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4 LIBERIA TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION
5 DIASPORA PROJECT
6

7 PUBLIC HEARING
8 June 13, 2008
9 St. Paul, Minnesota

10 TESTIMONY OF
11 ALI SYLLA
12

13
14 TRC Commissioners: Chairman Jerome Verdier
15 Vice Chairperson Dede Dolopei
16 Oumu Syllah
17 Sheikh Kafumba Konneh
18 Pearl Brown Bull
19 Rev. Gerald Coleman
20 John H.T. Stewart
21 Massa Washington

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Court Reporter: JoAnn Wahl

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 HEARING OFFICER TEAYAH: Please stand for the
2 oath.

3 ALI SYLLA

4 [being first duly sworn/duly affirming to tell the truth],
5 testified as follows:

6 TESTIMONY OF ALI SYLLA

7 VICE CHAIR DEDE DOLOPEI: Be seated, please.

8 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. Commissioner Oumu
9 Syllah will recuse herself because the witness is her
10 brother. Shall we rise, please.

11 (Commissioner Oumu Syllah exits the room.)

12 Is the witness's mike on?

13 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: We are very pleased that
15 you would take time off to come and share your experience
16 with the TROC and the people of Liberia as part of your
17 efforts and support to the peace and reconciliation process
18 of our country.

19 THE WITNESS: Right.

20 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: I will use this time to
21 introduce the commissioners --

22 THE WITNESS: Okay.

23 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: -- and following which
24 you'll present your statement.

25 At your right is Sheikh Kafumba Konneh, Pearl

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 Brown Bull, Gerald Coleman, Dede Dolopei, Massa Washington,
2 John Stewart, and I'm Jerome Verdier.

3 Can you kindly repeat your name?

4 THE WITNESS: My name is Ali Sylla, spelled A-L-I
5 S-Y-L-L-A.

6 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: H?

7 THE WITNESS: There's no H. S-Y-L-L-A.

8 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: I'll ask you for your
9 age.

10 THE WITNESS: My age, I'm 35 years old.

11 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Huh?

12 THE WITNESS: Thirty-five years old.

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thirty-five?

14 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

15 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Where do you reside
16 currently in the U.S.?

17 THE WITNESS: Oh, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

18 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: What do you do?

19 THE WITNESS: I'm a clinician.

20 (UNIDENTIFIED COMMISSIONER VOICE 1:) Clinician?

21 (UNIDENTIFIED COMMISSIONER VOICE 2:) Clinician.

22 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Clinician. When did you
23 migrate to the U.S.?

24 THE WITNESS: 199 -- June 7 of 1996.

25 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. Thank you. You

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 may proceed with your testimony.

2 THE WITNESS: Thank you. Thanks, Commissioners,
3 for having the public hearing in the United States. As I
4 said, my name is Ali Sylla. I live in Philadelphia,
5 Pennsylvania. I came to the States in 1996, of June 7, but I
6 left Liberia in 1994, of December of 1994.

7 So my testimony, probably I have to do a little
8 bit of introduction of my father. My father's name is Alhaji
9 Souleymane Syllah, the late. He was a businessman,
10 entrepreneur. He's owned the Syllah Brothers Corporation.
11 And the Syllah Brothers Corporation, in the '80s, we used to
12 sell rice, and then -- in the '70s we used to sell rice
13 before the Rice Riot. And then in the '80s my father, little
14 bit, start selling cocoa and coffee to L -- to LPMC. So he
15 was one of the southeastern agents of the LPMC, the Liberian
16 Produce Marketing Corporation. He was doing that for -- for
17 quite a while.

18 And also he was a founding member of the Muslim
19 Congress and the Muslim Council of Liberia. He was the
20 financial treasurer of the Muslim Congress High School. He
21 was part of the -- the Muslim Council was part of the
22 interfaith mediation committee that was set up, I think,
23 sometime in the '90s, and he was one of the first member that
24 was going to go to Sierra Leone for the first peace accord,
25 in Sierra Leone, of 1990. All right.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 So my story start from 1990. 1990, as you well
2 know, the war started, the war start of '89. And in 1990, at
3 that time my experience started. I was in Monrovia at the
4 time. I was attending Muslim Congress High School, which was
5 located on Mechlin Street, but now it's burned down.

6 So we're in school that day in 1990. We heard
7 rumors that the NPFL rebels were targeting Mandingos. During
8 actual truth to end this -- any one of the stories that was
9 coming out, why were they targeting Mandingos, I really
10 couldn't put my hands on it. So a lot of people were saying
11 that the Mandingos were associated with the Doe
12 administration which, of course, I would have said it was
13 false, because if I said it was false, in 1988, my father was
14 selling produce at the time and under the Doe administration
15 LPMC at the time was Aletha Johnson. She was the managing
16 director of LPMC. They came to our home and forcefully took
17 about \$200,000, worth -- 200,000 U.S. dollar worth of cocoa
18 and coffee, forcefully took it from our home. So when people
19 say that Mandingos were siding with the Doe administration,
20 you deal with judgment on that. So that goes to my story.

