

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

DIASPORA PROJECT

PUBLIC HEARING
HAMLIN UNIVERSITY
June 11, 2008
St. Paul, Minnesota U.S.A.

TESTIMONY OF:

SACKOR ZAHNEE

RC Commissioners:

Chairman Jerome Verdier
Vice Chairperson Dede Dolopei
Oumu Syllah
Sheikh Kafumba Konneh
Pearl Brown Bull
Rev. Gerald Coleman
John H. T. Stewart
Massa Washington

Court Reporter:

Holly Nordahl
Minnesota Association of
Verbatim Reporters & Captioners
P.O. Box 375
Marshall, Minnesota 56258 U.S.A.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

(The following proceedings were had and made of record, commencing at approximately 3:34 p.m.)

MR. SIRLEAF: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We're about to start the afternoon section, and we want to say welcome again. Now, at this time, we'll call on the next witness, who is Sackor Zahnee.

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Shall we rise for the oath.

SACKOR ZAHNEE,
being first duly sworn,
testified as follows:

TESTIMONY OF SACKOR ZAHNEE

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Please be seated. Mr. Witness, we say good afternoon.

THE WITNESS: Good afternoon, sir. How you doing?

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: I'm okay. How's yourself?

THE WITNESS: I'm fine. Thank God.

1 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: That's good.
2 We want to welcome you to the TROC.

3 THE WITNESS: Thank you very much.

4 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: This is a
5 public forum internet for us to share experiences in
6 terms of what transpired in our country and in our life
7 between 1979 and 2003, in the hope that by shared
8 experiences, we can learn from the past in order to
9 chart a better course for the future of our country,
10 and we're doing this all around where we think we can
11 find Liberians who don't live in Liberia, and now we
12 need diaspora. We have come out here because we
13 believe even though you Liberians are away from the
14 homeland, but you have your own experiences, you have
15 your own role to play, you have your own contribution
16 to make, and besides that, you are all still Liberians,
17 so that's why we are here. We appreciate it that you
18 could take time out of your busy schedule to come and
19 join us.

20 THE WITNESS: Thank you very much. If
21 you don't mind, (unintelligible). I don't make that
22 much.

23 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. I'll
24 introduce the commissioners to you so you get to know
25 the commissioners.

1 THE WITNESS: Okay.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Who will be
3 interacting with you over the next hour. Sheikh
4 Kafumba Konneh's at the end of my left, Commissioner
5 Sheikh Kafumba Konnen. Next to him is Commissioner
6 Pearl Brown Bull, Commissioner Gerald Coleman,
7 Commissioner Dede Dopolei, Commissioner Massa
8 Washington, John Stewart and Oumou Syllah. We will ask
9 a couple of preliminary questions, following which then
10 you will proceed with your testimony.

11 THE WITNESS: Okay.

12 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Please
13 restate your name.

14 THE WITNESS: My name is Sackor Zahnee.

15 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: How you spell
16 that?

17 THE WITNESS: S-A-C-K-O-R. The Kru
18 pronunciation is Sacko. My last name is Zeahnee, but
19 when I went to school they call me Zahnee, so I
20 accepted it at school. Sackor Zahnee.

21 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Sackor
22 Zahnee.

23 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

24 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Do you want
25 to spell Zahnee, too?

1 THE WITNESS: Sorry.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Please spell
3 Zahnee.

4 THE WITNESS: Z-A-H-N-E-E.

5 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Zahnee. Your
6 date of birth or age, please.

7 THE WITNESS: April 18, 1982, 26.

8 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Where do you
9 currently reside?

10 THE WITNESS: Southwest Philadelphia.

11 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Come again?

12 THE WITNESS: Southwest Philadelphia.

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Oh,
14 southwest.

15 THE WITNESS: It's called Little
16 Monrovia.

17 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: New Monrovia?

18 THE WITNESS: Little Monrovia.

19 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Oh, Little
20 Monrovia. Your vocation or occupation? What do you
21 do? What takes up your time?

22 THE WITNESS: Well, I work as a lab
23 tech at GSK, Glaxo SmithKline, but I'm just doing it
24 for the money. That's not my profession or anything.

25 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You work as a

1 lab technician?

