



TRC Sample Narratives



General Guidelines for Compiling Notes into a TRC Statement

- Complete sentences & clear paragraph structure**
- Third person**
- Identify statement-giver by last name**
- Generally chronological** (There is no definite rule as to how to organize the statement. Headings are not necessary, but may be inserted if you think they will be helpful.)
- Use quotes**
- Detailed!!** As much detail as possible about **who did what to whom when.**
 - **First and last name of all individuals** mentioned by the statement-giver
 - **Birthdates** of individuals mentioned by the statement-giver when possible
 - Dates and specific locations for all incidents
 - Identifying characteristics of perpetrators (dress, scars, nicknames, etc., as well as proper name if known)
- Check spellings** of places, tribes, etc. against the keywords lists
- Hearsay is ok**
- Stories about other people are ok**
- Err on the side of inclusion!** If you are unsure whether to include something, ask the statement-giver at the end of the interview what their preference would be. If you become unsure about something later on, keep it in. If there are inconsistencies in the statement, try to clarify them with the statement giver, but do not make assumptions if you have not had a chance to clarify. The TRC Commissioners in Liberia will investigate incidents, inconsistencies, and accusations in TRC statements – statement-takers should not insert their own assumptions about inconsistencies or potentially false information into the TRC narrative.



Sample TRC Statement from a Liberian Woman

At the onset of the war in 1990, Statement-giver was 13 years old, living with her mother and going to school. Statement-giver lived with her siblings and several other children under her mother's care in Gardnersville on a housing estate. The estate was close to the main road, and they had heard that another estate further off the road and near the forest had been captured by the rebels. They had also heard that the rebels were nearing Red Light, a major intersection about 15 minutes from the housing estate. Statement-giver's mother decided to take Statement-giver and the other children living in the household into Monrovia to stay with Statement-giver's aunt, whom she refers to as her "auntie". Statement-giver remembered that her mother brought a newborn baby home to care for, because the baby's mother was in trouble with the police and there was no one else to take care of the little girl baby. After having taken the baby and the girls into town, statement-giver's mother went back to the housing estate to get the older boys who were living there. Statement-giver's mother was cut off by the rebel advance and Statement-giver did not see her mother again for almost three years.

Statement-giver stayed with her auntie during the war. Auntie's home was on the corner up on a hill in the French Cable neighborhood, an area that Prince Johnson had captured. In addition to Statement-giver, her siblings, and her auntie, the other residents of the auntie's home included her own seven or eight children, Statement-giver's cousins. One night in August, they heard shooting in the neighborhood. The house did not have running water, and the next morning Statement-giver was outside her aunt's home brushing her teeth when she saw "freedom fighters" walking in the street. There were about six boys between the ages of 14 and 18 in front of her auntie's yard. The boys were wearing fatigues and were armed. They identified themselves as Prince Johnson's boys. Statement-giver did not know any of the boys, but her auntie recognized one of them.

A man was walking in the street jubilating, and approached the armed boys to welcome them. The boys said, "We know you, you're an army guy." They accused him of being a member of the army



because they said that they could tell by indentation marks made from the combat hat and boots straps due to repeated wear. In the case of this individual, the rebel boys did not even check to really see if the man had these markings – they just accused him and shot him. The armed boys shot this man right in front of Statement-giver. She remembers seeing the white coming out of his ears. Statement-giver urinated on herself because she was so scared, and her auntie told her to come in the house quickly, and that they were going to leave.

After the shooting, Statement-giver's auntie packed up the entire family and moved them later on during the day. They had to wait until the so-called "Freedom Fighters" had left the area before they could leave and they could not go at night because there was a curfew imposed at that time. Statement-giver went with her auntie and auntie's children and the little baby her mother had brought home. On the way down to Waterside, the group came across the first of several checkpoints. There were bodies littering the streets, and they had mostly all been stripped. Statement-giver was terrified and described the scent as terrible, and the scene at the checkpoint as horrible. Auntie tried to keep everyone together and in the center of the groups moving through the checkpoints, because those on the edges were more likely to be pulled off the line.