21 July 26 of 1990, that's the day that changed my
22 life. The INPFL rebel capture the Bushrod Island, coming
23 towards the Mamba Point area. That day was a Friday, so my
24 father went to the Juma'h prayer, and my father was one of
25 the Mandingo community leaders and Islamic council leaders.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 So he was, you know, pretty much, like every Friday, they
2 would go to the mosque'gee and have people to -- assemble
3 people and just, you know, participate in their daily
4 practices.

5 So while he was there, the rebel capture our area,
6 so they came to our home and ask everybody to leave. But
7 before that we pretty much lived in constant fear because of
8 the -- the -- the rumors that Mandingos were being killed.
9 And I heard of so many Mandingos were being killed and
10 targeted and harassed and humiliated. So we're living in
11 constant fear, pretty much.

12 But every day, as the day go by, my anxiety level
13 would just go back -- go up because of the -- the -- the news
14 about Mandingos being killed.

15 So on July 26th, 1990, when they capture our area,
16 we were told to leave the area because we heard that the Doe
17 soldiers, the AFS soldiers, were coming down to the area to
18 try to capture the area. So N -- NDPL -- ah, no, INPFL
19 rebels, which of course are -- I never knew there were INPF
20 at the time, and all I thought, they were NPFL, because
21 Prince Johnson at the time they were in NASDA, it was INPFL.
22 So they said we should move, everybody should leave the area.
23 So we kind of left the area to go to another of our home down
24 on -- on Johanson. I think around 2 o'clock p.m, on
25 July 26th, if I can vividly remember, we're told to go across

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 the bridge because at that time Prince Johnson rebel pretty
2 much capture the whole of Bushrod Island and some part of
3 Gardnersville area.

4 So we're told everybody leave their homes and, you
5 know. So we all just went to the old bridge area because
6 from Johanson to the old bridge, it's a short distance. So
7 we just crossed the bridge, and while we were walking, me and
8 my siblings, it was about 16 of us, while we're walking --
9 and also let me mention that I was 16 years old then. So
10 while we're walking across the bridge, I saw a friend of
11 mine. This friend, his name was Philip Toe. We were
12 confused. Nobody go because we didn't know anybody across
13 the bridge. So -- and when he spotted us, he said, "Where
14 you guys going?" So I said, well, we really don't know where
15 we're going. But he kind of, you know, got us to his folks'
16 house. So we went to Gardnersville right up to the cow
17 factory area. I really don't know that particular section of
18 Gardnersville in there.

19 So we went to that area. We stay at his house,
20 not knowing that this fellow, father was a Krahn, and he was
21 a deputy GSA director at the time. I can remember his last
22 name, used to call him Mr. Cooper. So we went to his house.
23 He has this big house. So one day, tried to stay there at
24 night. The rebel came and they tried to burn down the house.
25 So we jump from the back, all of us. We kind of jump from

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 the back, went to this -- in the Gardnersville area, there's
2 this swamp. So we jumped into the swamp, the swampy area.
3 So while we are in the swampy area, daylight came. They
4 didn't burn the house at that night. I think, somewhat
5 convinced them that -- Mr. Cooper wasn't no Krahn man, so
6 they left. And then once they left, early in the morning,
7 the same Philip Toe took us to his -- his -- another relative
8 of his, in the Logan Town area, behind the rice store, all
9 the way in Logan Town area.

10 So we stay in the Logan Town area for X amount of
11 days. I really can't count the number of days, probably like
12 four or five days. So while we were there, there were rumors
13 going around in the area that the folks' house that we're
14 staying in, that he was harvesting Mandingos. So -- so, I
15 mean, when I heard the news, he was even struggling to come
16 and tell us because we kinda find his place to kinda be, like
17 I said, hidden at the time.

18 So he told us he was struggling. He told us that,
19 you know, there's news around the area, and the rebels find
20 out that he was keeping Mandingos. And this is in Logan
21 Town, I mean, Prince Johnson rebels were pretty much --
22 that's one of their stronghold at the time. So we pretty
23 much were confused. We didn't know where to go. We couldn't
24 go right to the city because there was heavy fighting between
25 the AFS soldiers and the NPFL soldiers at the time.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 So we really couldn't go back to town, and also,
2 we didn't know my folks' whereabouts, my parents' whereabouts.
3 So every night, when I was in Logan Town, every evening we
4 tried to go across the bridge, walk to Vai Town area, try to
5 go across the bridge to find out what's going on with my
6 folks. But, unfortunately, I wasn't able to go across the
7 bridge. So when he told us to leave, we pretty much -- I
8 just made a decision, and I heard some rumors that the Voice
9 of America compound, I really don't know the area name, but
10 the Voice of America compound, people were going there to
11 seek refuge.

12 So I -- I told my siblings that's -- you know, we
13 need to go there. So it was -- it was a very impulsive kind
14 of decision. It was just, you know, something that you just
15 have to do with the constant fear, so we kind of walked
16 there. While walking, we witnessed so much abuse from the
17 soldiers; people were getting shot at, pretty much killed.
18 People were forced to bury people. You can't look onto a
19 dead body on the street. If you look at dead body, you most
20 likely to either bury the dead body or you get killed
21 yourself because everybody is suspicious. I mean, the rebels
22 were suspicious of the civilians, and the civilians were also
23 suspicious of the rebels. So we head to Voice of America
24 compound.