2 THE WITNESS: Yes, at a drug
3 manufacturer, Glaxo SmithKline.

4 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. When
5 did you leave Liberia for the U.S.?

6 THE WITNESS: October 1996.

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Is that when
8 you arrived in the U.S. or you left Liberia?

9 THE WITNESS: Yeah, that's when I came,
10 and when I left, I came here.

11 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: October, '96?

12 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay, Sacko,
14 thank you very much.

15 THE WITNESS: Thank you, sir.

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You may
17 proceed now with your testimony.

18 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

19 Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. First
20 of all, I'd like to start off by -- I'd like to thank
21 God for giving me the opportunity to be here today to
22 be a part of this public dialogue, which I hope would
23 -- would seek to find out the truth about the very
24 experiences that we all experienced during our civil
25 war in Liberia.

1 And, secondly, I'd like to thank my parents
2 who's there for being throughout the turbulent time of
3 the civil war, making sure that we was alive and
4 protected, and the fact that they gave me permission
5 today to come out here to, for the first time, put on
6 the public record just a tiny bit of our family
7 history.

8 And, thirdly, but most importantly, I'd like
9 to thank the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of
10 Liberia, you guys, and also the Advocate for Human
11 Rights Group. Thank you very much, Laura Young and
12 Sarah Pawletti. But not to finish off, I'd also like
13 to thank Hamline University for being a part of history
14 with us today and letting us use this building.

15 I understand I only have about time as far
16 as spent, I only have about 25 minutes, but because of
17 the TROC and the human right advocate group, I'm so
18 glad that an ordinary citizen like myself who is, by
19 all means just a nobody, will finally get to -- the
20 opportunity to -- to at least we understand that though
21 it may not be that important, but our human rights is
22 not going to be taken for granted, and I hope that you
23 guys will -- thank you for listening to me for that.
24 Thank you for including me in the process. Where do I
25 begin?

1 The civil war in Liberia affected me and my
2 family in so many ways that is so profound, from the
3 death of so many family members, to the emotional end,
4 the emotion of pain and scars that is associated with
5 witnessing and surviving through what I think is quite
6 a prolonged, peak campaign of ethnic cleansing.

7 If you mind me, I would just glance at my
8 notes every now and then so I can reconnect to see
9 where I was at in my testimony.

10 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Are those
11 your personal notes?

12 THE WITNESS: Yes.

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: From your own
14 recollections?

15 THE WITNESS: Yes, handwritten.

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You will
17 share them with us at the end of your testimony?

18 THE WITNESS: I have no problem.

19 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay.

20 THE WITNESS: Sure. Though -- so, I
21 was going to say, though my experiences may have some
22 unique aspect to it, by and large, I think for most of
23 the victims of the civil war in Liberia, we all
24 experienced, have common and shared experiences, like
25 dodging stray bullets and rockets, going through

1 diseases, starvation and hunger, and et cetera, et
2 cetera, fear and intimidation and all that stuff, but
3 the focus of my testimony today that I want you to
4 understand is I want to focus my testimony on the
5 issues that has to do with ethnic identity in
6 pre-Liberia, and during the war, and I would like to
7 focus on the negative impact that my ethnicity, my
8 ethnic affiliation had, was the consequence during the
9 civil war, what my ethnic affiliation resulted into
10 during the civil war. So, in order to tell that story,
11 I will have to narrate to you a series of events that
12 will take us -- take me from where I started off being
13 a proud member of an ethnic group to a point where me
14 and my family, we had complete loss of confidence in
15 our society and the respect for humanity so that we
16 were forced, in order to survive, had to deny
17 everything about my true identity for a very long
18 period of time just in order to survive.

19 For me, this is a story about how political
20 mismanagement of the different social identity in
21 Liberia, and to a larger extent, because they want us
22 to think that well, certain tribes have -- don't like
23 each other or hate each other, but what I feel was --
24 was inter-elite rivalry that resulted into what I
25 plainly consider to be a crime against humanity. So,

1 me and my family became victims only because we was us,
2 only because we were who we are, and that is, we was
3 Krahn. I'm about to get into the story.

