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4 TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

5
6 DIASPORA PROJECT

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8
9 PUBLIC HEARING
10 HAMLIN UNIVERSITY
11 June 14, 2008
12 St. Paul, Minnesota

13 **TESTIMONY OF**

14 **MEN'S PANEL**

15 TRC Commissioners:

16 Chairman Jerome Verdier
17 Vice Chairperson Dede Dolopei
18 Oumu K. Syllah
19 Sheikh Kafumba Konneh
20 Pearl Brown Bull
21 Rev. Gerald B. Coleman
22 John H.T. Stewart
23 Massa Washington

24 Hearing Officer: Pastor John P. Teayah

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1 (The following proceedings were had and made of
2 record, commencing at approximately 4:13 p.m.):

3 (Men's panel sworn)

4 COMMISSIONER DEDE DOLOPEI: You may please sit
5 down.

6 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Good afternoon,
7 Gentlemen. I want to say welcome. A panel have been
8 established, and you always speak from different
9 perspectives. You introduce yourselves and say a little bit
10 about yourself, and then you go into your presentation.

11 We appreciate it that you could take off time to
12 come and help us accomplish the task the Liberian people have
13 assigned us. The benefit goes beyond any of our individual
14 considerations, but rather posterity, our children and our
15 children's children, stand to benefit.

16 The past is the past. Now we have to find our
17 bearings to face the challenges of the future. But we are
18 very much convinced that the past embodies lessons that we
19 can learn to prepare us for that challenge ahead.

20 So thank you very much, and welcome, the
21 Commissioners and I, who are all known to you. I don't know
22 who will speak first, but you as a panel will agree. But
23 before you speak, just hear a little bit about yourself and
24 your connection with the Liberian community, and then you
25 proceed. If you have a long text that will eventually be

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1 surrendered to the Commission, you may want to just highlight
2 the text and leave enough time for questions and answers.

3 Thank you.

4 **SAM TOGBA SLEWION,**

5 having been first duly sworn to tell the
6 truth, testified as follows:

7 **TESTIMONY OF SAM TOGBA SLEWION**

8 THE WITNESS: Yeah. My name is Sam Togba Slewion.
9 I come here today representing the Union of Liberian
10 Associations in the Americas, commonly known as ULAA. We
11 were asked by the Commission to participate in this
12 institutional presentation, and the Union chose to speak on
13 its intervention in the recent refugee crisis in Ghana and
14 also to give some recommendations to address the refugee
15 situation not just only in Ghana, but in the West African
16 subregion.

17 Our presentation will cover the Ghanaian crisis.
18 We'll go into an updates on what is obtaining with regard to
19 the refugee situation. We'll also give our fundamental
20 observations of our -- during our intervention in the
21 situation, and then we'll also make some recommendations as
22 to how to go forward.

23 Counselor Jerome Verdier, Chairman of the TRC,
24 Honored Members of the TRC, Ambassador Nathaniel Barnes,
25 Liberia's Ambassador to the UN present, other government

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1 officials, staff and members of The Advocates for Human
2 Rights, presidents of local union chapters present, Fellow
3 Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen: I bring you greetings on
4 behalf of the national board of directors and national
5 administration of the Union. We want to express our sincere
6 appreciation to the invitation extended to ULAA to
7 participate in this historical event, which we believe is the
8 first and only public hearings of the TRC to be held outside
9 of Liberia.

10 These hearings are intended to encourage us as a
11 people to reflect both on the atrocities and the
12 sociopolitical deficits of our country as we undergo the
13 process of healing as a people after 14 years of civil
14 crisis, which has drained our infrastructures and left us
15 emotionally scarred.

16 The various testimonies and presentations being
17 made at these hearings since Tuesday are an attempt to heal
18 these scars and right the wrongs of the past and provide a
19 hope for the future for all Liberians, irrespective of
20 ethnicity, religion, political persuasion, gender, and sexual
21 orientation.

22 One of the groups that we come here to give a
23 voice to today is the refugee population in the West African
24 subregion, including Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Nigeria.
25 Our compatriots are residing in these countries on a very

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1 difficult, if not inhuman, condition. Like many of us, voted
2 with their feet 14 years ago, when a country led by Charles
3 Taylor, NPFL, occurred in Liberia on December 24, 1989, to go
4 to Nimba County.

5 As we speak here today, we speak of a total of
6 1 million registered Liberian refugees in the world, and this
7 is 1 million of the total population of our country, which
8 was registered prewar 2.5 million. Therefore, the label has
9 been placed on Liberia as a nation in exile. Reference to
10 refugees in West Africa, we have a total of 233,264
11 registered Liberian refugees that make their home in Ghana,
12 Nigeria, Guinea, and Ivory Coast.

13 As we go further, we want to express our
14 appreciation to these host countries who opened their doors
15 to our citizens when they arrived on their shores without
16 prior notice. We also want to commend the international
17 community and the local staff of the UNHCR for providing the
18 needed logistical and emotional support to our compatriots as
19 they adjust to new life in these host countries.

20 However, in spite of this support, many of us can
21 attest -- those of us who lived in refugee camps can attest
22 to the fact that sometimes life in these camps can be very
23 demeaning and unbearable, to say the least. I have family
24 members who lived in refugee camps in Ghana for over three
25 years before resettling in the United States. Their stories

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1 are the same: the lack of (unintelligible) drinking water,
2 decent living structures, poor educational system, and
3 inadequate healthcare. Many of the refugees had to build
4 their own houses in Ghana. Despite a healthcare clinic that
5 was situated on the camp subsidized substantially with drugs
6 and equipment, refugees were asked to pay as high as U.S. \$50
7 for malaria and typhoid treatments. Many refugees could not
8 afford such expensive course of treatment, resorted to
9 purchasing over-the-counter medications, which resulted to
10 many times complications and sometimes fatalities. Although
11 these camps -- these clinics were built to be staffed by the
12 Liberian refugees as a source of employment, many times they
13 were staffed by citizens of the host country.

14 Other conditions of the refugees included the
15 reluctant -- a reluctant state of the Ghanaian police to
16 respond to complaints filed by refugees, to investigate
17 crimes against the refugees. There was also negative media
18 coverage of refugee life in Ghana that reinforced the
19 stereotypes held by the larger Ghanaian community against
20 Liberian refugees. But despite these conditions, the
21 refugees did the best they can to make life normal, to
22 represent a sense of normalcy. While in Ghana, many of these
23 refugees were killed in car accidents just by walking at the
24 roadside to fetch water.

25 Many of them kept the hope alive, hoping to be

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1 resettled in a tier country or when they return to Liberia.
2 For those in Ghana, this hope and dream of the over 30,000
3 Liberian refugees in Ghana residing in Buduburum Camp was
4 dashed on March 17, 2008, when a demonstration which started
5 on February 19 was quelled with violence by the Ghanaian
6 police. The demonstration by the refugees was in protest
7 against a proposed reintegration program in the Ghanaian
8 community. They instead opted for the alternative program,
9 including a repatriation to Liberia for \$1,000 compensation
10 or resettlement to a tier country in the west.

11 The Ghanaian Government reacted, arrested several
12 refugees, including women and children, and deported 30
13 Liberians to Liberia on the claims that they were residing in
14 Ghana illegally. However, the UNHCR later clarified that
15 many of those deported were legitimate refugees and had no
16 reason to be arrested and deported. Those arrested including
17 pregnant women who were detained at the Kokrobitey Leadership
18 Youth Training Center in Greater Accra region. Sad to note,
19 two of the women had miscarriages.

20 To add insult to injury, the initial response of
21 our Liberian government was a condemnation of the refugees,
22 terming their behavior as unruly without a firsthand
23 investigation to ascertain the facts of the situation. These
24 reactions, initial reactions of the government of Liberia and
25 Ghana, enraged many Liberians in the diaspora of the United

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1 States who were themselves refugees in Ghana and still have
2 families, including their wives and children, living in
3 Ghana.

4 The initial reaction of the governments also
5 prompted the Union, which is ULAA, to take a stand on the
6 situation and devise a two-prong approach, advocacy and a
7 humanitarian action. Our humanitarian action was through our
8 national social service commission, headed by Dr. Mariah Y.
9 Seton. Through the efforts of the Commission, a nation-wide
10 fund drive was launched by the Union to raise funds to
11 address the humanitarian needs of the refugees in Ghana.

12 As we make this presentation, Ladies and
13 Gentlemen, the fundraising efforts are still ongoing, and the
14 Union will make a determination to utilize the funds to make
15 a desirable impact through ongoing collaboration initiated
16 going on between Liberian government and the Union.

17 On the advocacy front, the Union issued a position
18 statement which, among other things, acknowledged the
19 hospitality of the Ghanaian government accorded to Liberian
20 refugees and the Ghanaians' government commitment to the
21 peace process in Liberia, but also expressed disappointment
22 over the initial reaction of the government of Liberia and
23 Ghana, over the government -- initial reaction of the
24 government of Liberia and Ghana towards the demonstration by
25 the refugees and described those initial reactions as

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1 unacceptable and inconsistent with international laws and
2 Ghanaian laws.

3 The Union went further to ask the government and
4 UNHCR to allow reasons to prevail and recommit themselves to
5 seek a solution to the refugee problems with a respect for
6 human dignity and civil liberties of refugees consistent with
7 international laws.

8 And the laws we're asking the government of Ghana,
9 Liberia, and the UNHCR to respect include the following: the
10 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; the
11 amended 1967 Protocol for Refugees and International
12 Convention of Civil and Political Rights; the International
13 Convention of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; the
14 Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination
15 Against Women; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
16 Racial Discrimination; Convention Against Torture and Other
17 Cruel, Inhumane, or Degrading Treatment; Convention on the
18 Rights of the Child and optional protocol on CRC of children
19 in armed conflict. We also, in addition to those
20 international customary laws, asked both governments and the
21 UNHCR to also, in addition, respect the African Charter on
22 Human and Peoples' Right, the OAU Convention Governing
23 Specific Aspects of Refugees Problems in Africa, and other
24 regional instruments.

25 The Union also called on the international

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1 community to launch a full-scale investigation into the
2 crisis. Finally, the Union statement called for the Liberian
3 government to begin the process of repatriating all Liberian
4 refugees and reset them up internally displaced.

5 In addition to our statement, the Union made
6 contact with several human rights groups in Ghana, including
7 the Legal Resource Center and the Center for Human Rights
8 Studies. As a result of our contacts and as a result of
9 other activities, a coalition of Ghanaian human rights filed
10 a lawsuit against the Ghanaian government on the right of
11 habeas corpus to compel the Ghanaian government to produce
12 the living body of a woman whose husband has complained that
13 she was missing.

14 We are pleased to note that in apparent response
15 to the Union statement and other public sentiments, the
16 Liberian government issued an official statement on the
17 refugees crisis dated April 1, 2008. In that statement, the
18 government, among other things, noted the following: that a
19 (unintelligible) Liberian delegation arrived in Ghana on
20 March 24, 2008, to consult the appropriate authorities; that
21 a candid and friendly consultation covered a four-day period,
22 reaching from March 24 through the 28th. In consultation,
23 the refugees called off the one-month demonstration and
24 accepted a voluntary repatriation to Liberia as a way
25 forward. The UNHCR resumed its normal humanitarian

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1 assistance on the refugee camp and began the process of
2 repatriation. A tripartite committee was formed comprised of
3 representatives of the government of Liberia and Ghana and
4 the UNHCR to oversee the repatriation process in Ghana as
5 well as handling and monitoring the Liberian refugee
6 situation.

7 The tripartite committee was mandated to meet
8 every two months to review its progress. Following an appeal
9 by the Liberian government, a statement noted the Ghanaian
10 government returned 636 refugees detained to the Buduburum
11 camp. The government delegation, according to the statement,
12 will be dispatched to subregions to meet with Liberian
13 refugees in Ghana, in Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Nigeria to
14 discuss their plight and possible plans for their return to
15 contribute their quota to national development.