25 So while we're at the Voice of America compound,

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 at night they will put their lights on, so it's a kind of
2 safe haven for the rebel. The rebels will not come because
3 the Americans were staying in the voice -- the Voice of
4 America compound.

5 So we're there for X amount of days. I think it
6 was five days. Then the Americans got evacuated. I mean,
7 when the Americans got evacuated, the next minute the rebels
8 were in the area; they came to the compound. And they
9 started calling people to -- to give up their names. As you
10 know, my name is a Mandingo name anywhere: Ali Sylla.
11 There's no -- you know, how can you give that kind of name at
12 that time? So the confusion was -- and anxiety and fear, was
13 all, you know, building up bit by bit. So I -- we just
14 decided to go to Sierra Leone because we couldn't give our
15 name. We didn't come up with any other name. I mean, pretty
16 much that our name. So we're pretty much targeted because of
17 our identity and because of our ethnicity, to make a long
18 story short.

19 So we started walk in the jungle to head to Sierra
20 Leone. We're going to Sierra Leone; we came across Gba. Gba
21 is a town in Bomi County. There was a commander there, a
22 radical named Bai Ray. This guy was so vicious. He was
23 harassing women, so much psychological abuse the way he was
24 talking to people, the way he was shooting people, just take
25 you out of the line. Because if you approach the checkpoint,

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 you get interrogated. And once you get interrogated, I mean
2 viciously, you get a thorough interrogation. After that, you
3 either be associated -- I mean, few things they have to look
4 at. They have to look at your feet, whether your foot was
5 kind of tied from the -- the soldiers, unit soldiers wear
6 those military boot, and the way they tie, it leave kind of
7 scar on their -- on their feet; whether you was a soldier and
8 they look for I.D., you know, if you have any kind of I.D.
9 with your name on it, you're most likely to get killed. And
10 also you less likely to -- to go over the checkpoint.

11 So why we reached the Bai, I don't know how we get
12 over, but we -- we managed to cross the checkpoint. So while
13 we managed to cross the checkpoint, because people were
14 investigating names and so on and so forth, so I decided to
15 change my name to Alex Freeman. Alex Freeman just came to my
16 mind; very impulsive thought at the time. I decided to
17 change my name to Alex Freeman because I thought that Alex
18 Freeman was close to an Americo-Liberian name. So when I
19 changed my name to Alex Freeman, it was an easy way out to
20 kind of cope with some of the -- some of the target. So I
21 changed my name to Alex Freeman. So that -- that -- that
22 really actually allow me to kind of succeed in my -- in my
23 flight to Sierra Leone.

24 So after Bai, we were walking in the jungle; went
25 to a town called Bobojah. So Bobojah, I think, is the -- is

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 the Lofa River between Bomi and Cape Mount County, if I'm --
2 if I'm not mistaken. So we cross the river, but those who
3 were crossing the river were -- were the rebels. So pretty
4 much we -- you can't really look at the rebels in the eyes.
5 You really can't look at them. So we're tormented in every
6 shape or form. So after we crossed the river, we went to --
7 actually Robertsport was on this side, so we tried to come up
8 to the Main Street, because Robertsport is on the -- the left
9 side. And I would walk ahead of the group of my siblings.
10 And when I walked ahead, I would make sure there ain't no --
11 no rebel ahead of us. Then I would come back, and then I
12 would walk along with my siblings. So every time I will do
13 that, you know, every maybe like a mile, or mile and a half I
14 would walk, and then walk back, and make sure for their own
15 safety. So I continued to do that. At one point I kind of
16 walk ahead, and then when I came back, my siblings weren't
17 there. (Pausing.) Ah, my siblings weren't there (crying).
18 That's good; that's good; yeah, all right. Thank you.

19 Yeah, when I walk back, my siblings weren't there.
20 So I -- I stay at that area, but I slept in the jungle and --
21 so I slept there that night because at 6 o'clock you really
22 can't walk because of the curfew in the area. So I stayed
23 there, and then the next day I kind a -- I was just confused.
24 I said, well, let me just go ahead because you really can't
25 go back because you give -- you know, you give another -- you

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 already give a fake identity, so you really can't go back.
2 If you go back, you're most likely to be charged with either
3 some other crime -- a spy. There was a terminology that they
4 use.

5 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: TI?

6 THE WITNESS: What?

7 UNIDENTIFIED COMMISSIONER VOICE: Reconnaissance?

8 THE WITNESS: Reconnaissance, yeah, yeah,
9 absolutely. And that term, you know, pretty much, if you get
10 caught for that terminology, you're done. So I didn't go
11 back. So I just continued. So I continued. I went to -- I
12 went to Tienie. That's another big town. You know, at
13 Tienie, I was there, this guy came up, there's a rebel guy
14 that asked me for my name. I mean, this name was just -- was
15 just a made-up name, you know, so I was really not used to
16 the name very well.