4 I was born in 1982, like I mentioned
5 earlier, in Monrovia. My father, John Zahnee, and my
6 mother, Frances Dartoe, she later remarried and her
7 last name was Sua, they both came here from the
8 southeastern part of the country. My mother was from
9 Sinoe and my father was from Grand Gedeh, so that
10 directly put me into the heap of the action when the
11 war started. But mind you, I was only seven years old
12 when -- 1989, I was seven years, but the war really --
13 I like to think I was eight because 1990 was the real
14 war. 1989 was just the beginning and the trigger of
15 the stuff that happened.

16 When I was born, we lived -- my father
17 worked for the Liberian Electrical Corporation, and my
18 mother worked for -- as a kindergarten teacher at the
19 SOS kindergarten. That's where I went to school, and
20 me and my brothers went to elementary school. For the
21 most part during my time in Monrovia, I lived with my
22 two brothers, John Zahnee and Fernade Zahnee, and my
23 mother, but I had two other siblings, my two older
24 sister, Mercy and Wiladay. Mercy lived in Sinoe and
25 Wiladay lived in Bombi Hills, so we started off on --

1 but just to make sure, my dad, just for the record, my
2 dad worked for LEC way back when it was -- he started
3 in 1971 during the Tubman Administration when it used
4 to be called the PUA. I don't know if you remember
5 that. Excuse me.

6 So, my ethnic identity was something that I
7 inherited. My father was Krahn, so if you know the
8 story of Liberia, you take on -- your tribe is the
9 tribe of your father, that's your tribe. So, I didn't
10 speak the language, never been to Grand Gedeh. By and
11 large, my father's tribe was just something I
12 inherited, so in other words, I had no other connection
13 to the Krahn ethnic group except that my father was a
14 Krahn.

15 I was born in Monrovia in 1982, never went
16 to Grand Gedeh, never spoke their language, and never
17 benefitted from anything because the picture that I'm
18 trying to draw for you is I was born in 1982. That was
19 the beginning of the new era in Liberia, one that we,
20 me and my family, may not have supported or have any
21 kind of an increment, in no way, shape or form
22 supported the actions that -- especially when it comes
23 to the coup in 1980 that took the life of the late
24 President Tolbert for which I sat and listened to his
25 daughter. It was a painful experience, so I just want

1 to apologize to her family and the entire nation for
2 going through such a trauma, but back to my story.

3 When we lived across the bridge, we lived
4 in -- I was born in Beaumont Bridge. That was on
5 Bushrod Island. Later on in life, we move over to
6 Logan Town but in -- by 1986, after the coup -- I mean,
7 after the -- the invasion and the elections that Doe
8 won, I have a vivid recollection of the coup -- not the
9 coup, I'm sorry, but the invasion, the Quiwonkpa
10 invasion. I was still a kid, was living in Logan Town,
11 but I remember that because nobody went outside that
12 day, and people were saying all kinds of anti-Krahn
13 sentiments that I really didn't understand because I
14 was scared.

15 However, after that, my father was fortunate
16 enough, he was an electrician and he did private
17 contracts, so he used to do his work for this Lebanese
18 guy, John Fox. But the Sabo people call him John
19 Blume, that's the other name, because he used to play
20 that trick, you know, the card games, win/lose, so when
21 the people lose, it would be like blew me, it's a long
22 story, so they call him John Blume. That's how we knew
23 him, as John Blume. He befriended my dad and because
24 my dad would do work for him on a consistent level, so
25 he said, "Well, why don't I just -- I would like to

1 help you with this" -- this is something my dad told me
2 now because he knew I was coming here, so he put the
3 whole story down -- "so why don't I just like help you
4 with your rent every month so that way you can do my
5 work, and then I help you out with your rent money,"
6 but then later on he decided, well, I have a tiny,
7 two-bedroom house right next to mine, right next to his
8 big house. I'm just trying to get to the point where I
9 ended up in such a -- we moved onto Ninth Street, and
10 you know Sinkor, that's a more affluent part of the
11 city compared to, say, other places that I lived like
12 New Kru Town and other stuff like that.