16 The government of Liberia also calls all Liberians
17 at home and in the diaspora to provide assistance directly or
18 to a special fund that will be expected to be mounted with
19 international com -- association and community in response to
20 the situation.

21 Finally, the Liberian government noted, they
22 reassured the Ghanaian government that there are no plans for
23 retaliation whatsoever against Ghanaians living in Liberia.
24 Both government agree to meet in a friendly and
25 (unintelligible) relationship that existed over the years.

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1 In an attempt, Ladies and Gentlemen, to continue
2 to mount pressure and hold the government of Liberia and
3 Ghana and the international community accountable, the Union
4 led a two-man delegation to the United Nations. On April 7,
5 the Union met with Ambassador Barnes, Liberian
6 (unintelligible) representative to the UN, and addressed him
7 with the concerns of the Liberians in the diaspora concerning
8 the Ghanaian crisis. On the same day, the Union also met
9 with Ambassador Sheikh Diara, the UN under-secretary for
10 Africa, and addressed him with the situation in Ghana.
11 Ambassador Diara immediately commenced to invite the Union to
12 his office for further discussion on the situation.

13 With consistent efforts, on April 16, 2008,
14 another two-man delegation, headed by Yohomo Sabin
15 (phonetic), met with Ambassador Diara in his office at the UN
16 headquarters, and following discussions were held. At the
17 end of a two-hour -- a one-hour discussion, Ambassador Diara
18 immediately authorized his political officer to contact the
19 UNHCR office at the UN to arrange a meeting between the Union
20 and the UNHCR for further discussion.

21 It will interest you also to know that it was
22 ironic at the interval meeting, Ambassador Diara was headed
23 to Ghana, in his own words, to attend a conference. Upon the
24 return from the UN headquarters, the Union, in
25 (unintelligible) of its proactive stance, immediately made a

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1 regular contact to the Liberian government to express its
2 willingness to form partnership with the government in
3 addressing the refugee problem. A communication was sent to
4 Counselor Wheatonia Barnes, director of the Liberian Refugee
5 and Repatriation Resettlement Commission in Liberia; Minister
6 Ambullai Johnson, the minister of internal affairs. Both
7 officials are members of the tripartite committee that was
8 set up in Ghana to monitor and organize the repatriation of
9 Liberian refugees.

10 Following our interactions and intervention,
11 Ladies and Gentlemen, we want to bring you an update of what
12 is obtained on the refugee situation. Earlier, we indicated
13 that the total Liberian refugees registered in the subregion
14 is 233,264. As of October 4, 2004, to December 31, 2007, a
15 total of 117,256 registered Liberian refugees were assisted
16 to return home. As of December 31, 2007, there is a residual
17 caseload of 75,000 (unintelligible) Liberian refugees still
18 living in the subregion. What has the Liberian government
19 done thus far to reduce this caseload of refugees? Reports
20 from the LRRRO, in the case as of June 6, 2008, 1,652
21 refugees are being repatriated with the following breakdown:
22 from Ghana, 1,415; from Guinea, 196; from Nigeria, 41.

23 In Ghana, most of the refugees have been
24 air-lifted to Liberia, while many of them are sending their
25 personal belongings back on martial trucks, ranging between

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1 \$150 to \$400. Many of them see these personal belongings as
2 an attachment of things that they acquired during the
3 refugee's life and therefore strongly believe that they don't
4 want to leave them behind. But the condition to travel by
5 road can be also appalling. There is a condition of a family
6 that spent one month traveling by roads just moving their
7 things to Liberia because there was a breakdown of the truck
8 and lack of spare parts. They had to go back either to Ivory
9 Coast or Ghana to get spare parts.

10 The LRRRO also report that an integration program
11 has been set up in place to assist the refugees integrating
12 the mainstream of the Liberian society. The integration
13 program, according to the LRRRO, which is being implemented
14 throughout the country, includes carpentry, literacy,
15 tailoring, hairdressing, exterior and interior design,
16 electricity, plumbing, et cetera, in addition to short-term
17 loans and grants. It is very interesting to note that there
18 is no mention of the psychological component to deal with the
19 trauma that these people suffered for the many years they
20 were outside the country.

21 An update, as of today, the Union has
22 officially -- pleased to note that the Union has officially
23 received a response from the minister -- from Minister
24 Johnson two weeks ago, expressing his appreciation for the
25 direct contact made by the Union to his office to form a

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1 partnership in addressing the plight of the Liberian refugees
2 in its subregion. We are yet to receive an official response
3 from the director of the LRRRO. The Union will also
4 continue -- the Union continues to remain engaged with the
5 United Nations, and a follow-up meeting with the UNHCR at the
6 UN headquarters in New York is tentatively scheduled for
7 July. Specifics will be discussed at that meeting.

8 Observations: In addition to the updates and
9 during our intervention in the Liberian refugee crisis in
10 Ghana, we would like to share with you some fundamental
11 observation that we made through our intervention.

12 Observation number one: During our intervention
13 in the Ghanaian crisis, we observed that although Ghana and
14 Liberia rectified all of the international protocols and
15 conventions mentioned, there is a local Ghanaian law called
16 the 1992 Refugee Law of Ghana that takes precedence,
17 according to Ghanaian authorities, over international
18 protocol. Our legal friends in Ghana advised that these
19 treaties and customary laws operates within the sphere of a
20 dualist state like Ghana. As a dualist state, international
21 laws, including subregional, regional, or global amendments,
22 do not operate directly in Ghana unless Ghana promulgates a
23 domestic law to give effect to the terms of the treaty and
24 agreement. When Ghana enacts its local law, it trumps over
25 international agreement concept, except, of course, customary

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1 international laws.

2 Observation number two: We have also observed
3 that despite the pronouncement by the Liberian government to
4 visit other refugee camps in the subregion, which we thought
5 would be a proactive move by the government to ascertain
6 preventing situations in these countries and devise a
7 proactive mechanism to begin to address the concerns in these
8 camps, there has been no official pronouncement from the
9 government that these visits have occurred.

10 Three, observation number three: There are also
11 no reports of an official launching of the special fund that
12 was mentioned by the government (unintelligible) to
13 officially engage the international community and the
14 Liberians in the diaspora to support.

15 Finally, in view of the above observations, the
16 Union would like to advance the following recommendations:
17 Number one, that the Government of Liberia follow up with its
18 plans to visit other refugee camps in the subregion to
19 ascertain conditions prevalent in these camp to avoid a
20 reoccurrence of the crisis in Ghana; that the government
21 obtain copies of all local laws enacted by host countries to
22 provide a better understanding of the legal ramifications of
23 refugee conditions in these countries, especially in a time
24 of crisis, similar to what happened in Ghana earlier this
25 year.

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1 The Union is also requesting an inclusion on the
2 tripartite committee at least in an observation status to
3 enable the Union to obtain progress reports and updated
4 information on the repatriation process of Liberian refugees,
5 currently 75,000 caseload, to better inform the Union in
6 order for the Union to better inform its constituency in the
7 diaspora of the United States.

8 In addition to the integration package, that a
9 component on affordable housing and agriculture be
10 specifically devised to address the housing needs and
11 agricultural needs of people which may help to contribute to
12 the Liberian economy through the agricultural sector.

13 In conclusion, as we close our presentation, we
14 believe that while it is imperative to implement the above
15 interventions in addressing our refugee problems, we believe
16 to avoid a repeat of our national crisis which led to our
17 brothers and sisters in refugee camps around the world, we
18 must try to develop a society in Liberia that ensure an
19 accountable distribution of the country's wealth, create
20 opportunities for everyone irrespective of their ethnicity,
21 religious background, gender, and sexual orientation, and,
22 above all, create an environment for respect of the rule of
23 law. Most importantly, we caution both our policy makers and
24 citizens that we should conduct our daily lives on a profound
25 creed of the UN, which states, and I quote: It is in the

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1 minds of men that wars are created, and therefore, it is in
2 the minds that defenses of peace must be built.

3 I thank you. God bless Liberia.

4 (Applause)

5 **HASSAN KIAWU,**

6 having been first duly sworn to tell the
7 truth, testified as follows:

8 **TESTIMONY OF HASSAN KIAWU**

9 THE WITNESS: Good afternoon. My name is Hassan
10 Kiawu. I'm the communications director for the Liberian
11 community of metropolitan Atlanta, called LAMA.

12 Just to give you a short biography of myself, I
13 was an Olympic athlete, ran two Olympic games, the Seoul
14 Olympic games in 1988 and the Atlanta Olympic games in 1996;
15 two World Championships, one in Gutenberg and one in Sweden;
16 and then one World Student Games in Fukuka, Japan, 1995. I
17 was the BBC sports correspondent in Liberia from 1994 to 1996
18 and also a reporter for the Reuters News Agency. Now I'm the
19 BBC North American correspondent, which covers the United
20 States and Canada, so to speak.

21 I'm going to speak on LAMA, what LAMA has done
22 over the years or during the scope of the civil war. And if
23 you just permit me, give me an additional 10 minutes to talk
24 about a little experience I had during the civil war, because
25 I've got a few recommendations here I need to share. Without

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1 my short experience, these recommendations may not be
2 forthcoming.

3 The Liberian community of metropolitan Atlanta,
4 LAMA for short, was established in 1976. It was established
5 first as a Liberian student association, and one of those who
6 established the organization was Mabel Green. I guess many
7 of you know Mabel Green.

8 Several leaders have come and gone. To date we
9 are having the 24th leadership in Atlanta. But as the war
10 was raging, there was a great hunger for peace as for news,
11 and the war, characterized by extrajudicial killings and
12 other vices, made so much headway; and more and more
13 Liberians, there was a need for news, and that event
14 developed the appetite for news.

15 Now, the only outlet then was the BBC where people
16 got their news, because there was limited information coming
17 out of the American networks on -- about the Liberian civil
18 war. I guess many of you, if you -- anything happens in
19 Africa or somewhere else, you can tune to Internet, where you
20 would never get, you know, a full detail. You would just get
21 maybe 10 seconds clip on news from Liberia or so at that
22 time. And so there was a dire need for us to get information
23 to our fellow compatriots in Atlanta.

24 Having said that, we decided to establish what we
25 call the Liberian Community Hotline, and that hotline served

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1 as a way of disseminating information coming out of Liberia
2 and about Liberia and for Liberians in Atlanta. The hotline,
3 the number is, if you like to write it down, and this is --
4 we are the only people in the United States -- Liberian group
5 in the United States that have this technology, so I'm proud
6 to say that. The number to dial is 770-908-3978. Now,
7 multiple users can dial in to this number to get news on
8 Liberia, and the news will start from the beginning for each
9 caller. So, for instance, if you -- if everybody sitting
10 here dial that number, the news will start from the beginning
11 for you, for each person. The number, again, is
12 770-908-3978. It's called the Liberian Community Hotline.
13 We have Cyril Lurlay. He's been -- he's the voice of the
14 Liberian Community Hotline. He's been reading news since the
15 early stages of the war. I call him the best Liberian in
16 Atlanta, because to be so much -- to have the passion to read
17 the news on Liberia, to fetch news on Liberia since the
18 advent of this technology, is unheard of.

19 Now, that's one thing we try to bring to our
20 Liberian community, to know exactly what's going on in the
21 world or especially Liberia. And after that, there is also
22 another problem that we were faced with in Atlanta: jobs.
23 Many of our fellow compatriots during the war had to work two
24 or three jobs, and the jobs -- they were doing these jobs at
25 least to cater to their relatives and friends back in

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1 Liberia. You know, everybody knew Western Union at that time
2 and up to now, so people worked multiple jobs in order to
3 support friends and relatives back in Liberia.