Crossing the "Old Bridge", the group in which Statement-giver and her family were moving had to practically crawl, and people were regularly taken off the line for a variety of reasons. Statement-giver said that "If you were seen as being Krahn you were taken off the line and killed. If you looked a certain way they would kill you. Sometimes they would just pull people off the line and accuse them, if they found certain things on your person." Statement-giver witnessed people having their elbows tied back to the point at which they touched (a practice known as *tabbé*), being beaten, and being taken off the line. The men at the checkpoints would use their guns and rifle through the belongings of those passing the checkpoints, and take their money. After 2 hours trying to get through the checkpoint, they finally did so. Once Statement-giver, her family and the other persons in the group reached the other side of the bridge, three people were taken off the line and everyone heard shots.



The group walked on toward Bushrod Island and all along the route were bodies. At Claratown, there was another checkpoint where everyone had to take off their shoes. The rebels searched people to make sure that they were not hiding shoes. Again, people were pulled off the line and told to sit off to the side. Statement-giver does not know what happened to those people.

At Freeport there was another checkpoint and Statement-giver's family were all taken off the line. They were sent to do forced labor, unloading the cargo at the port of Monrovia, which the rebels were systematically looting. One of Statement-giver's cousins was told to stay behind to watch over the little children, while the rest of the family was forced to load trucks. All the INPFL rebel supervisors were wearing fatigues, and some had red t-shirts and/or wigs and dark blue jeans – this was their unofficial uniform if they did not have army green camouflage/ fatigues. Statement-giver and her family were forced to work unloading cargo for the rest of the day, and they had to sleep overnight at the docks. The next day, the rebel commander came down and ordered them all to get out of the area, and began beating people, so they ran away as fast as they could.

Statement-giver and her family were able to reach another auntie's house in Logantown, which was closer to Prince Johnson's base in Caldwell. There was no food and no water, but there was a well at this auntie's house. They collected chicken greens that grew alongside the nearby swamp and cooked them over a fire on the septic tank at the back of the house. For some time they were not bothered because Prince Johnson's troops were busy emptying the port of Monrovia. Prince Johnson's troops would regularly use the Logantown road as a shortcut to get to Caldwell. One day, several so called "freedom fighters" came by the house and said that they were there to get wives for themselves. Auntie told him that all her children were too young for that, but the rebel took one of Statement-giver's cousins. Another soldier said that he would be coming back that night to sleep with Statement-giver. Another cousin, who was 19 or 20 at the time, said that Statement-giver was a virgin but she was not. That night, she wrapped Statement-giver up in a blanket so that she couldn't move and put her under the bed in their room, telling her not to make a sound. The rebel came back and asked for Statement-giver. When her cousin told the rebel that she didn't know where Statement-giver was, he kicked her and kept asking for Statement-giver, but her cousin continued to



lie. He was drunk and after her cousin didn't tell him where Statement-giver was, he raped her. Statement-giver was lying under the bed as the rebel raped her cousin, who didn't say a word. After he left, her cousin was screaming and crying, and Statement-giver felt as if she herself never wanted to see the light of day again. In the morning, her cousin went and immersed herself in the swamp. Statement-giver reported that she herself slept under the bed for many years after this incident.

Statement-giver's cousin who had been taken by a rebel as a wife, returned and decided that she had to get out of Monrovia. She went to the port where she had heard that there was a ship leaving for Ghana, and she somehow got on the ship and never came back.

During the war the rebels would come by on the Logantown road and ask Statement-giver about her tribe. Statement-giver knew that they would kill Krahn's, but she told them she was Krahn anyway. Statement-giver's mother is Americo-Liberian, but her father is a Krahn. The rebels never believed her when she said that she was Krahn, and Statement-giver never argued with them. Statement-giver took care of the little baby her mother had brought home, but there was no milk or baby food. The baby was only a month or two old and she died on the same Wednesday that the SELF group came to distribute food.

During the war Statement-giver and her family always lived in fear. Apart from all the bad things that were happening, it was always dark because there was no electricity. One day Statement-giver saw a woman walking into town and she literally was like a walking skeleton – seeing that woman made statement-giver think about her mother whom she had not seen or heard from since the start of the war. The vision of that woman made statement-giver wonder if her mother was still alive and, if she had food to eat or, did she look like that woman now for lack of nutrition.

After President Doe was captured, ECOMOG troops came, and Statement-giver's family group went back to Monrovia. In May 1992, Statement-giver finally got word that her mother was in Kakata. During Operation Octopus, Kakata was targeted. Statement-giver's uncle and aunt, who had helped her mother, were killed – their burned bodies were found in their home. Statement-



giver's mother was able to get to Monrovia with the help of a friend. After arriving in Monrovia, Statement-giver's mother never went back to Kakata.