13 The reason why I was saying that was to say
14 was to disconnect because other people may look at it
15 and see how we started to rise up right after 1980.
16 What I'm trying to say was it had no -- it had nothing
17 to do with the new ruling class, which were the Krahn.
18 But growing up in my family, in my household, being
19 Krahn was something that we was proud of, we was taught
20 to be proud of, more especially the fact that the Krahn
21 became the new ruling elite, and there was -- they was
22 running everything, and they was -- they was actually
23 forming a hegemony, exactly what became -- what the
24 military regime accused the previous regime of: rampant
25 corruption and all kinds of stuff. What I'm saying was

1 the new class was doing the same thing, so -- but we,
2 my family, did not benefit from anything like that. My
3 dad still worked at LEC as a laborer and my mom still
4 worked her kindergarten job as a kindergarten teacher.

5 The picture -- another picture I want to
6 show -- that I'm trying to draw your attention to
7 before I get into the war part of my story was when we
8 moved on Ninth Street, like I said, the Lebanese guy
9 gave my dad this house that was in his backyard and a
10 much bigger fence. If you know where George Weah
11 stayed at on Ninth Street, we used to share a common --
12 a common border right there. But, if you know, there
13 is from that fence is nothing between the fence and the
14 ocean, so later on when the war intensified, we -- that
15 became a theater for murder by the AFL soldiers who was
16 engaged in ethnic cleansing against the Manos and the
17 Gios. So, that's why I'm trying to draw you a picture
18 and that's why I've wasted your time to tell you how I
19 got on Ninth Street. Well, I've only got 25 minutes.

20 To move things ahead, 1989 came. They --
21 almost the start of the civil war. At the time I was
22 spending -- I was living with my uncle. I was spending
23 the time with my uncle on the Old Road. My uncle's
24 name was Bestman Julu. He was second in command at the
25 Liberian telecommunication. I was living with him on

1 the Old Road, and my dad and the rest of my other
2 family stay on Ninth Street. Well, first, it started
3 off, I started on Ninth Street, but based on the stuff
4 that was happening, my mom decided it is not right for
5 us to be seeing stuff like that because we lived right
6 next to the beach, and the soldiers knew my dad was
7 Krahn, so for some reason they didn't think -- they
8 felt comfortable, so they would shoot people right in
9 the yard. They would go all day looking for the Gio
10 and the Mano people, and then bring them and shoot
11 them, but -- a couple people got shot in the yard
12 because they knew they was going to die, so they kept
13 fighting, kept fighting instead of them walking
14 politely to the beach, so they got shot right there.
15 And my father had to, because soldiers wasn't going to
16 remove the body, my father had to drag the body out to
17 the beach, and that was -- I'm trying to -- it was a
18 constant process that was happening. Once the war
19 intensified and, say, places like Buchanan was already
20 taken and it was getting closer to Monrovia, that
21 became -- that became a routine event, looking for Mano
22 and Gio people and bringing them.

23 I want to tell you a story about this one
24 guy who, when we was kid growing up, he used to make
25 the coal pot for when you put the coal -- what we call

1 coal pie in Liberia, he used to make that, and we had
2 no idea he was Gio or anything, as far as we was
3 concerned. We used to call him an American Joe. He
4 used to talk with some kind of an American accent and
5 had a story that he was deported from America, so we
6 had no idea he was Gio or anything. So one day during
7 the war, we saw Afra (ph) run into the house and he was
8 crying. "So, my darling, what happened?" So he say,
9 "Well, they been looking for me and they just missed --
10 they just missed me." So, my dad said, well -- because
11 my dad was quite comfortable with the soldiers. My
12 stepmom used to sell cane juice and other
13 (unintelligible) market stuff, so the soldiers would
14 always come there to drink cane juice and buy
15 cigarettes and stuff like that, so my parents was cool
16 with them. And at this time most of the soldiers who
17 was still fighting was Krahn, to be honest with you,
18 like a huge percentage was them who was still fighting
19 was Krahn. So, Afra kept crying, he came crying to my
20 dad, so my dad said, "Well, we're going to keep, we're
21 going to hide you up in the -- we're going to keep you
22 here," because my dad was pretty comfortable, and then
23 it didn't even take too long the soldiers was coming.
24 So my dad put Afra up in the ceiling. He was supposed
25 to be there, and they came in and they say, "Oh, you a

1 Krahn man and you here keeping Gio people, we heard
2 that stuff, and if we find any here, we're going to
3 kill you too because you keeping Gio people." But for
4 some reason, they was just dumb enough not to look up
5 in the ceiling.