4 Also, some people worked these jobs, odd jobs and
5 white-collar jobs combined, or some even all odd jobs, and
6 they had to travel to neighboring countries like Sierra
7 Leone, Guinea, the Ivory Coast and Ghana and Nigeria, where
8 Liberians are displaced or where their relatives are, to lend
9 a hand to them. And some of them also tried to get them over
10 to the United States. And so it was a burden for us. So the
11 effect of the war also spilled over to the United States on
12 those who were here who were watching television, if they had
13 it; because at that time, the Internet was so new to us and
14 computers were in short supply in Liberian homes.

15 Another thing again we -- that burdened the
16 Liberian community was resettlement. We had Liberians coming
17 from Liberia, coming here, and also Liberians fighting for
18 resettlement program for their relatives, send them money to
19 them in the thousands and so on.

20 When I listened to the women that were here before
21 us, they talked about cultural difference between Liberians
22 who come here with the Liberian culture and the system here.
23 That became a problem for us as well, because many Liberians
24 who came from Liberia were not used to how things are done
25 here in the United States. So that became a problem. Some

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1 of them got into a problem with the law, and thank God we are
2 trying to work on a number of things, which I will discuss in
3 a short while.

4 And, as I said, we have cultural differences. We
5 have the kids. We have the women. And most -- we found out
6 that most women or most children, when they come, they become
7 so -- they become Americanized in a short space of time,
8 likewise the women. And I like the question that Chairman
9 Verdier asked earlier -- yes, exactly. And my cousin
10 Ms. Badio said it's a reverse empowerment. Hmm, what an
11 empowerment.

12 Well, you know, we've had several other issues,
13 including that, in Atlanta, that we're trying to address.
14 Now, since November -- since October of last year, a new
15 administration came to power headed by I will call one of the
16 finest souls we've got in Atlanta, Walter B. Skinner, Sr. We
17 have sought to institute a number of issues, a number of
18 things, to make the Liberian community powerful; or, when I
19 say powerful, it means everybody coming together,
20 governizing, resources, and support for the association.

21 Now, one of the first things we have on our agenda
22 to implement is to have a cultural center. We found out that
23 we do not have a cultural center in Atlanta, like other
24 people in Texas and I think even here in Minnesota, I guess,
25 so we want to have a cultural center where we can have our

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1 Liberian youth, you know, entertained or trained to know
2 about your background. We know some of us have had children
3 here, but we need to tell them where we come from. There is
4 a saying in Liberian that if you know where you come from,
5 you know where you're going, and that we are missing.

6 We also are trying to put together an after-school
7 tutorial program for the youth and our young people in
8 Atlanta. We want to make sure that people are not idle after
9 school. We don't want kids to be playing computer games or
10 just come and play, and the next day you go to school. Then
11 every day is a different ball game.

12 Before I mention the other one, education, I would
13 like to introduce our -- I don't like to call him education
14 minister, but I would like to call him the chairman of our
15 education committee, Dr. Augustine Konneh. He's the chairman
16 of our education committee in Atlanta. He's also the
17 chairman on constitutional reforms.

18 We also have an adult literacy program for our
19 adults, and I was very -- I was fascinated by what the
20 Minnesota Women's Initiatives are doing here. We try to -- I
21 think we may have to copy some stuff from them too. What
22 we're trying to do is that we're trying to make them computer
23 literate and also, you know, teach them something that will
24 be worthwhile for their group and for our children as well.

25 We also have youth programs that we want to

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1 implement. We know that an idle mind is the devil's
2 workshop, so we try to make sure that we organize activities
3 for the kids as they come out of school during vacation time
4 or even during school time. We have sports going on so far,
5 and we have other events that are coming up. We have a
6 program called Taking LAMA to the People, LAMA meaning the
7 Liberian Association of Metropolitan Atlanta. And in years
8 past, we've not had any of that sort. We expected people to
9 come to the association. But this time around we are turning
10 it around, taking the organization to the people. So -- and
11 we're trying to bridge the gap. We're trying to connect the
12 two loose ends to see where we are in our membership and how
13 we can bring everybody together to work in the general
14 interest of Liberians in Atlanta.

15 We also want to say that there is a crucial issue
16 I think everybody is aware of, the immigration issue. I know
17 many of us escaped deportation at the skin of our teeth last
18 September. Thanks to George Bush, he extended the -- I mean
19 he turned TPS to DED, which has been extended for 18 months.
20 But come March, many of us might be packing up our bags to
21 head for Liberia if efforts by ULAA and other Liberian
22 organizations to lobby with lawmakers to grant us permanent
23 resident status does not yield the desired results.

24 So what we are doing in LAMA, we are teaming up
25 with ULAA, the parent body here, and LAMA -- and ULAA is

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1 doing a fantastic job, I want to publicly say here, in
2 collaboration with Minnesota and Philadelphia. Those two
3 groups, I mean, those two individual groups -- not ULAA.
4 ULAA has been doing a fantastic job. But the two
5 organizations in the United States are very, very, very hard
6 pressing and working assiduously. I want to commend the
7 Minnesota group and the Philadelphia group. Those two are
8 very organized. Those are the two most organized groups in
9 the United States that I can think of. They are pressing
10 hard for that. So I would like to congratulate you.

11 (Applause)

12 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

13 Now, we also want to get our membership straight.
14 In Atlanta we want to know the demographics, want to know
15 where we see Liberians in Atlanta, where do they live, in
16 which county, how many Liberians, how many women here, how
17 many men there compared to that. And we also want to go to
18 the prisons, how many Liberians are in prison. Oftentimes we
19 forget about Liberians in prison. We figure that Liberians
20 are -- in prison, we tend to forget about them. It's like
21 someone tells me, oh, the belly button is not part of the
22 body, because nobody thinks of their belly button as being a
23 part of the body. So we try to go to the prison. And that's
24 something we are working on in Atlanta, to find out how many
25 Liberians live in Georgia, live in each county, both men and

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1 women, how many in prison, how many in special fields, so
2 that we'll know straightaway what to do.

3 And since we also took over, we have what we
4 call -- we are bringing our newsletters every -- I mean twice
5 a week. This is something that has not happened since --
6 before we took over, has never happened in Georgia. And I
7 think we are number one or so. So we are setting the pace on
8 several fronts. We have a newsletter that we send out. We
9 talk about LAMA activities. And then we distribute that. We
10 have a distribution list of two and a half thousand email
11 lists all over the world. We have Liberians in Atlanta, the
12 United States, even here in Europe, Asia. We copy them in on
13 our email list and tell them what goes on in Atlanta. We
14 also have some Liberian news, too, from Atlanta, just tidbits
15 here.

16 So basically -- also we have a health fair. A
17 health fair, I want to invite every one of you, those of you
18 who will be going to Atlanta, if you have the time this
19 weekend coming, we are having a health fair in Atlanta. And
20 what we're trying to do is we want to tell our people in
21 Atlanta that you may think you are healthy because you
22 haven't gone to the hospital or you are not suffering from
23 any headache or there are no symptoms. For instance, if you
24 watched TV yesterday, Tim Russert from NBC, he was at work
25 yesterday when he fell, and he died. There were no symptoms

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1 that he was about to have a heart attack. So we need for
2 people to attend, if you are there. It's an invitation so
3 that we can check your cholesterol. Someone said to me in
4 Atlanta we may (unintelligible) cholesterol. But we have to
5 take it serious. If you have pain, we want you to show up in
6 Atlanta for that.

7 So those are some of the things that we are doing
8 in Atlanta. And I think we would like to commend every one
9 of you for your patriotism, for taking up this task to come
10 to us and find out, you know, what is going on.

11 Permit me just 10 minutes to --

12 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: If you like, less than
13 five.

14 THE WITNESS: Okay. Less -- well, okay. Five.
15 And let me just roll my mouth a little of stuff during the
16 war.

17 During the civil war in Liberia, we -- like anyone
18 else, we were displaced on Duport Road, and I happened to be
19 one of 121 persons living in Momolu Sirleaf's house on Duport
20 Road, and we -- and then the NPFL sent out notices that all
21 journalists should report to the national radio station, ELBC
22 then, to work for them. And I was one of those who turned
23 up. And before -- then for a week I worked in the news
24 department, but then I opted to work in the radio department
25 later on. And one of the reasons for that was that each time

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1 we went on assignments, in Buchanan or Harper, we conducted
2 interviews with commandos or commandos who were already
3 planted to say, oh, the nicest things about the NPFL and by
4 (unintelligible), the United States, ECOWAS, ECOMOG, and
5 every other organization that was -- every organization that
6 had the money to bring peace and unity to Liberia. As a
7 result, during those times, Tom Obuyu came to our studios, he
8 gave announcements, and there was a fight between Paul Vaye
9 and Sam Latu (phonetic). And after the fight, the next day I
10 saw Mr. Charles Taylor. He came down to LBS. But I also
11 want to stress, say one thing I didn't think I've ever told
12 anyone, and it is important that I say this. Maybe that will
13 clear my chest.

14 I was -- I had to set up a meeting between -- I
15 mean for Louis Brown, Abram Sirleaf (phonetic), and the late
16 Teayah Falcoti (phonetic). All of them were my friends, but
17 then -- because it's my understanding that I'm related to
18 Momolu Sirleaf, where I was displaced, and because Momolu
19 Sirleaf was there, the minister of foreign affairs,
20 Mr. Taylor, during the war and therein was -- I mean, several
21 times they went after me to set up that -- to set up a
22 meeting between them and Mr. Taylor. I was not close to
23 Mr. Taylor, but I was close to my uncle then. And they
24 needed -- they wanted to form the movement for the promotion
25 of the Taylor administration, just like UGDA (phonetic), the

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1 movement for the promotion of the Doe administration in the
2 past. And after dodging them several times, they cornered me
3 on Duport Road. And luckily, then Momolu Sirleaf came. And
4 I arranged a meeting with them -- for them. I was in that
5 meeting, and we met at Momolu Sirleaf's house. And at the
6 end of the meeting, Momolu Sirleaf said he was going to
7 arrange a transportation for them to travel -- for all of us
8 to travel, to -- to meet Mr. Taylor. I opted not to go,
9 because I felt that it was not worth my time, because my
10 mother had already run away to go to Sierra Leone to escape
11 the war, and I wouldn't get involved in anything that would
12 support any warfare or anybody who was launching a war. So I
13 stayed on.

14 And three days later, ECOMOG took over Duport
15 Road, so I had to report myself to ECOMOG. But then the fear
16 to report myself to ECOMOG at the time, there was a fear
17 because ECOMOG and Prince Johnson were working together, and
18 if I report myself to Prince Johnson, Prince Johnson was
19 killing any or everyone who worked with Charles Taylor then.
20 And then if I report myself, I felt that maybe ECOMOG would
21 have executed me or passed me on to them or maybe -- Prince
22 Johnson was ruthless. You know, he would have killed me. So
23 I went to the ECOMOG base. I was in prison for two nights at
24 Freeport, just for interrogation, to see what Mr. Taylor was
25 up to during the time when we worked at the national station

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1 or so on. And then, when the interim government took over,
2 we had a mobile radio station at the Free Zone Authority. We
3 broadcast news from there. And I had a program called
4 Liberia Today. And the interim government was basically
5 preaching peace, and we have (unintelligible). We have the
6 message of peace, reconciliation, and unity. That was our
7 message and all throughout until after other events took
8 place and so on.

9 I left Liberia in 1996 to attend the Olympic
10 games, but before I left Liberia, I was one of those
11 threatened because I was -- I became the senior newscaster at
12 the Liberian Broadcasting System. And, in fact, during that
13 time, April 6, when the last war occurred, ELBC -- many of
14 you who were in Liberia at the time will agree that ELBC,
15 that's the first time ever ELBC became objective.

16 And so we were there because -- one of the reasons
17 why we were objective, the fear was that because around the
18 Ducor Hotel, where the radio station was located, was
19 predominantly controlled by LPC and the AFL boys. Now,
20 Charles Taylor was on the other side, in Congotown and across
21 the bridge. We were supposed to be the government radio
22 station. If we said anything wrong about LPC, it's just a
23 drive up to the Ducor, so we've gotta be -- we have to be
24 objective. And so we're very objective. And it was then
25 that I even knew that the U.S. government even -- embassy

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1 supported us with fuel oil and food at that time, and that's
2 when I knew that the ELBC was objective at the time.