17 Once I reached there, I would kind of mentally
18 prepare myself to give that name. So I just -- here I think
19 I was a little bit tired and confused and -- and stressed out
20 from the stress. So I kind -- when he asked me for my name,
21 I kind of -- it was a delayed pattern between giving up my
22 name and the question, so it took me a while. So after I
23 catch up, and then I said, oh, Al -- Alex Freeman. So by the
24 time I said "Alex Freeman," he put a gun to me and he tried
25 to kill me. Because the first thing he said, oh, I'm a

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 Mandingo man. I don't know my name, and so on and so forth.
2 But it was a bunch of people that were there, some good
3 Samaritan kind of, you know, talk him out of it. If he says
4 his name is not -- his name is Alex Freeman, that's what he
5 is. He's not Mandingo. I think the thing that really make
6 me to succeed there, because of my -- you know, because I
7 could speak a little bit better English, so that was my
8 advantage. But if I couldn't speak no English, I was, you
9 know, done.

10 So when he put a gun to me and everybody came to
11 my plea. So he -- later on, they talk him -- they talk
12 him -- pretty much talk him out of it. So I went to Bo. Bo
13 is a big town between Cape Mount and Sierra Leone. So I went
14 to Bo. They were doing some investigation and interrogation
15 in the desert huts. When you go in there, you most likely
16 not to come out. So I say I'm not going to take that chance.
17 I mean, I just had those thoughts. I said, I'm not going
18 there. What I'm going to do is I'm going to sit here and
19 wait for the group that come out, and then -- then -- then
20 they ask for single file. The group that come out into a
21 single file, then I can probably try to slip my way through
22 there. And then, once you in that single file, you really
23 don't have to go back through interrogation. So I tried to
24 do that the first time. Then people were looking, so I went
25 back. So I tried the second time. People were looking; I

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 went back. So the third time when I tried, no one was
2 looking, so I joined the single-file line. So that's how I
3 crossed to Sierra Leone. So at Sierra Leone, Bowaterside in
4 Sierra Leone, I stay there for ten days. No money. I was in
5 one clothes. No food. I was hungry. So I just stood there.
6 There's nowhere I could go because I didn't have no
7 transportation to cross over to whatsoever I needed to go --
8 to go to Kenema or Bo or Freetown. So I stay at Bo, and also
9 with the thought of maybe my folks, my -- my siblings will
10 join me later on. But, unfortunately, that didn't happen.
11 So I stayed there ten days. I was sleeping on market tab --
12 market tables, and you know, when it rain at night, you have
13 to get up and wait for the rain to stop. You name it. You
14 name it. So the basic necessity weren't there. Shower was
15 out of the question. You don't have no food so -- so the
16 basic necessities weren't there. So I stayed there ten days.

17 Fortunately, for me, I saw -- because of my
18 father's status and I was always around my dad, so I pretty
19 much knew most of his friends and his associates and some of
20 his business partner. So I -- I kind of spotted one of his
21 associate, but he didn't really know me. So I walk up to
22 him. I said, "I know you don't really know me, but my father
23 name is..." this and that. And he called -- and then he
24 said -- and then he said at that time I already knew that my
25 father -- before I get to that, that my father was killed on

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 July -- July 26th. He was captured on that day, when he came
2 from the mosque to the house, and he was killed by NPFL rebel
3 on that day. So when I get there, and -- and he ask me,
4 "Where is your dad?" And I said to him, you know, "My dad
5 been killed." And so he offered me transportation to go to
6 Guinea (crying). So he offered me transportation to go to
7 Guinea. So I -- I took his -- I took that transportation and
8 went to Guinea. I was in Guinea, confused. I knew -- I
9 never knew my -- my folks' or my siblings' whereabouts. And
10 also I knew my father was killed, too.

11 So I stay in Guinea from -- this was in September,
12 on to December I was in Guinea. The Guinea experience
13 weren't pretty either so, I mean, no money -- I was, you
14 know, you know, living on the refugee Camp Nzerekore, and I
15 stay in Guinea until January of '91. Then I heard interim
16 government at the time with emissary was sending people to
17 Liberia, transporting people from Guinea to Monrovia, so I --
18 I shoot to -- oh, before that, before that, I was in
19 Nzerekore. That's a radio I used to listen to about the news
20 in Monrovia because I really wanted to go back to Monrovia.
21 And there was an announcement on the radio station, and the
22 announcement came from -- that -- actually, I think the
23 announcement came up that my siblings were in Monrovia
24 because of my father's status. So once I immediately heard
25 that news, I kind of went straight to Conakry, and I heard

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 that they were, you know, repatriating people back to
2 Monrovia. So I went to Conakry. I got on the ship. I think
3 it's the Amville ship, and I went to Monrovia. Immediately I
4 got to Monrovia, at the port were the NPFL rebel at the port
5 with ECOMOG. So they were harassing people, who you are,
6 this and that, so I give the guy the same Alex Freeman name.
7 You know, I didn't have no ID, you know; definitely, I didn't
8 have no ID. So he cannot let me go. So I went to town.
9 Fortunately, I went home, and then I spotted my siblings at
10 home.