Another offensive began in the capital, and Statement-giver's mother went back and forth between the estate where they had once lived in Gardnersville and Monrovia. Rockets were being launched constantly, and a rocket hit the house where Statement-giver and her mother had lived. Everything was destroyed, and even after walking all the way there Statement-giver and her mother couldn't save anything because rain had flooded the building. Statement-giver and her mother were separated again, and Statement-giver's mother went to Ghana. Statement-giver also spent time in Ghana, but later returned to Monrovia.

Statement-giver's father had been searching for her throughout the conflict. He had left Liberia at the start of the war and had fled to the United States. He located her in the spring of 1996 and Statement-giver was informed that there were papers waiting for her at the embassy so that she could get out of Liberia. Statement-giver was able to locate her mother in Ghana and brought her to the United States in 1999.



Sample TRC Statement from a Liberian Man

Statement giver had just returned from studying abroad, at the outset of the war in 1990. Statement giver lived with his family in a place called Millionaire Quarter. Statement giver heard rumors about the war coming to Monrovia from friends in the neighborhood. He didn't believe it since he had never experienced anything like that before.

In July 1990, statement giver lived with his wife and four children. During this time, heavy fighting had erupted between the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) soldiers and Prince Johnson's INPFL forces. Statement giver thought that it was a "do or die." He thought that they would not survive the situation since the fighting was so heavy. The fighting forced him and his family move to the Perry Street neighborhood, which is near the G.W. Gibson Junior High School on the Capital Bypass.

Once they arrived in Perry Street, things were all chaotic. There was shooting everywhere. Friends warned statement giver and his family to leave. The Prince Johnson forces were attacking the AFL from their Caldwell base. Statement giver heard the notorious reputation of the Prince Johnson boys. Some people were crossing the Gabriel Tucker Bridge to Bushrod Island, walking toward Duala and Brewersville. Statement giver and family decided to leave for the Island too.

Statement giver was detained at the Gate of Heaven Check Point at Crown Hill in Monrovia. He had forewarned his family that if he was stopped then they should keep going and not look back. He wanted to save his family if anything were to happen to him. At the Gate of Heaven check point he saw his first actual dead body that he had been hearing about. Statement giver was not sure about which group had killed this individual. He said it could have been either the AFL or the INPFL. Statement giver was tortured at this check point. He was tied up, made to confess for being a Krahn, or also an AFL soldier. He said he didn't confess to something he was not. Because of his refusal to confess, he was severely tortured. He said the rebels didn't want anyone calling them "rebel"; they preferred people calling them "Freedom Fighters."



After eventually being allowed to pass the checkpoint, statement giver and his family passed by the Daily Observer newspaper offices, across from the YMCA building. They encountered another check point, manned by the INPFL rebels. These rebels wore red pieces of clothing on their heads and guns. They quizzed people trying to cross about their ethnicities and governmental affiliations. The rebels also asked people questions about what they saw on the other side.

Statement giver said that since he had just returned from abroad, he was looking a bit different so the rebels could tell that he was an important person. Because of this assumption, they began to strip him naked. In the process, the rebels found his wallet with his identity cards. One of the IDs was his National Social Security card. Upon seeing this card, the rebels became infuriated and said that he was a security person. The illiterate rebels who could only recognize the word “Security,” thought that statement giver was their enemy. Statement giver said that he was held against his will and tortured again for several hours. Statement giver was tied in a “Dog-Fat” tabae. Tabae meant they tied his hands behind his back so that his chest protruded to a point of breaking his chest cavity. He was in this position from 8 am to 9 pm. He was interrogated intermittently about his ethnicity and affiliation to the AFL soldiers. At that check point, while being tortured, he saw the rebels dismember and torture other civilians who were being interrogated as well.

While all this was going on, statement giver saw a former student. Statement giver used to be a public school teacher. Statement giver said he intentionally made incessant noises so that his former student would notice him. This former student was a member of the INPFL rebels. At first, when the former student recognized him, the former student ignored him. Despite his effort to make the student see him, this student refused to assist statement giver. He said that he thought perhaps the student didn’t help him because the student was afraid if he did, he might have suffered a similar fate since that was common practice of the rebels. Or perhaps, the former student might have been just a low ranking officer in the rebel force at that time and thus had no authority to release him. Statement giver said his family left him and went to an unknown destination while he was being kept at the check point. He remained at this checkpoint tied up until dawn.