3 One disappointment I have throughout my reporter
4 duties for the Liberian Broadcasting System -- and this is
5 important to share with you guys -- during Operation Octopus
6 in 1992, Mr. Taylor launched what was then known as the
7 unprovoked attack on ECOMOG peacekeeping force positions
8 across Monrovia. And we are LBS. Of course we did not want
9 to -- we did not want a propaganda mission there by
10 Mr. Taylor to overshadow what the interim government was
11 doing at the time and ECOMOG. So rather than telling the
12 truth where ECOMOG -- I mean where Mr. Taylor's forces were
13 in the suburb of Monrovia, we were rather telling people, "Go
14 back. Mr. Taylor is just giving propaganda. There is no war
15 somewhere. Go back to your various homes. Everything is
16 calm." When people went there, and they were slaughtered,
17 they were killed by Mr. Taylor during the interim government.

18 That's my only regret, because, you know, I felt
19 that during those time that I ran news, that I was sending
20 someone to die, even though the news was coming out of ECOMOG
21 or news was coming from the interim government that people
22 should go, (unintelligible) we should go, the interim
23 government was only confined to the Paynesville area. Now,
24 when Mr. Taylor was sending rockets all over the place,
25 people were starting to come into the city center, so that

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1 gave Mr. Taylor leverage. Now, you don't want the rebels to
2 have a propaganda edge over you, so you -- also a
3 peacekeeping force with that much strength to allow the
4 rebels to push you way into the city center did not all go
5 well, so we had to run the propaganda for ECOMOG. We had to
6 run the propaganda for the interim government. So by doing
7 that, we were ourselves helping to kill people. That's my
8 only regret.

9 Now, in terms of recommendations that I have here,
10 my personal recommendation, not of LAMA -- and I want the TRC
11 and organizers of this forum to take into consideration that
12 Liberians who took part in the war should be barred from
13 taking public offices. Those who have already taken public
14 offices, Liberians should rise up and tell the people step
15 down, because I feel that keeping silent has the same effect
16 as giving aspirin to a cancer patient.

17 Also, I would also like to recommend that people
18 who sponsored the war from America should be deported to join
19 the people over there to suffer together, because I think
20 many of us here have sponsored the war, and we sit here in
21 the comfort of -- in the comfort zone, send other people's
22 children to their early deaths while our children are here.
23 We eat the burger, we eat the McDonald's, we eat everything
24 while other people live on leaves. For instance, Mr. Lusinis
25 (phonetic) talked about -- Mr. Wopea talked about his son

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1 urinating for the other one to drink so that he will recover
2 from his dizziness or whatever state he was in. I almost
3 cried. But it's because of what others who were here raising
4 money to -- to do that. So I think the United States
5 government should take concrete steps to deport them, those
6 who were funding anything from here, deport them to Liberia.

7 And also, I also have -- there was the movie
8 called "Iron Ladies of Liberia." I don't know how many of
9 you watched it recently. But in that report, in that video,
10 journalists raised some issue with the president, Madam
11 Sirleaf. Now, how sure are you that these critics of yours
12 or former rebel leaders or opposition leaders who still claim
13 to be making farms are actually making farms or if they're
14 not mustering more -- they're not creating more muscles to
15 wage war? So we need to look at that keenly to make sure
16 that people are not sent to their early deaths. If the
17 message is making farms, we need to monitor them.

18 Another thing, decentralization of economic and
19 political power. Liberia is -- right now is a landlocked
20 economy. No productive sector is working, and people with
21 take-home pay cannot even take them home. What we want to do
22 is I want to make sure everything is decentralized so that
23 the national government cannot just easily dictate to the
24 people down in Lofa County or Nimba County, say, "This is our
25 money." No. Everybody raise your own money. And if you

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1 have something to contribute to the national treasury, then
2 you -- then that can be done.

3 For too long in Liberia the military and the
4 police force or the security forces, rather than helping or
5 saving guard or protecting Liberians, they are rather
6 protecting the government against the people. We need to
7 look at that to make sure that we bridge that gap; that the
8 police, the security forces serve as a connecting rod, and
9 also to make sure that to protect everyone irrespective of
10 status in the country.

11 Also, I just came back from Liberia about five
12 days ago, and someone hinted to me that the greatest threat
13 to our security in Liberia is the media. I almost tend to
14 agree with them, even though I'm a media personnel too. I
15 saw several things with my own eyes. Everyone who has the
16 available -- you know, there is a saying that if the
17 available -- if the prominent is not available, the available
18 become prominent. There are many people who have become
19 "joined-the-lists"; not journalists, but "joined-the-lists."
20 Everyone who can read and write, who feel they can read and
21 write, have become journalists. The subject and verb are
22 falling apart, and I think we need to correct that. And I
23 think the PUL -- I'm sorry to say, I'm a journalist, but the
24 PUL is not doing a good job. Any time something happens to a
25 media house or somebody has done wrong, they blindly support

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1 the media, which is wrong. You can always tell your son,
2 "Look, you did wrong. You need to change," because by giving
3 him blind support, you are creating more wounds, and you're
4 creating problems for the society. We should be the watchdog
5 of the society. So the media is doing a bad job. Let me
6 state that. The media is doing a bad job in Liberia. We
7 need to correct that.

8 And, lastly, patience. Liberians, we are not
9 patient-minded. That's something again I found out in
10 Liberia. We want quick-fix solutions. We are never patient.
11 We want everything to come right now. The mentality, I think
12 the minister has a program called "change your mind, change
13 your attitude." I want to believe that -- maybe I will be 99
14 years old before people actually change their mentality, or
15 maybe I'll be dead, but I think it's a good step in the right
16 direction. We need to change our attitudes. People have
17 still not changed their attitudes in Liberia, to be honest
18 with you. People are not patient-minded at all, and we need
19 to work on those.

20 Those are my few recommendations that I have here,
21 and I will take my seat. Thank you very much for the
22 opportunity.

23 (Applause)

24 (Witness excused)

25 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: We will last hear from

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1 the OLM president, who inherited a question from the last
2 time he was up at the podium.

3 **KERPER DWANYEN,**

4 having been first duly sworn to tell the
5 truth, testified as follows:

6 **TESTIMONY OF KERPER DWANYEN**

7 THE WITNESS: Good afternoon.

8 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Good afternoon.

9 THE WITNESS: I want to, before I begin, take this
10 time to recognize the elected officers of the Organization of
11 Liberians in Minnesota here present: Mr. Andrew Tehmeh, our
12 vice president; Mr. Kulah Parker, seated next to him, our
13 treasurer; we have Thalia Cooper, our general secretary.
14 Earlier you had the opportunity to interact with two of our
15 board members, Doris Parker and Georgette Gray. I don't see
16 them here anymore, but we want to recognize them as well.

17 I will be speaking about our experience as a
18 diaspora community as it relates to the period of this
19 conflict. I will give you a little hint just about the
20 migration patterns of Liberians to Minnesota, talk about some
21 of the activities we are engaged in that we believe will be
22 helpful to this process of national reconciliation, talk
23 about what's happening in our community as far as
24 reconciliation goes, and forward some recommendations.

25 In the 1970s, there were about 25 Liberians in the

1 state. We were not that many. Most came to attend Dunwoody
2 Institute. Dunwoody is a technical college in the
3 Minneapolis Uptown area that was providing training in mining
4 technology, and Minnesota has or used to have a serious
5 mining industry. There is an Iron Range up north. So LAMCO
6 and -- used to send a lot of their students here on
7 scholarship.

8 Then we had the period of migration from 1980 to
9 1990, which primarily consisted of people both -- before
10 1980, most people who came to this country were coming
11 directly to go to school, get their American degree, and go
12 back home. 1980 came, the coup came, and Liberia became
13 uninhabitable for a lot of people. And many of them found
14 their way to Minnesota, and it became sort of a temporary but
15 permanent home, hoping that conditions in Liberia would
16 change.

17 We had the same situation in 1990. We had the
18 post-1990 migration, which is characterized by the same
19 situation, except now the conditions in Liberia were so
20 terrible, people came fleeing the war. Some had already
21 given up on Liberia because the trauma that they faced, and
22 some hope and want, you know, one day they will be able to
23 return to Liberia.

24 These groups represent different challenges,
25 different opportunities, different demographics. It's been a

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1 challenge for our community. We've grown to between 25,000
2 and 30,000 people. The group that came prior to the 1980s
3 knew exactly what they were coming for, were focused, tended
4 to have an education. The group that came after 1980,
5 between 1980 and 1990, was sort of a mix, but a lot were very
6 educated, very focused, and knew what they wanted, had the
7 means to leave Liberia, had the motivation to leave, and had
8 a plan to sustain themselves in America.

9 The post-1990 migration pattern presents us with a
10 slightly different set of circumstances as a result of the
11 demographics. You heard earlier from the women's panel that,
12 besides having people who were educated, had lived here,
13 could, you know, sustain themselves in this society, we had
14 young children, boys and girls, who perhaps were in the
15 second grade in 1990, had been out of school for five years,
16 and arrived here in 1997 and was expected to be in the
17 seventh grade. We had families that relocated simply because
18 this is -- you know, there was a refugee program. But the
19 issues of cultural assimilation was quite more difficult for
20 those families, and it's been a challenge for our community.
21 It's been a challenge of providing the needed resources to
22 help these families to assimilate.

23 The question of law and order as it relates to the
24 cultural context is another concern. I think it was Harriet
25 Badio who was -- you know, spoke on the issue of domestic

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1 violence. And there is a story about, you know, a young man
2 who came from Liberia. He had an argument with his
3 girlfriend, so he got mad. He stopped the car on the side of
4 the highway and began to beat her, and the police stopped him
5 and went to intervene. He told them, "I'm beating my momu."
6 (Unintelligible) He was promptly arrested, of course, and he
7 learned a lesson in American culture and the legal system.

8 We also have a lot of very, very promising
9 stories. We have a number of youth who have come, taken
10 advantage of the opportunity, and gotten very solid education
11 for their future. They're taking advantage of the
12 environment. We have a lot of people who have used the
13 opportunity for being here to advance themselves and acquire
14 skills that is helping their own personal development, and
15 they hope to one day go back to Liberia and transfer these
16 skills.

17 Our community has been very instrumental in
18 helping the economy in Liberia in many ways, the remittances
19 that we send at the times, especially at the darkest hours.
20 People are on the phones trying to get money to Western
21 Union. When Western Union broke down, we have a local
22 businessman here, Velmer Porte, who has his own
23 money-transfer business, and Velmer Porte has been able to
24 make it possible for Liberians to send money to their
25 families even when all the technology has broken down.

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1 We are starting a number of businesses in Liberia.
2 When you go to Liberia today -- and I've seen it for myself;
3 others continue to confirm that -- most of the foreign
4 license plates you will see on cars in Liberia are Minnesota
5 license plates. We're building homes. Some people in
6 (unintelligible) will use those homes for retirement homes.
7 Some people are building those homes, you know, so that when
8 they go back next year, two years, five years down the road,
9 they will have a place to stay. Some are building hotels,
10 motels. And we're participating in the economic revival and
11 the social revival of Liberia.

12 Our community has also -- as I said earlier in my
13 personal testimony, this community has been in the forefront
14 also of advocacy for the rights of Liberians, both at home
15 and here. Elements of our community have also been on the
16 other side of instigation and also resolving the war.

17 We have issues here that deal with immigration.
18 Prior to the war, we had people who were on visitor's visas,
19 student visas, couldn't work. Because of the war, we have a
20 TPS status, temporary protected status, which allowed people
21 to be able to work, since they couldn't return to Liberia.