11 So in Monrovia we -- we were just living in fear,
12 you know, and you know, constant fear, constant harassment.
13 We have NPFL soldiers in our homes -- my father had, you
14 know, extended properties; rebels in our home not paying
15 rent. We couldn't take them out. There's a fear. If you go
16 there, most likely if anything happen, you gonna get killed.
17 So properties were destroyed from us. In my father home, a
18 hundred thousand U.S. dollar was taken, 8 kilos of golds and
19 diamond were taken. I mean, legitimate papers were
20 destroyed: Bank account, court documents, I mean, bank
21 statement, bank book. So most of my father's assets were --
22 we didn't really retrieve them, you know. Home -- property
23 deeds were taken. I mean, some people were having some of
24 the deeds and saying that that is their home. So while I was
25 in Monrovia, I was living in constant fear. So I tried to

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 get back in school because, you know, I got back in school.
2 I started going to the First Assembly of God High School on
3 Buchanan Street. So in school there was always sentiment
4 that, oh, if anything happen, you're Mandingo people, we're
5 gonna kill ya. You know, I have friends of mine who would
6 always threaten me. Some of them I don't even know their
7 name, but I know their nickname. There's a guy down there
8 that I grew up with, is name was Tiej; always threaten me.
9 If anything happen, he gonna kill me. And in some part of
10 Monrovia at the time, we couldn't go there because of your
11 ethnicity. The Caldwell area, some part of Logan Town, I
12 couldn't really go there because of my ethnicity. Some part
13 of Paynesville, I couldn't really go there because of my
14 ethnicity. So I was very much barricaded into central
15 Monrovia. And then some part of central Monrovia, on Carey
16 Street, you know. At some time I used to go around Carey
17 Street to go where I have to go, you know, because the NPFL
18 rebels and the INPFL rebels will come to town. And you
19 really don't want to be identified as a Mandingo person at
20 that time. And then the status of my father, is easy, is
21 much, much easier to -- to be identified. So I always have
22 constant fear. I was always in constant fear. So I stay in
23 Monrovia off and on. There was war. Then all the wars came,
24 you know, constant fear. A lot of people came to central
25 Monrovia, so central Monrovia was packed to capacity. Then

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 later on, I graduated from high school. And in 1994, I like,
2 I got to get out of here because, you know, there was no room
3 for me to be in Monrovia, or so on and so forth. So I just
4 told my people that I have to leave. So, fortunately, they
5 have some money, so I got some visa. I went to Egypt. I
6 went to try to go to the university, American University in
7 Cairo. So while there, the -- I stay with the ambassador,
8 Ambassador Dr. Kaba, at his house, Abraham D. Kaba, because
9 he was part of the Muslim Congress and the Muslim Council, so
10 good, you know, associate with my father. So I stay with him
11 for a little bit. Then Octopus came around -- no, not
12 Octopus, April 6th war came around. I had no contact with my
13 folks in Monrovia so -- and then he was called back. I think
14 he was called as a deputy foreign minister at the time. So
15 he obtain me a visa to come to America, so I came to America.
16 My American experience, I went to go get asylum. I was first
17 denied by the immigration officer. I don't know why, because
18 I'm sitting here giving the same story, and their views and
19 the -- the agony that I went through. He denied me the first
20 time. Then I went to court. I had a lawyer; I went to
21 court. And the judge saw my credibility and he approved my
22 asylum, and I got asylum. And later on I kind of adjusted my
23 status. I went back to school, got my bachelor's degree. I
24 went back again. I got my master's. I just have my master's
25 this May. So that's pretty much my experience. But if

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 anything come up, maybe I can probably come back to that, say
2 thanks.

3 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you. Thank you
4 for taking up your time to share your experience with us and
5 your experience here in the diaspora. There's evidence of
6 the progressive nature in which you've conducted yourself. I
7 want to use this time to express our sympathy to you for the
8 death of your father. The rest of your siblings, you didn't
9 introduce enough your siblings?

10 THE WITNESS: I didn't hear you.

11 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Your siblings.

12 THE WITNESS: My statement?

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Siblings: Your brothers
14 and sisters.

15 THE WITNESS: Yes, oh, my siblings.

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: They are all alive?

17 THE WITNESS: One of my brother got killed with my
18 father. His name is Lafayette Syllah; name is Lafayette,
19 L-A-F-A-Y-E-T-T-E, Lafayette Syllah. And another brother of
20 mine, too, got killed. He joined the AFL to try to protect
21 the family. His name was Bangaly Syllah. Just imagine, he
22 joined the AFL with not even a Bangaly name. He enter, I
23 think, Bob -- I can't even remember his last name, that he
24 enter the AFL with, not with a Mandingo name, but Bob. So --
25 and I guess, because he tried to, you know, hide his identity

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 because maybe he was thinking about what was really
2 happening. Some of my siblings back --

3 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay.

4 THE WITNESS: -- in Monrovia.

5 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you. Like to say
6 sorry that it happened.

