document the experiences and talk about certain participation and so on , I really, really on behalf of the Advocates for Human Rights and as a Liberian professional person who works with human rights organizations I am personally privileged to be apart of the Liberian project in this organization and provide services this way, public service and it has enabled me to learn a lot from you and for me and other people who have experience in Liberia and who are living here in the United States.....so I will like to thank you personally and Laura wants me to thank you also and apologize that she had to leave in the middle of our conversation she will talk to you as soon as she is able to do so.....once again thank you so much for your time today Mr. Hunder. You provided lot of insight and we will have some more conversation after this. We will keep you abreast as to what the Oral History project and give you up date and what will happen to this recording and the archive of it and all of that. As we mentioned in the beginning the disclosure form that we sent you please sign it and put it in the mail for us.

A: Ok, I will.

I: Again thanks a lot, it was fascinating conversation.

A: Well thank you, I appreciate it and I really welcome it can I appreciate it very much and thank you all for the effort that you have continued to follow up on this TRC hearing and continue to make sure that we have the proper documentation and stuff, that required your determination and we are indebted to the TRC for that.

I: Thank you so much sir, you have a wonderful day.