22 Now that the war is over, now that Liberia is
23 recovering, the legal basis for granting temporary protected
24 status is no longer there, but we have a situation where some
25 people have been on TPS now for 18 years. We have families

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1 that came from Liberia with two children, they had two
2 children here, and they're on TPS. The American-born
3 children can stay, but the Liberian-born children have to
4 leave. So it's a major challenge for our community, and this
5 is why we've made it a high priority to lobby for passage of
6 the Liberian Immigration Fairness Act. We are pleased to say
7 that we have excellent support from our congressional
8 delegations in this state. We are working along with ULAA to
9 make sure that the coalition that we built has a national
10 appeal to it, that organizations and, you know, legislators
11 in other states can join us and support us. And it will be
12 important that the government of Liberia is helpful in that
13 effort, because we don't believe that Liberia is ready and
14 capable of absorbing the Liberians here that are affected by
15 this status. If they have to go home, what you will have is
16 that you will be taking people who are economically
17 independent today, they're working, they're participating in
18 sustaining their friends and relatives in Liberia, and you
19 will be taking them and putting them in a mix of 85 percent
20 unemployment. They will no longer be able to care for those
21 people who were in Liberia that were being helped. So you
22 even compound the problem further. We believe that that is a
23 risk to Liberia's recovery, both economic and security.

24 Now, on the level of what's happening in this
25 community with regards to reconciliation, you know, in

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1 Liberia, I was there for the elections. The people of Grand
2 Gedeh and the people of Nimba Counties in Liberia voted on
3 opposite sides. But here in Minnesota, I can tell you, going
4 back as far as the George Wuo administration this election,
5 the people of Grand Gedeh and the people of Nimba voted on
6 the same side.

7 In my own election, I enjoyed an overwhelming
8 support from the people of Grand Gedeh as well as the
9 Mandingo community in this state. We also witnessed in 2004
10 Arthur Watson, who is from Grand Gedeh, and George Wuo run on
11 the same ticket for the ULAA presidency and the vice
12 presidency respectively. We have in Nimba County now the
13 United Nimba Organization, UNICCO. We have a president
14 elected three weeks ago, a Mohammed Keita.

15 So we believe that we are taking concrete steps at
16 reconciling ourselves in this community with regards
17 particularly to the ethnic groups that were at loggerheads
18 during this conflict. We have a lot of work left to do, but
19 we think that there is an opportunity that we can help with
20 reconciliation in Liberia to ensure that people are no longer
21 at loggerheads, but we judge people by the content of their
22 character rather than their ethnicity.

23 I'm very proud to say that that's something we've
24 been able to accomplish here. I do believe that economics
25 plays a role in the capacity to reconcile at this level

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1 because people are no longer hungry, they're no longer
2 desperate, so they can pay attention to higher-order issues.
3 And so we all think we have a solemn responsibility to be a
4 part of the economic revival of Liberia, because ultimately
5 the conflict is -- reduced to the lowest common denomination
6 is to fight for bread. Some people wanted more than dry
7 bread, others wanted filet mignon, and they were prepared to
8 kill their friends and their compatriots to maintain that
9 power. It comes down to issues of livelihood. So the issue
10 of reviving Liberia's economy is very, very critical to this
11 whole issue of reconciliation.

12 We're also involved in trying to structure a trade
13 mission to go to Liberia with investors from the state of
14 Minnesota to provide information. Last year we hosted an
15 investment symposium here that brought the National
16 Investment Commission, the ministry of lands and mines, the
17 energy sector, and the agriculture sector to try to promote
18 Liberia as a destination for investment. And that's
19 something that we take very serious as a part of this
20 economic revival.

21 We're also working with institutions that can help
22 us in the relief area as it relates to two particular areas,
23 the health -- revitalizing the healthcare and revitalizing
24 the educational sector. So these are activities that our
25 community is embarking upon to help in rebuilding our

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1 country.

2 We want to advance some recommendations on behalf
3 of this community that we believe will go a long way in
4 bringing about peace, reconciliation, stability, and a
5 prosperous future. When I say "peace," I mean it in a sense
6 that conflict is not just the absence of war. Conflict is
7 the absence of people tearing apart each other because of
8 their competing interests, and if we -- when we accommodate
9 each other's competing interests, then we reduce conflict.
10 This is why, in my personal testimony, I made it a point to
11 go to the pre-1979, because even though we were not shooting
12 at each other, there was a lot of conflict in our society.
13 So we need to be able to structure our society and manage it
14 in a way that we can reduce conflict, keep it to a minimum so
15 that it doesn't threaten the society.

16 This is going to sound very similar to my personal
17 recommendations, but I'll repeat this on behalf of the
18 community. We believe that there should be accountability.
19 There should be a level of accountability for what's
20 happened, the database of information that this Commission
21 will collect to serve as the guiding tool for determining how
22 we assign that accountability, but at the very least we
23 should see some prosecutions out of this process.

24 We spoke -- we believe that the concentration of
25 power in Liberia has been a prescription for conflict. It

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1 has created a situation where the president has been
2 almighty, and absolute power corrupts. Because of the
3 absolute power that our presidents have enjoyed, they've been
4 able to exact sycophancy out of citizens who have been
5 prepared to tell any lies that they can tell on their fellow
6 citizens to gain the favor of the president. So we need to
7 decentralize that power by ensuring, first of all, that we
8 have a strong legislature, a strong judiciary, and the
9 counties are able to elect their leaders, they can have their
10 own county legislature. We can create a revenue-sharing
11 formula where the county determines their own budgets, how
12 they're going to prioritize those resources, and that's going
13 to be a proving ground for leadership. We can see how John
14 Brown operates as the leader of Grand Gedeh County, and based
15 on the development he brings to Grand Gedeh County, we can
16 say this is a person capable of assuming national leadership.
17 We can see how somebody does it in Maryland County. We can
18 see how Maryland County legislators, Sinoe County legislators
19 stands up to the county executive for what is right, and the
20 people in Sinoe can say, "You need to go represent us on a
21 national level."

22 Economic power has to be decentralized in a number
23 of ways; not only that the local governmental units would
24 have control over dedicated resources by an agreed-upon
25 formula rather than by the whims of somebody who can change

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1 their mind when they fall out of favor. We also need to look
2 at empowering Liberian businesses. I go back to there was a
3 statement that was made to me by a Lebanese merchant who was
4 my neighbor in the early '90s in Monrovia. He said, "Oh, the
5 Tolbert government was sweet. I could just sign my business
6 card, I would say, 'Give this man \$10,000,' and they get that
7 loan." Well, he didn't realize he was speaking of somebody
8 whose father had 10 times more collateral but couldn't get
9 the loan for what he needed. And we need to stop that. Our
10 governments need to stop being afraid of Liberian people
11 getting rich. Adam Smith and Karl Adams believed in one
12 fundamental principle. One was the founder of -- Karl Marx,
13 I'm sorry. One was the founder of capitalism, one was the
14 founder of communism. They said the basic purpose of a
15 government is to enhance the welfare of its citizens. And
16 Liberia cannot continue to fail on that benchmark. The
17 government must take enhancing its citizens' welfare as its
18 number one priority -- economic welfare, security welfare,
19 psychological welfare, social welfare -- and that can only
20 come about through economic empowerment and decentralization.

21 We need to be serious about reparations to those
22 who have been hurt by this crisis. We need to ensure that
23 those who have been hurt the most not in terms of the dollar
24 amounts that they lost or the number of relatives that they
25 lost, but the impact on their lives. Some people lost

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1 millions of dollars and have recovered. Some people lost
2 \$500 and the only house they've had, and they've never
3 recovered. That person who has never recovered should be a
4 priority.

5 We need to memorialize the victims of this
6 conflict. We need to make sure that we never forget this.
7 We also need to make sure that our military and paramilitary
8 forces have the proper training and indoctrination to protect
9 and serve the people, not the president.

10 In 1990 we saw the armed forces of Liberia paid
11 for by your tax dollar, my tax dollar, saying, "No Doe, no
12 Liberia." That should never happen again. They were not
13 there for Doe, they were there for the Liberian people.
14 Because they failed that sacred responsibility, we are where
15 we are today. And then we want to make sure that our
16 citizens who have had to flee Liberia because of the
17 instability of the past 29 years, who have taken residence in
18 other countries, who have established roots but still have
19 the deep love for Liberia, be allowed to hold dual
20 citizenship.

21 Thank you very much for your work. On behalf of
22 the Liberian community in Minnesota, I want to say that it's
23 been an honor, it's been a privilege to have you in our midst
24 for this historic occasion, representing the first time a TRC
25 has held hearings, public hearings, in the diaspora. We walk

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1 away from this deeply touched, more inspired, more motivated
2 to ensure that our country reconciles and rebuilds and that
3 we never, ever repeat the mistakes of our past.

4 We also want to say, do not be disheartened that
5 this room was not filled in any of your exercises. Many of
6 us here work two and three jobs to support our friends and
7 family back home. Those of us who have not been able to be
8 here at times, when I haven't been here, I've turned on the
9 Internet and I've followed the proceedings. So this process,
10 these proceedings, have been observed by more people than
11 what you've seen here. It's the talk of the town, and people
12 are grateful that you are here.

13 We know that this is an important step in our rise
14 from the ashes. We encourage you to go forth with more
15 resolve. And your conscience, let your conscience be your
16 guide.

17 Thank you very much.

18 (Applause)

19 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you, Witnesses,
20 Gentlemen, for your respective presentations. The
21 Commissioners will take time now to ask you pointed
22 questions. I will look forward to a healthy interchange.

23 We have less than 30 minutes. Commissioners will
24 be pointed in their questions, and I hope you can also be
25 pointed in your responses so we can have another period of

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1 engagement. Thank you.

2 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you very much for
3 your presentation and the support you've given this
4 Commission. I also want to say thanks for the
5 recommendation.

6 My question will go to ULAA. You talk about your
7 engagement in Ghana concerning the status of the refugee. We
8 thank you very much for that initiative, and we ask you to
9 continue to do it more.

10 You talked, but you didn't mention anything about
11 the role of ULAA from 1979, because the TRC is trying to
12 review the history, the period of the conflict, which
13 actually start from 1979. Can you say anything? What did
14 you like to aid or to stop?

15 MR. SLEWION: Thank you very much, Commissioner
16 Syllah, for that question.

17 When ULAA was invited to participate in this
18 hearing, we were specifically asked to be focused on our role
19 with the refugee crisis, and so we thought our presentation
20 would be within that context. Now we're standing -- the
21 Union has a 30 years history. It was founded as a Liberian
22 student association by a group of Liberian students in the
23 United States in the '70s. Its role was to be -- first to be
24 able to provide some support to students here as a group of
25 Liberian students, and it took on the role to focus on some

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1 of the political inadequacy in Liberia.

2 ULAA has a history of being in the vanguard of
3 changing the political landscape. They consistently
4 advocated for social justice. The Union has, in its role
5 from the past, ensuring that there was a political change in
6 Liberia that reflected the aspirations of the majority of the
7 Liberian people.

8 It has new challenges. Between the period of 1979
9 and 1980 and 2003, besides numerous demonstrations that were
10 staged by the Union with policymakers, holding congressional
11 hearings, and also presenting reports to congressional
12 committees, the Union has also had an opportunity to send
13 several delegations to Liberia to engage the Liberian
14 government on many of the issues that we are speaking about
15 today.

16 So there is a record that the Union continue to
17 maintain that mission and that focus; but in addition to its
18 role as an advocate for social justice and political
19 equality, the Union has new challenges, which is from the
20 background that the demographic of the United States within
21 the Liberian community has changed dramatically. Therefore,
22 the Union in the last three years has been able to look at
23 its mission in terms of social justice to begin to now focus
24 on social services to Liberians in the United States.

25 As a result of that mission, that new focus, the

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1 Union has established what it calls a national social service
2 commission. Many of what the Union does in the social
3 service community is through its local chapters. For
4 example, in Raleigh, the Union chapter there has a program
5 that cater to senior Liberian citizens by helping them
6 navigate the social service agencies in Raleigh to obtain
7 senior housing, to obtain assistance for utilities like heat
8 and other things.