Statement giver said that while he was in was in captivity, the rebels asked him his opinion about what was happening. He then told them that he thought they (the rebels) said that they had come to save the people, that they were “freedom fighters.” Statement giver said his comments got him into further trouble when the rebels accused him of being a “Big-Shot” and they said he “know too much book.” These accusations led to further torturing. At this point the rebels decided to take him to Slipway Township, where the rebels had a detention facility. At this Slipway facility, statement giver said the rebels had other torture victims as well. At one point, statement giver heard a woman crying and cursing the rebels. This went on intermittently. He said the woman was complaining and urging the rebels to not harm her. However, statement giver heard the woman saying she didn’t care who the rebels were, and the rebels were not freedom fighters for her. But he didn’t know exactly what the rebels were doing to this woman.

Statement giver said that the following morning, he saw the rebels let some captives go. Others were still being humiliated. They took some people, including statement giver behind Slipway Community School, and then all of a sudden shooting broke out. The shooting was happening across the Bridge in Vaitown. The rebels said it was AFL soldiers attacking. Statement giver said the rebels were heavily armed. He said the rebels and the government soldiers were exchanging recriminations and insults. The rebels accused the AFL of massacring their people at the Lutheran Church in Sinkor. Again the rebels began to torture him and others because of the Lutheran Church massacre. Again, he was accused of being Krahn, which he repeatedly denied. At this point he was still stripped naked. One of the rebels’ commanders arrived and asked who statement giver was. The rebel commander asked to see statement giver’s ID. Upon seeing the ID, he concluded that statement giver was not man enough because he was from Sinoe County and not Grand Gedeh County. So, the commander ordered his boys to let this “woman” go. Another commander named General Noriega saw statement giver’s ID and said they let him go because he worked for a hospital and they thought he was a doctor. The commander asked statement giver to join the rebels, but statement giver opted to go find his family. At this point General Noriega warned statement giver that the boys on the other side were more ruthless and that they would kill him if he went to their



territory. Statement giver insisted on leaving to find his family. They took his personal belongings and some of his IDs and let him finally go. However, one of the rebels followed him and gave his voting id back to him. He couldn't tell whether the previous rebels group was NPFL or Johnson boys. But as soon as he crossed the Bridge to Vaiton, he realized he was now in Prince Johnson territory. This was July 31, 1990. Johnson rebels had heard also about the Lutheran Church massacre. There was chaos and confusion. All he wanted was to get to Duala to find his wife and four children because he heard that that was where most of the people from the check point went to.

He met another INPFL rebel former student of his who was a commando at the Johnson check point. He was afraid, but this time around the student helped him. He gave him 200 Liberian dollars and some Garri or Farina (cassava product, food). The former student urged statement giver to stay with them and promised to introduce statement giver to Field Marshall Prince Johnson. But statement giver refused and said he was going to find his family. Statement giver then trekked toward Demi in Bomi County. He left Demi to go to Malima Gobla in Bomi. As a result of the torture and extensive trekking, statement giver still feels pains in his body.

View on root causes of conflict:

Statement giver attributed the crises in Liberia to the 1979 Rice riot and its antecedent unresolved problems under the late President Richard Tolbert. He also said corruption and the monopoly of the rice market by the government led to the crisis in 1979. He said Liberians were far ahead of other African countries in terms of democratic practices, but the country also was ahead on corruption and lack of essential services to the people.

Recommendations for reconciliation in the USA:

Statement giver believes that Liberians in American have adopted the individualist nature of the American society. As a result, statement giver said it is difficult to bring people together as would easily happen in a communitarian manner in Liberia. Statement giver nevertheless urged Liberians in the USA to come forward to give their statements to the TRC. He also feels that Liberians should



forgive one another. He made references to South Africa's former President Mandela's attitude of forgiveness toward the people who abused his rights for many years. He said the reason why Liberians must forgive one another is that there is no such thing as Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians. Statement giver says that everybody is now fused as one body of Liberians.

He, nevertheless, still believes that in order to deter the reoccurrence of war, people who deliberately committed human rights abuses as a way of revenge, etc. should be prosecuted for their crimes. Statement giver said the TRC recommendations should be presented to the International Community, not the Liberian government since the government could sit on them. He fears that if the recommendations are presented to the government, it will fail to investigate itself.

Lastly, statement giver said that people who committed human rights abuses and now sit in government should be held accountable for their crimes.