7 THE WITNESS: Yeah. Can you speak up a little
8 bit?

9 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: We are sorry that all of
10 that happened, and we are glad that you have come to testify.

11 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

12 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Commissioners will ask
13 you a couple of questions.

14 THE WITNESS: Sure.

15 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Sheikh.

16 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Thank you for the
17 sharing of this story.

18 THE WITNESS: Okay.

19 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: You know, one of the
20 things of the war is how do we deal with people's reparation
21 for those who have suffered great losses. So I'm just
22 wondering in your -- since the war time, have you and your
23 family ever made any effort with regards to reclaiming the
24 property that you said you lost? Has there been a problem
25 with that?

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 THE WITNESS: Yeah. We had -- we had some problem
2 obtaining some of the deeds from some people. I was in
3 America, but I was in constant contact with my sisters, my
4 siblings back home. They had some serious problem with the
5 Lands and Mines, some of the deeds because, you know, the
6 properties were obtained prior to the war. So I think the
7 Mother Deeds in Lands and Mines, you know, some of the deeds
8 were there, but some of the other original deed, the original
9 deeds were taken and destroyed. So I -- I think it took
10 awhile for them to get of those deed around, but it's pretty
11 much the duplicates.

12 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Then you mentioned
13 only two brothers that passed away. How about your mother?
14 How did she fare during this time?

15 THE WITNESS: You know, thanks for asking that,
16 but when my father got killed, she -- she told me that --
17 because my mom kind of speak pretty much like a lot of
18 different local languages. I guess she hid her identity
19 speaking Mano. She said a gun was put to her head. She was
20 talked to like trash. I really don't want to get into my
21 mother's stuff.

22 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: I understand. Okay.
23 Thank you very much.

24 THE WITNESS: All right.

25 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Mr. Witness --

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 THE WITNESS: Yep.

2 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: -- thank you,
3 again, for coming and for muster -- mustering the courage to
4 tell your story which is extremely heartbreaking.

5 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

6 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Thank God you are
7 alive, and other members of your family as well, and sorry
8 for the death of your father and brothers. I have one or two
9 questions.

10 THE WITNESS: Sure.

11 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: If for any reason,
12 if you feel you don't have to answer any of the questions --

13 THE WITNESS: Okay.

14 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: -- it's your
15 prerogative; you don't have to.

16 THE WITNESS: Sure.

17 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: We just want to
18 understand, for the sake of the record, how some of these
19 things could have happened.

20 THE WITNESS: Can you speak up a little bit
21 louder?

22 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Sure.

23 Can you -- do you have any information at all
24 about those who are responsible for killing your father and
25 your brother?

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 THE WITNESS: And I've been struggling with that
2 for quite a while. I've been struggling with that because
3 the same people that kill my father, they in power right now.
4 So -- and the reason why I been struggling with that is
5 because my siblings in Monrovia. And I'm not trying to put
6 them in any harm's way. But also because I've been
7 struggling with that, it allows me to be stagnated, you know.
8 I mean, this is a very -- but the thing that I must say, I
9 think my father would probably say something like, you know,
10 forgive, but forgiveness is a hard thing, you know. Because
11 you are so religious, you just say, Mandingo, you talk to
12 Allah ma. That mean, you know, just leave it with God.

13 And also, too, there's this -- there's a old
14 saying that, you know, every son, you know, wishes to live up
15 to his father expectations, or to either better themself from
16 their father mistakes. But I would say the people that they
17 kill my father is Adolphus Dolo.

18 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Okay. Before I go
19 to my next question, just very briefly, you stated that your
20 father would have probably would have said --

21 THE WITNESS: I can't hear you. Speak up some.

22 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: You stated that
23 your father would have said just leave it alone --

24 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh -- which is a good thing.
25 But then also the TROC has a mandate under the Act to address

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 the culture of impunity that is -- has existed in our
2 community for so long.

3 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

4 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: And now someone
5 rightly stated the other day that people oftentimes like to
6 confuse impunity with reconciliation --

7 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

8 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: -- and we, on the
9 TROC, want to make sure that in pushing and pushing
10 reconciliation and ensuring that we can reconcile our people,
11 that we'll also address the culture of impunity. So please
12 bear with me if I ask certain questions intended to look at
13 those very issues of justice and impunity.

14 THE WITNESS: Sure.

15 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Okay. Again, this
16 is another difficult question. You don't have to answer it.

17 THE WITNESS: Okay.

18 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Did you receive
19 any information concerning how your father was killed?

20 THE WITNESS: Did I receive any information how my
21 father were killed? You know, there's a good friend of ours.
22 I don't know whether he's alive or -- or dead, and I
23 really -- he was a friend of my -- my -- one of my oldest
24 brother, because I think they were going to Saint Patrick's
25 together. He told us that he saw my father buried at Mechlin

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 Street, down in the Waterside area, along with my brother.
2 So it seems like that he was taken away from home, but he
3 really didn't make it to the base and he got killed at the
4 Waterside area. So that's -- that's pretty much. But the
5 reason why I call his name was like, you know, in the area.
6 We had neighbors that, you know, seven guys came to the
7 property and tried to get my father. And my brother
8 Lafayette kind of joined my father because he says that if my
9 father is gonna go, he has to go along with my father so --
10 and I guess any son would do that, you know.