9 In Philadelphia, the Union works to support the
10 work of the Agape Senior Center, which caters to all the
11 Liberians, like what we saw with the ladies that came up to
12 help in the older population through literacy work. And I
13 also was very appreciative of the work that the Liberian
14 Women Initiative is doing in Minnesota. Similar work is
15 being done in Philadelphia, and there is success stories of
16 that work. And I'll just tell you two of those success
17 stories. There is two other persons who left their homes.
18 As you know, in the United States, when you come here and you
19 step out of your house, I mean, an illiterate person, it's
20 difficult to return because all the houses look the same. So
21 the older lady wandered and could not identify her house, but
22 in the process she was able to know her telephone number, and
23 therefore, the police were able to call her daughter's cell
24 phone, and the information was provided, and that saved the
25 day. And I'm sure we may have similar success stories here

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1 in Philadel -- in Minnesota.

2 So in addition, as I mentioned to our constituency
3 with regard to speaking out for the Liberian people and
4 educating Liberian people about their basic civil liberties,
5 the Union remains very much sensitive to the change of our
6 demographic in the United States as well.

7 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Okay. Thank you for
8 that information.

9 And during the course of the week, witnesses have
10 been coming and sharing their testimony, also their roles in
11 the conflict in Liberia, and one of the witness mentioned
12 that during the course of the civil crisis, when the people
13 were negotiating for peace in Liberia, the Liberian in the
14 diaspora said -- demonstrated that they should stop the
15 negotiation because that was a sign of support for former
16 president Doe. Can you comment on that?

17 MR. SLEWION: First, let me say when -- I also
18 stayed in Liberia during the war. For some reason, out of my
19 own faith and belief that there would be peace in the
20 country, I refused to leave Liberia. So I may not have a
21 very good collection of the Union's role in that situation,
22 but I know that the Union did send a delegation to Ghana
23 during the negotiation of the Ghana Peace Accord, which
24 eventually led to the departure of Mr. Taylor. The Union
25 actually engaged in that process with a three-man delegation

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1 in Ghana who stayed in Ghana throughout the process and
2 participated in the crafting of that accord that led to an
3 interim government that eventually led to the elections that
4 brought to power the first elected female president of
5 Africa.

6 And even after that accord, the Union also
7 actually fully participated in the monitoring and ensuring of
8 an election process in Liberia.

9 Post-election, the Union continued to remain
10 engaged. They have participated in or met on numerous
11 occasions with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf during her
12 numerous visits to the United States to express to her
13 concerns of Liberians in the diaspora.

14 Most recently we had a meeting with Dr. Fahnbulleh
15 and Ms. Medina Shepherd (phonetic) in Philadelphia when they
16 came to investigate the -- what is now called the Nippygate
17 at the Liberian embassy, where there was a memorandum who
18 (unintelligible) smuggled out of the embassy that blacklisted
19 Liberians here in the United States. In that meeting with
20 Dr. Fahnbulleh and Ms. Shepherd -- Mrs. Wesseh. Let me be
21 correct. Mrs. Wesseh, Medina Shepherd Wesseh, we made it
22 clear. We presented a 10-point paper clearly explaining some
23 of the concerns that Liberians had in the United States.
24 Notably among them was the situation prevailing out of
25 Freeport concerning the declaring of consignments. There

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1 were many Liberian business people who -- many Liberians who
2 were interested in investing in Liberia who were concerned
3 about the broker system that was too cumbersome, very
4 confusing, and, as a result, caused their entire
5 (unintelligible) dollars with their goods stuck at the
6 Freeport.

7 In addition to Liberians who were interested in
8 business, there were Liberians who were also -- who were
9 sending humanitarian goods to Liberia to help solve some of
10 the humanitarian problems. Notably, there were three
11 organizations who have continued outside of the port for the
12 last six months, and the fees have skyrocketed. We also have
13 a situation where Liberians were concerned about one of the
14 problems that many Liberians predict, and we hone that to --

15 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Mr. Witness, can I ask
16 you to be a little brief?

17 MR. SLEWION: Yeah, we will.

18 We also raised the issue of land, *tenu*, in
19 Liberia, that many Liberians felt that they were buying lands
20 and the lands were being resold, and there was nothing done
21 by the legal system to address that situation.

22 So, to be short to your question, the Union
23 continues to remain engaged even after the Ghana Peace
24 Accord.

25 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you very much.

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1 MR. SLEWION: Yeah.

2 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Thank you very much,
3 Gentlemen, for your presentation.

4 I listened to the speakers, and I took note of one
5 point. That is calling for prosecutions. As you may be
6 aware, the mandate of the TRC states that the TRC should --
7 in their report, should make recommendations for
8 prosecutions. Most of all the witnesses who have appeared
9 and all the speakers have focused mainly on the human rights
10 abuses that were committed, and one of the speakers mentioned
11 an economic side to the crisis. The TRC also has a mandate
12 to investigate the misuse of power, the misuse of resources,
13 economic crimes. I wonder -- and that question goes to all
14 of you -- what is your take on that portion of the mandate
15 calling for the investigation of economic crimes and the
16 recommendation of prosecutions? Would you support that?
17 Thank you.

18 MR. DWANYEN: Absolutely. One of the things that
19 caused this war to drag on were people selling produce that
20 didn't belong to them, taking over people's coffee farms,
21 rubber farms, looting people's cars, selling iron ore,
22 selling diamonds that didn't belong to them. It was a very,
23 very important contributing factor. It's a contributing
24 factor that robbed the country of the ability to develop.
25 These people were exploiting the resources of the country and

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1 not paying teachers and not paying nurses, not buying
2 medications.

3 We listened to Georgette Gray talk about her
4 sister that bled from one hospital to another and died. I
5 lost a sister who died in childbirth because she did not have
6 the medical attention prenatal, postnatal. I also heard
7 another gentleman speak of the same circumstance that
8 happened to his sister. I don't have his permission to call
9 his name. That happened today. So this is a very serious
10 matter.

11 The economic crimes, many of them have the same
12 impact as taking a gun and shooting someone, so I would
13 strongly recommend that those crimes are investigated and
14 they are prosecuted.

15 MR. SLEWION: If I may quickly add, I think there
16 is no doubt in anyone's mind that our conflict lasted the
17 time that it did because of the participation of countries
18 and organizations in the economic robbery of the Liberian
19 people. There are countries that we believe are on record by
20 the Green -- by the Global Witness organization that have
21 documented the economic crime committed by certain
22 institutions and countries on chronological basis, and I
23 think those documentations can be retrieved by the TRC to
24 form part of your investigation. You may not have the
25 mandate to prosecute these countries, but I think you might

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1 have the capacity to put these countries on record.

2 We had a situation where Mr. Gus Kouwenhoven, who
3 participated in aiding Mr. Taylor to rob Liberia of its
4 logging in -- resources, Mr. Kouwenhoven was prosecuted in
5 Australia through the effort of Global Witness and other
6 organizations, and we think Mr. Kouwenhoven is just one of
7 many suspects that may be lying out there. We also have
8 recent report from the State Department -- I mean from U.S.
9 sources of the millions of dollars that Mr. Sawyer (phonetic)
10 has been able to deposit in this country. And we're sure
11 this is through the aid of a system and mechanism that
12 probably need to be explored by this TRC or other sources to
13 bring those banks and those financial institutions that aided
14 Mr. Taylor in robbing the Liberian people and depositing this
15 money in the U.S. economy to be exposed and documented.

16 It is not unusual. Their conscience is not
17 peculiar to Liberia. We recently saw the Jewish community
18 were able to go after banks during the Hitler time and
19 retrieve this money as we speak.

20 So we strongly, as Liberians in the diaspora, want
21 to encourage the TRC, if possible the Liberian government, to
22 use every available resources to be able to retrieve wealth
23 that have been taken away from the Liberian people.

24 MR. KIAWU: Well, I think -- I'm in support of
25 what my colleagues have just said. What I would just add to

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1 that is that prosecution against those who have committed
2 such crimes, I would say heinous crimes, economic crimes, I
3 think we should not be -- Liberian men would say pick and
4 choose. We should do it across the board. If it affects our
5 brother, yes, let us prosecute our brother. But in Liberia
6 we have a tendency of covering up for our siblings, and in
7 Liberia it's the usual thing, who knows you. I think the
8 time for who knows you is one of the reasons for the civil
9 war. I think we should cross that barrier to go across the
10 board. If you commit a crime, whether he's my brother or my
11 mother, let us do it. Once we set an example, I think others
12 will -- that will serve as a deterrent to others.

13 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Lastly, would you
14 support reparations for victims of this conflict? What's the
15 Union and your organizations' position on this?

16 MR. SLEWION: I would say yes, we do support the
17 reparations. And if we're looking at reparations for
18 victims, we strongly believe that where there is proven
19 evidence that there is a systematic victimization not only of
20 individuals, if there is a systematic and targeted
21 victimization or even a community or an ethnic group, we
22 think reparations should be looked at in that context beyond
23 just individuals being given these reparation, but should
24 also be extended to communities that have been deprived.

25 We have a situation, like my brother Dwanyen said

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1 of what happened in Nimba County with the mining company, the
2 many years they stayed there, and there is nothing in
3 exchange for the community. We believe that should be looked
4 into. We have a situation in Bomi Hills where that community
5 was robbed of its resources, and the company left, and that
6 community today lies in ruins. We have the situation in Bong
7 Mines. So we think reparations should go beyond just
8 individuals being targeted, but it should also go beyond
9 rewarding and compensating communities in behalf of ethnic
10 groups that are affected by those economic victimization.

11 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Thank you very much.

12 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Good afternoon,
13 Gentlemen. I have two short questions, but just a brief
14 comment on the issue of reparations.

15 The year before the last, the TRC was fortunate to
16 have made a presentation at ULAA's convention held in
17 Philadelphia, and at that convention we made a presentation,
18 and ULAA had expressed its support for the TRC's reparation
19 program. Under the TRC Act, we are supposed to at least
20 start or set up a reparation fund, and ULAA has agreed that
21 it will make itself available to assist in setting up the
22 fund and even helping to fundraise initially for that
23 process. I just wanted to shed light on that, that ULAA is
24 already working with us.

25 I have two short questions. The first one is for

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1 ULAA, so I guess the senior representative of ULAA,
2 Mr. Slewion, will answer that.

3 Concerning the reconciliation of Liberians not
4 only at home but also abroad, as you can see, we took the TRC
5 to the diaspora, and the government of Liberia also has on
6 its post-war immediate agenda for the country the issue of
7 reconciliation. Now, what is ULAA doing at that policy level
8 to address the issue of national reconciliation, especially
9 amongst Liberians and Liberians of -- Liberian organizations
10 in the U.S.?

11 MR. SLEWION: That's a very good question.

12 (Overlapping speakers)

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Go ahead.

14 MR. SLEWION: Just a short answer.

15 As I said, the Union has new challenges, and the
16 Union's mission in the past was more focused on social
17 justice. As we speak, the challenges of reconciliation is
18 also now in the picture. Specifically with regard to dealing
19 with conflict within ULAA organizations, I think that ULAA
20 has made tremendous progress in addressing that challenge to
21 the point where it's intervening, directly meeting with
22 communities that have problems and helping those communities
23 to come up with recommendations in solving their own
24 problems. Notably, the Union was able to intervene in a
25 situation in the Liberian called FOLICAM, the federal

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1 coalition of Liberians in Massachusetts. At end of that
2 conflict, the Union was able to get the leadership and the
3 community to sign a memorandum of understanding with clear
4 three mandates, setting a date for elections, setting an
5 election commission, and holding elections. The Union did a
6 similar thing in Connecticut with the Liberian community
7 there.

8 And so the Union has taken an approach of engaging
9 these communities and no longer just hands off on the belief
10 that these communities or chapters are autonomous by your
11 last constitution.

12 With regard to the greater Liberian community, I
13 have seen the Union is being very supportive of the TRC
14 process itself. That the Union has been able to make a
15 public statement that it supports this process is a moral
16 action on the part of the Union towards reconciliation in
17 Liberia. The Union does not have a definitive position
18 between the two philosophical approach as to resolving the
19 reconciliation process in Liberia, which is the TRC and the
20 war crime. The Union believes that each process serve
21 different purposes, and so it supports the TRC based on the
22 purpose it wants to serve. And at the point if there is a
23 general psychology for a war crime to be set up, the Union
24 will make its position known at that time. Presently the
25 Union has no official position on that issue. It has

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1 official position on the TRC.

2 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Okay. My next
3 question goes to Mr. Kiawu Hassan.

4 You gave, I think, a rather grim picture of the
5 situation with Liberian journalists, especially when it comes
6 to professionalism, education. You know, you rightly -- you
7 just very, very frankly stated that you think the press is
8 doing a rather poor job in Liberia because of all of these
9 issues. They're not educated, they're not experienced, they
10 don't seem to have an agenda that is national in scope. You
11 as a journalist, a practicing journalist for many, many years
12 and also an active member with the Liberian community in
13 Atlanta, Georgia, what practical steps do you think the press
14 union and other media groups can take to help the situation
15 with (unintelligible) the journalism field in Liberia?

16 MR. KIAWU: Well, first of all, I think the Press
17 Union of Liberia should take concrete steps, and one of those
18 steps would be training. I think the bulk of the thing,
19 things that the press union needs to undertake, is the
20 adequate training for the press union members themselves,
21 because these press union members themselves work at these
22 various places. But the web of blacklisting in Liberia, I've
23 witnessed a few myself during the short time I was there, and
24 the quality of their work is very appalling, and people cry
25 foul all of the time. In fact, I was talking with the

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1 managing director of -- one of the managing directors. I
2 can't recall now. He's taking one of them to court. And I
3 think the union always backs the media houses, and everybody
4 is just springing up and bringing it up in the newspaper
5 houses. So I'll give you an example. One of my best friends
6 from the University, Adolphus Karnuah -- I'm sorry to call
7 his name, but I confirmed to him right on Carey Street just
8 about -- Saturday before I came, and I asked him, so you
9 (unintelligible) people -- are you operating -- are you a
10 journalism man? (Unintelligible) now, come on, we've gotta
11 make sure we regulate, we have a regulatory system where we
12 know that people who are engaged in such things -- yeah, you
13 can be a publisher, that's fine, but you cannot be a
14 journalist when you have no knowledge of the subject matter.
15 So we need training for them. And all these media houses,
16 like I was at the Liberia Broadcasting System. I had a day
17 seminar for them. I even ran news for them. I also ran news
18 for Truth-FM and other places while I was there, organized
19 many seminars for them every now and then. Those will help
20 out greatly, to tell people what is this. People don't even
21 know what, for instance, a cue, an intro to a clip on the
22 LBC. The guy writes something, the interviewer's name was
23 not even -- the interviewer's name was not even mentioned
24 while reading news. And he just said something, the --
25 somebody of District Number 4 in Nimba County said blah,

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1 blah, blah, blah, blah, boom, here is a clip. And I just put
2 it aside. I didn't even read it. And because they are
3 collecting money from somebody, I was hoping that that would
4 have been read on the seven o'clock news. I didn't read it,
5 because I felt that it was poorly done. So we need training,
6 training, training, training, training.

7 MR. SLEWION: And you know I'm smiling because you
8 know I won't let such a question go by. Being a journalist
9 myself and having served as secretary-general of the press
10 union for four years in Liberia, I think the statement that
11 the media in Liberia is bad is a generalization that is
12 inaccurate. I believe there are media institutions in
13 Liberia that are professional. We'll take the *Daily Observer*
14 for number one. You will take the *Democrat* newspaper, the
15 *Enquirer* newspaper, and many other institutions that can
16 be -- as Liberians generally in the diaspora, that we can be
17 proud of. I think the issue of this blanket statement of
18 unprofessionalism does not serve well if we do not do
19 anything to contribute to the improvement of the institution.

20 I had an opportunity in December to serve on the
21 project called the Liberian Media Project at the University
22 of Massachusetts in Boston as one of the technical
23 coordinator. That project went to Liberia in December 2006
24 with a three-man delegation, which I happened to be a part
25 of, and we did a media assessment in Liberia. And as a

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1 result of that media assessment, we also ran a media survey
2 to gauge the Liberian people, their own acceptance of the
3 media. And it will interest you to note that that survey
4 produced some very interesting results and (unintelligible).
5 The surveys were conducted both in Monrovia and in Gbarnga.
6 The survey in Gbarnga was to engage the community as to their
7 own acceptance of the content of news in the rural community,
8 and the survey in Monrovia was to engage the reading
9 population on the content, the professionalism, and as work
10 and as well as -- maybe we'll talk about the quality of
11 newspapers. Both of these cover newspapers and radio. As a
12 result of that media survey --

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Can you be very --

14 MR. SLEWION: As I said, we brought nine
15 journalists to the United States who stayed at the University
16 of Boston for almost two months. So I think I would not make
17 a general statement about their own professional journalism
18 like you are. I would make a statement that it's on a
19 case-by-case basis.

20 And also, finally, on that comment, the problem
21 facing the media in Liberia is not a peculiar human resource
22 problem to the media in Liberia. It's a general human
23 resource problem in Liberia. As I speak to you, there was a
24 survey done on the Liberian judicial system. It will
25 interest you to know that 10 percent up -- over 25 percent of

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1 people who are dispensing justice in Liberia are high school
2 students who are responsible to determine whether somebody
3 goes to jail or not. A high school student, sitting in
4 (unintelligible) -- or judicial positions and making
5 decisions that affect the lives of people in the country.

6 It is not a problem that we want to blame any of
7 these sectors. We want to blame the entire war situation
8 that has caused a brain drain in our country.

9 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you. I think your
10 point is well made. I see Mr. Kiawu is shaking his head. We
11 know there is an argument, so Commissioners will just ask the
12 remainder of the questions, and we'll get final responses
13 from you, we'll sing the National Anthem of Liberia and the
14 United States, and we go.

15 Commissioner Dolopei.

16 COMMISSIONER DEDE DOLOPEI: No questions.

17 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Pointed questions,
18 Commissioners?

19 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Yes, I have three
20 pointed ones. The first one, can you please give me a quick,
21 succinct overview of the evolution of violence as versus the
22 rule of law as a means of socioeconomic change with regards
23 to your organizations in Liberia's crisis today? One of you
24 mentioned earlier that at the beginning there was no idea
25 like this, but later it became a necessity. So I just would

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1 like a succinct presentation of how that change came about
2 and why.

3 MR. DWANYEN: Let me correct that --

4 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Dwanyen, please, just
5 for your piece, let him complete. We'll ask our questions,
6 then you respond.

7 (Overlapping speakers)

8 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: The second one had
9 to do with we're concerned about this issue of justice. You
10 know, we've heard from many of you that justice is very
11 critical for the future of our country, but we have what they
12 call retributive and we have restorative.

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Your question,
14 Commissioner?

15 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: So the question
16 becomes --

17 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: I want you to ask the
18 question.

19 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: I can't have a
20 foundation to ask it?

21 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: No, we understand the
22 foundation.

23 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: The second one then
24 becomes now, considering Liberia's situation, there were
25 three tiers of involvement, people who were active. There

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1 were the visionaries and the financiers. Without them, this
2 whole process would never have happened. Then there were the
3 technicians, the military high command, the people who made
4 it possible. Then you have foot soldiers, as we mentioned,
5 and in our case many of them were just children who were just
6 confused.

7 So, considering your concern for justice, how
8 should we put our priorities when we're talking about justice
9 for Liberia? That's a broad question to you.

10 And the last one, this one is more of a challenge,
11 not a question. We're concerned about reparations in
12 Liberia. The Act says we must create a reparation trust
13 fund. So I want to challenge all of the Liberians here in
14 America to please consider that if 50 percent of all of you
15 were to give 3 U.S. dollars over the next year, because our
16 term will finish within the next year, by next July, pledge
17 that amount, we could be able to raise 300,000 U.S. dollars,
18 symbolizing approximately \$1 per Liberian who may have died
19 in this war. Take that as a challenge to make a commitment
20 for all of you for the trust fund that we'll be establishing.

21 So that's my last challenge with my two questions.

22 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you, Commissioner
23 Coleman.

24 Commissioner Bull.

25 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Take your pen now

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1 and start writing them down, like we have been doing since
2 you have been talking. Your compatriots said -- told
3 me beyond that, I shouldn't tell you all thank you for
4 anything, so -- but I have a sacred responsibility. I want
5 to say to you all thank you very much, because, just like --
6 a statement was made, just now say, and a ULAA person said
7 it, generalized to say the press not correct, all of them not
8 bad, or we should take it on a case-by-case basis. You see,
9 we've gotta come to the end, a final report. But we look at
10 now the government's past up to this thing, you say -- when
11 you talk and say the Tolbert government was so-and-so --

12 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Do you have a question,
13 Commissioner?

14 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Question, yeah.
15 The Doe government was so-so, and so the Taylor government
16 was so bad, so we have to look on a case-by-case basis. I
17 want to say to Hassan Kiawu, a journalist, you really spoke
18 straight from the heart, and you made recommendations. And I
19 want to ask ULAA, do you agree -- in addition to your
20 recommendation, he said that all those who were involved in
21 the war should be barred from public offices. That's one of
22 the recommendations. And that those who sponsored the war
23 that are living in America should be deported.

24 Now, he also brought up two points which were on
25 his heart -- and thank you for, straight from the heart,

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1 confessing. You said that 1992 Octopus war, many lives were
2 lost because there was a propaganda from the IGNU government
3 and ECOMOG, which they knew, willing knew but wantonly told
4 people that Taylor was further off when, in fact, they were
5 together -- I mean closer, and many lives were lost. It
6 takes me back to Mr. Dwanyen, in his personal confession -- I
7 mean testimony this morning, he referred to the Nimba Defense
8 Force.

9 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Redemption Council.

10 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Okay. Nimba
11 Redemption Council out of which Nimba Defense Force came into
12 play. No? They were different? For one week.

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Do you have a question,
14 Commissioner Bull?

15 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Yeah, I'm trying
16 to get clarity --

17 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Will you clarify it?

18 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Chairman, if I
19 can't get clarification, I will mislead in my writing.

20 MR. DWANYEN: I don't know anything about a Nimba
21 Defense Force.

22 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Oh, Nimba
23 Redemption Council was different from Nimba Defense Force.

24 MR. DWANYEN: I don't know if a Nimba Defense
25 Force ever existed.

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1 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Lofa Defense Force we
2 knew about.

3 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Okay. Well, you
4 did say but there was a war that went on for one week before
5 there was ceasefire; right? In Nimba area. Did you?

6 MR. DWANYEN: I didn't say there was a ceasefire
7 either.

8 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Okay. What was
9 that war that went on for one week fighting?

10 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Will you clarify what
11 he's saying, Counsel?

12 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Can you clarify
13 that?

14 MR. DWANYEN: Do you want that clarification now?

15 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Okay. Yes.
16 Please clarify that, because I see from that Nimba Redemption
17 Council in which on the board you talk of Joseph Guannu.
18 Joseph Guannu then was also serving as minister of state for
19 presidential affairs to the IGNU government in 1992, and they
20 were giving this propaganda. And we also have -- you talk
21 (unintelligible) was Tiawon Gongloe, who is now the solicitor
22 general of Liberia, he was also on our council and very close
23 to IGNU during this period. So we just take note of that.