11 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: So the same person
12 also is responsible for the killing of your brother?

13 THE WITNESS: Absolutely.

14 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Would this be the
15 same person or group of people who looted your -- your
16 father's property and took away --

17 THE WITNESS: Absolutely. I think they came back
18 to the property and looted the house. And there was --
19 actually we have another property down in Johanson area. One
20 of the -- even one of the -- the guys that did the --
21 occupied the property, when I went back to Monrovia, and he
22 wouldn't leave the property. We had to get ECOMOG involved
23 and they came there for him to leave the property.

24 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Do you want to
25 share that second name with us?

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 THE WITNESS: I really don't know his name. They
2 always had some kind of nickname, but I really don't know his
3 name.

4 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Okay. My last
5 question. You just painted a very extremely grim picture of
6 tribalism in Liberia and how people were just simply targeted
7 because of their ethnicity --

8 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

9 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: -- which is
10 absolutely so wrong. Based on your experience --

11 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

12 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: -- as a Mandingo
13 who was targeted, and only to the fact that now we out of
14 war; we're not fighting war anymore --

15 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

16 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: -- how do you feel
17 right now? Do you still feel that your -- your -- your
18 ethnic group is targeted, marginalized, or how do you feel
19 right now? Do you feel hopeful at all?

20 THE WITNESS: You know, there's always hope, you
21 know. But I think, you know, if you look at 1990, you know,
22 it's like, you know, it's just something to start this stuff.
23 I think the Mandingo sentiment start as long time ago. I
24 think it's something that I would classify as call
25 transgenerational cell. When I say transgenerational cell,

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 that before my father time, there was always sentiment about
2 Mandingo people in Liberia in the first place. Then, you
3 know, after my father, there was always sentiment of
4 Mandingo, you know; we were just marginalized. And then in
5 1990, you know, we're targeted, you know, either based on,
6 you know, hate, either jealousy. You know, we were not
7 affiliated with any kind of political party. Maybe some, but
8 majority of the Mandingos were just entrepreneur. You know,
9 they were self-sufficient in local businesses,
10 transportation, rice, cocoa and coffee.

11 Do I have hope? Of course, I do. There's always
12 hope. There's always hope. But I think -- I think with --
13 with the -- with, you know, the TROC, the establishment of
14 TROC, I think I probably go back to not put emphasis on
15 retributive justice, but restorative justice. I think I put
16 a lot of emphasis on restorative justice, because at least we
17 can have an opportunity to have conference mediation between
18 victim and offenders. And also -- and that -- that would
19 allow us to have a win/win situation. We understand the
20 other person's perspective. I think we, as Liberian people,
21 really don't respect one another. I really feel like that.
22 I think we really don't respect one another. We don't
23 respect one another ethnicity or even religion. Or we don't
24 even care to find out. I think where there's, you know,
25 where there's no respect, there's almost tremendous human

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 right violation, you know. So this violation of 1990, and
2 I'm glad -- it's from 1979, but this violation should go back
3 to that trans transgenerational cells that I'm talking about,
4 just going back to that, you know to, you know, addressing
5 some of those core principles of what does it mean to violate
6 someone human right, you know.

7 You know, it's funny that you ask me that, because
8 when I came to the States, you know, I had that sense of
9 detachment to Liberia because atrocities done to me, you
10 know, there's a big sense of detachment. Why would do -- why
11 do really -- why would I want to go back to Liberia when I've
12 been prosecuted because of my ethnicity, you know. But I
13 really don't feel like that. I think with education, with
14 self-acceptance, with -- I think self-acceptance is you have
15 to accept that we have a problem. And then once we accept
16 that, it's easy to face the challenge of our ordeals, you
17 know. So I don't think we, as Liberians, ever accept that we
18 have a problem. We never did. So -- for generation we never
19 did. So the sentiments are still there. They are there. I
20 mean, you can go back to history, no? I can go back -- I
21 mean I'm not a -- I mean, I'm 35 years old, but I can vividly
22 remember some of the things that happened. You know, go back
23 to Guinea; Mandingo dog. You don't belong here. So that
24 pretty much tarnished some of our self-esteem, you know. I
25 mean, I was going to Muslim Congress. I really didn't want

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 to go to Muslim Congress because some of the sentiments
2 associated with Muslim Congress, you know, and that's a
3 shame. And I wanted to go to other schools so I can have a
4 sense of belonging, you know. So that's -- do you qualify
5 that as a human rights violation? Of course. That's a basic
6 human right violation. So where do we start? I think that's
7 the question.

8 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Mr. Witness, I -- I
9 would like to admonish you to be as brief as possible.

10 THE WITNESS: Okay.

11 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: I just got a notice that
12 you should be catching a flight --

13 THE WITNESS: Yep.

14 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: -- in maybe ten minutes.

15 THE WITNESS: Yep.

16 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Well, in that case I
17 just would like to ask one question --

18 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

19 COMMISSIONER STEWART: -- based on the issue you
20 raised about victim/offender coming face to face and confront
21 each other. I'd like to ask you whether you have since made
22 any contact with Mr. Adolphus Dolo, as you call his name
23 whether there has been any response -- if you did, whether
24 there has been any response from him, and whether you would
25 have the interest in coming face to face with him.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 THE WITNESS: That probably would be a good idea.
2 But am I prepared for that? That's the \$64,000 question, you
3 know. You know, am I prepared for that, to facing Mr. Dolo.
4 I think I've grown. I think I've understand what does it
5 mean to violate someone human rights. I think I have become
6 a spiritual person in my -- in my higher power which, of
7 course, I call Allah.

8 There's an interesting thing that I was reading
9 the other day about the ten commandments and one of the thing
10 the ten commandment said, "Thou shalt not kill." And I said
11 to myself, being a Muslim, would I want Adolphus Dolo to be
12 killed. So I -- pretty much I'm basing my decision on my --
13 on my anguish, you know. I'm not basing my decision on my
14 spiritual well-being. So I would love to face him to kind of
15 hear what he says about his story, but -- you know.

16 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Would you want to see
17 him face justice?

18 THE WITNESS: Say that one more time --

19 COMMISSIONER STEWART: Would you want to see him
20 face justice?

21 THE WITNESS: -- do I want him to face justice?
22 Well, you know, Liberia is an interesting case. It's a big
23 case that if -- if you want to go ahead and prosecute some
24 leaders, the Liberia people who committed some atrocity done,
25 especially like mass murder, you pretty much going to

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 prosecute everybody. So I think what we need to do is
2 probably facing people in just the healing process and try to
3 find out what some of the issues they have, so we're not --
4 that go back to my question to, you know, that
5 transgenerational cell, you know. My father was just killed
6 because he Mandingo, period. No association to Doe.
7 Nothing. Mandingo and a Muslim leader. That's it. So how
8 can I justify that?

9 He never took political office. He wasn't
10 educated. He was a very smart and a brilliant person, you
11 know. So -- so how can you -- you know what I mean?

12 What kind of justice? I probably prefer
13 restorative justice, because retribution will probably
14 bring -- you know, lots of people are going to be locked up
15 for no reason -- for a reason that we all created. So I
16 prefer, you know, restorative justice.

17 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Thank you very much.

18 THE WITNESS: No problem.

19 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: I just heard you saying
20 Adolphus Dolo.

21 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

22 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Have you seen this
23 Adolphus Dolo?

24 THE WITNESS: Have I seen him? I saw him after
25 the war, like after 1991. I saw him on Carey Street when he

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 has North Star Security, I think, securities.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Yeah.

3 THE WITNESS: Yeah. Right there on -- between
4 Gurley --

5 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: And Carey Street?

6 THE WITNESS: -- and Carey Street; that's correct.

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Do you know where he is
8 now?

9 THE WITNESS: I heard that he's a junior senator.

10 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: In Liberia?

11 THE WITNESS: Junior senator, Republic of Liberia,
12 yeah.

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. I stop right
14 here.

15 VICE CHAIR DEDE DOLOPEI: Excuse me --

16 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

17 COMMISSIONER DOLOPEI: -- can you please repeat
18 when your father was killed, the date?

19 THE WITNESS: July 26, 1990.

20 COMMISSIONER DOLOPEI: And by whom?

21 THE WITNESS: Say that one more time.

22 COMMISSIONER DOLOPEI: By whom; which one of the
23 groups?

24 THE WITNESS: You know what, that's later on I
25 find it was INPFL was during for NPFL, you know. I think

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 it's NPFL --INPFL.

2 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: INPFL.

3 THE WITNESS: INPFL.

4 COMMISSIONER DOLOPEI: INPFL?

5 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

6 VICE CHAIR DEDE DOLOPEI: Okay. Thank you very
7 much.

8 THE WITNESS: No problem.

9 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. You've just come
10 to the end of your testimony, and we want to thank you very
11 much. Is there anything else you want to say before you
12 leave? Even though you said a lot about the foward-looking
13 processes, is there anything else?

14 THE WITNESS: I think I just do what my father
15 would do, you know. My father would just say talk to Allah,
16 man. I mean, forgiving. And I forgive Adolphus Dolo. When
17 you talk about conference mediation, I forgive him. And I
18 think I speak on behalf of my siblings here today; that I
19 forgive those who committed atrocities done to my family.
20 And I'll be glad that they -- they come up and state, you
21 know, the things that they did to other folks. So that's it.

22 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much.

23 MR. SYLLAH: No problem.

24 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay.

25 Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. We will take a

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 one-hour break and resume after lunch. Thank you very much.

2 (The luncheon recess was taken.)

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I, JoAnn Wahl, Official Court Reporter, do hereby certify that the foregoing pages of typewritten material constitute an accurate verbatim stenographic record taken by me of the proceedings aforementioned before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, on the 13th day of June, 2008, at the time and place specified.

DATED: July 30, 2008.

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