24 And to ULAA, we see that right now you've always
25 been in the forefront for all situations in Liberia, so

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1 political, sit and talk about social and economic, and now
2 the issue is the refugees. And I see you talk about that
3 now. But one thing, it started since February 2008, and ULAA
4 had planned -- you opened a relief fund drive, fund relief
5 drive to send food for the refugees in Ghana. It's June 14,
6 and that fund, have you sent anything from the relief fund?
7 Because there is a saying in Liberia that while the grass is
8 growing, the ox is dying. So since February, these people
9 need food and stuff. It's June. What happened to the relief
10 fund that ULAA was sending to them?

11 Thank you. Thank you very much.

12 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: I have no
13 questions. Mine is an advice, and so I would suggest they
14 not answer these questions, maybe will add something to my
15 advice.

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: I prefer you just do the
17 advice now.

18 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Okay.

19 Gentlemen, first, I'm sorry that you did not take
20 into consideration gender representation. But there are two
21 schools of thought. One says history repeats itself, and
22 another says the world is a progressive society; and as the
23 society progresses, the need to change becomes imperatively
24 necessary. I was happy when ULAA said we were on social
25 justice, we were advocating on social justice, now we are

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1 advocating social services.

2 MR. SLEWION: Yeah.

3 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: But we want
4 you to go beyond that. We want ULAA and all other
5 organizations to also transform themselves from destructive
6 criticism to constructive criticism; from confrontation to
7 engagement; from resistance to avoiding it; from curement to
8 prevention; and from the notion let us spoil it, someone will
9 feast, to that of consciousness. Because these are the
10 things that helped to compound our disgruntlement and
11 eventually led to war. And let us also begin to speak on the
12 basis of live and let's live instead of me, me, and me.

13 Liberians of every segment in Liberia continue to
14 fight for their individual and segmental rights without
15 taking into consideration what is called national
16 responsibility and duties. If you're fighting for your
17 rights without take into consideration of my rights, then, of
18 course, you are provoking me to fight for my rights. So let
19 us forget about fighting for rights now, because for 160
20 years nobody has won. Let us then transform from fighting
21 for our rights to respecting the rights of others.

22 What is my duty to you as a Liberian? And then
23 you also ask yourself what is my responsibility and your duty
24 to me. If we have that kind of change in our society --

25 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Sheikh --

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1 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: -- hopefully
2 the healings of the wounds, the reconcilings of the
3 differences, and reunifying our people for the greatest
4 task -- I always say this -- of rebuilding Liberia. If the
5 minds are not healed, if the minds are not unified,
6 eventually there will be a repeat of history, God forbid.

7 Thank you very much.

8 MR. SLEWION: Thank you, sir.

9 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much,
10 Commissioner.

11 Gentlemen, two minutes each or less. Yes. We
12 need to adjourn as soon as possible.

13 MR. DWANYEN: The question -- okay. I will start
14 with Commissioner Coleman's three questions.

15 First of all, none of these organizations that we
16 represent have been involved in going from civic advocacy to
17 violent advocacy. The OLM has never, neither has ULAA, and I
18 don't believe that LAMA has ever, so --

19 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Members of the
20 core --

21 MR. DWANYEN: Individuals -- and I spoke to that
22 earlier, that individuals or members of the progressive
23 movement later on, especially in the later '80s, changed
24 their philosophy to advocate for violence. And just because,
25 for example, Charles Taylor was the president -- I mean the

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1 chairman of the board of ULAA in the '70s and wages a war in
2 1989, you cannot hold ULAA responsible for Charles Taylor's
3 actions. That did not happen when he was --

4 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Who were some of those
5 individuals? That was the last question you didn't answer
6 previously.

7 MR. DWANYEN: Can I get to this? I can tell you
8 that later, because I don't want to use my two minutes naming
9 individuals. Now, let -- there are some important issues
10 here.

11 You spoke about restorative justice versus
12 retributive justice. I think both are equally important.
13 Restorative justice has to try to bring people back to some
14 degree of wholeness, even if not in totality, and retributive
15 justice is also important to set an example. I mean, if
16 somebody kills a person, for example, you can never
17 restore -- you can never bring about restorative justice in
18 that example, because nothing you do will bring that dead
19 person back to life. But you don't allow the person, you
20 know, to go with impunity simply because you cannot provide
21 restoration.

22 You spoke about how do we prioritize the
23 prosecution between the visionaries, the financiers, and the
24 technicians. The fact of the matter is that because someone
25 envisioned a war, you have to look at where the country was.

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1 The people who may have envisioned war were themselves
2 subjected to war. Think about this. Nichols Porjer
3 (phonetic) went back to Liberia in 1984 or '83. What
4 happened to him? He was killed. If you are denied the right
5 to enter your country and you feel that if you enter your
6 country, you will be killed --

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thirty seconds.

8 MR. DWANYEN: -- you have a right. What you don't
9 have a right to do is to use the war for the selfish
10 acquisition of wealth and power and create all these war
11 crimes, recruit 12-year-olds to fight and disembowel pregnant
12 women and just -- 97 percent or more of the people who died
13 in the Liberian conflict died at the checkpoints and in their
14 homes. They didn't die as a result of combat. And that's a
15 situation that you have to address.

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much.

17 MR. SLEWION: I think Mr. Dwanyen spoke to some of
18 the questions that I would have want to address. I believe
19 he did very a good job on covering the questions. I will
20 just go to two or three of the questions.

21 One has to do with the statement that say warlords
22 should be barred from public office and supporters of war
23 should be deported. I think the suggestion in my mind is
24 very theoretical. Implementation has to be done within the
25 context of law. You have to be able to understand the law

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1 within Liberia that grants people the right to participate in
2 the government. You also have to be able to look at those
3 suggestions from the premise that everyone is innocent until
4 proven guilty. Until you can establish a guilt, you cannot
5 bar anyone on the basis of sentiments. That's one.

6 On the issue of deporting people from the United
7 States because they supported a war, go back toward the
8 premise that people are innocent until proven guilty. There
9 are laws in the United States that address the issue of any
10 foreigner participating in war in their country if it can be
11 proven, because we have seen some people who have
12 participated in the Jewish or the Hitler situation being
13 arrested, proven guilty, and deported.

14 In the United States, throughout our crisis --

15 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thirty seconds.

16 MR. SLEWION: Thirty seconds. Throughout our
17 crisis, there has been -- there is one proven case, one
18 proven case; even not yet proven, but at least to some extent
19 it has a potential of prosecution, and that is the case of
20 Chucky Taylor, who is an American but participated in the
21 prosecution of the war in Liberia. For the first time, the
22 United States is invoking that law that prosecutes U.S.
23 citizens that participates in war or crime in other country.
24 So Chucky is facing prosecution on the basis of that law in
25 Florida. So these suggestions will be taken in the context

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1 of the law.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much.

3 MR. SLEWION: Quickly, on the issue of contract,
4 Mr. Chairman, I just want to quickly address that, because
5 this goes to the credibility of the ULAA in terms of raising
6 money. The Union has been involved in raising funds to
7 address the refugee situation in Ghana. When the funds --
8 the funds, as I speak, are being raised. The problem -- or I
9 wouldn't say problem. The challenge that the Union faced was
10 how to channel that money to make sure that, one, it's
11 accounted for and that it meets the desired results. What we
12 have done --

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Sorry, Mr. Slewion.

14 MR. SLEWION: No, no. Quickly, what we have done
15 is ask The Advocates for Human Rights, who have been very
16 gracious and helpful to us, to identify an implementing
17 partner in Ghana in the implementation of the disbursement of
18 these funds. We identified a group called the New Apollo
19 Project based in California, which we were helped by The
20 Advocates for Human Rights to identify that group. We
21 consider this as a public fund. We are still studying the
22 capacity and the credibility and the track record of the New
23 Apollo Project to work with ULAA in implementing their funds
24 in Ghana. We have also --

25 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Sorry, Mr. Slewion.

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1 Thank you very much.

2 Hassan, please use less than 30 seconds.

3 MR. KIAWU: He had 30 seconds, so I can add 30
4 seconds more. Two minutes.

5 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Ten seconds are gone
6 already.

7 (Laughter)

8 MR. KIAWU: Okay. Well, my other colleagues have
9 already said everything, but I think I want to come back to
10 what Counselor Bull, Pearl Bull, just said regarding my two
11 recommendations, the barring of people to take public
12 offices. And what I'm saying is that we should -- is within
13 the context of the law. But I think the people who elected
14 them have a voice, do have a voice, and I think you can
15 say -- you know, the old man used to say the same thing --
16 the same thing that pull you up is the same thing that bring
17 you down. So I think the same way, that they elected them to
18 public offices, the people can rise up against them and say,
19 "No, maybe we have made a mistake." Or these people -- for
20 example, Prince Johnson, Adolphus Dolo, those people should
21 not be sitting up there. There should be a protest to bring
22 them down, because they've killed, they've maimed people, and
23 there cannot be people who killed us to go over and enact
24 laws to tell us where to go, to go left or right.

25 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You gave statement to

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1 the TRC?

2 MR. KIAWU: Pardon me?

3 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You gave statement to
4 the TRC?

5 MR. KIAWU: Okay. And then the other one, barring
6 people who have helped to create -- to create carnage and
7 destruction in Liberia, I think my issue here is that people
8 who have helped to destroy Liberia, to bring Liberia to its
9 knees, I think they should also feel the same consequence as
10 the people who suffered as a result of that. So people
11 should be deported if at all they are caught or they are
12 found guilty of that.

13 I interviewed somebody from LURD rebels in 2003.
14 He went to Atlanta from -- on his way to Liberia through
15 eastern. I've forgotten the gentleman's name. And I
16 interviewed him. Now, here he was, a Liberian on the run in
17 Africa. His voice is there. I still have the tape.

18 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you, Hassan.
19 Thank you very much.

20 Ladies and Gentlemen, please join us in thanking
21 our panel for their testimony this afternoon.

22 (Applause)

23 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Gentlemen, you may
24 please leave.

25 MR. DWANYEN: Thank you.

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1 (Witnesses excused)

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: At this stage, we can't
3 help but to thank everybody: The Advocates for Human Rights,
4 Robin Phillips; other members of the TRC advisory committee;
5 our core of volunteers from law firms; students of Hamline
6 University; the administration and staff of this university.
7 We are immensely grateful for all the support and assistance
8 given to this project. We recognize all of you distinguished
9 members of the American society who have come out to support
10 us; distinguished members of the Liberian society; our
11 transcribers, the court reporters, whose patience have been
12 stretched beyond our understanding of them. That goes for
13 our camera crew also, who has done a splendid job in
14 documenting all of these processes.

15 (Applause)

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You know, what happens
17 here in the diaspora complements what we're doing in Liberia.
18 At the end of this work, I'm sure you'll all be pleased that
19 we have recorded and we have documented word-for-word
20 testimonies from Maryland County to Grand Cape Mount County
21 and to the diaspora. In that way, we can memorialize the
22 process, we can memorialize the memory of our people who have
23 gone before us. And what we're doing here, the reports, the
24 recommendations will live beyond us, and posterity will
25 benefit from it.

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1 I want to thank the security crew also at Hamline
2 University, who has been very, very rigid in making sure that
3 this building (unintelligible).

4 I'm getting so many warning signals.

5 Thanks to everybody. Many of you I cannot name,
6 because by the time I begin to name, I will leave some people
7 out. But the volunteers have done well elsewhere. And, of
8 course, my colleagues, the Commissioners, who have stuck
9 together.

10 (Applause)

11 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: So thank you all.

12 Shall we stand and sing the National Anthem of
13 Liberia and the United States?

14 (The National Anthem of Liberia was sung)

15 (The National Anthem of the United States was
16 sung)

17 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: We now declare the
18 hearings of the TRC Diaspora Hearings in Minnesota, United
19 States of America, successfully closed.

20 (Applause)

21 (Hearings concluded at approximately 6:28 p.m. on
22 June 14, 2008)

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I Jean M. Whalen a Registered Diplomate 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 14th day of June, 2008, at the time and place specified.

DATED: July 21, 2008.

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