6 They didn't -- they didn't find Afra, but he
7 heard what they were saying, so when he got down -- I
8 mean, the guy we called American Joe, his real name was
9 Afra, so when the soldiers left, he told my dad he
10 wasn't going to try to -- he didn't want to endanger
11 his family, so what he was going to do was try to
12 escape and get over to the rebel side; maybe he could
13 be safe down there. So my dad said, "Okay." But when
14 he got out, he didn't even go too far. He didn't even
15 go too far. It wasn't even quite 30 minutes later when
16 the soldiers brought him right back into the yard and
17 shot him.

18 So, I saw so many -- so many people got
19 killed in my yard before my mom decided that enough is
20 enough, you'll be better off if you go to the Old Road
21 and live with your uncle, so we moved to the Old Road,
22 but my other brother stayed. My mom was afraid I was
23 too young to be able to handle these kinds of stuff.
24 So, one of my other brothers stayed, and my other
25 brother who moved -- we move to the Old Road with my

1 uncle.

2 Now, my uncle, he was -- he was active in
3 the government because he worked as a -- he was second
4 in command to Usquaquia(ph) at the telecommunication
5 when it was functioning, the one on Lynch Street. But
6 during that time, during the curfew time, the soldiers,
7 the same AFL soldiers but at that time they was known
8 as Krahn soldiers, they would come to my uncle's house.
9 I later found it out that they were harassing. They
10 would come look in the house. They was -- I found out
11 later that they thought he was conniving with the
12 rebels, so they always used to come there and harass
13 him. So as the fighting got closer to Old Road and the
14 guys that took over the EAW, once they took over EAW,
15 my uncle say it wasn't safe enough, so him and my
16 grandfather, my maternal grandfather, they stay in the
17 house and he asked the rest of the family to go down to
18 Twelfth Street to his son's mother's house, my cousin's
19 mom house. She lives on the Twelfth Street. So we
20 left and we wanted to find out, but I didn't find this
21 out until a year later when I got back from the rebel
22 territory that the day that we left and the rebel took
23 over the Old Road, my grandfather and my uncle got
24 executed. They was beheaded, just to be real graphic.
25 And the only reason was because they got beheaded by

1 the NPFL rebels, and it was mostly because they was
2 Sabo. And that draws another dimension to the story
3 because at that time, the rebels were not
4 distinguishing between Sabo and Krahn anymore. The
5 fact that these two people belongs, they share -- they
6 belongs to the same language group and they was
7 perceived to be Doe's and the Krahns' number one
8 allies, so there was a linking to the same thing, so my
9 uncle and my grandfather was killed because of that.

10 Well, so when we got to Twelfth Street,
11 things wasn't -- things wasn't too good. The food
12 problem was getting real drastic. And it was at the
13 time that the INPFL -- I'm running out of time here --
14 the INPFL had captured Bushrod Island, and including
15 the port, so the fact that they had the last food that
16 was in port, my mom thought it would be a good idea for
17 us to move across the bridge to go to another uncle, a
18 Thomas Dati, because the impression was that they have
19 more food there. So we went down to -- we -- it was
20 me, my brother, Fernade, and my uncle who got killed,
21 Bestman Julu, his son, Bestman Julu, Junior, it was the
22 three of us who took that journey across the bridge in
23 order to get food, and then for my other uncle, Thomas.
24 It was during that time that I personally saw Prince
25 Johnson, the head of the INPFL, shoot his own soldier

1 in front of me. I saw that with my own eyes, but I
2 heard so many other stories about him killing innocent
3 people, but the one that I saw with my own eyes was he
4 killed his own soldiers. I think he accused them of
5 looting or something, and he killed them. And he was
6 sitting underneath a cotton tree and sing gospel songs
7 all day, but I saw that with my own eyes, so I just
8 wanted to put down in the public record.

9 Well, to make a long story short, there
10 really wasn't that much food across the bridge, so we
11 had to go all the way back to Ninth Street, but we left
12 mainly because my mom came in, and when she saw me, I
13 looked so bad and malnourished, she said, "Well, you
14 can't stay here. You're going to have to go back to
15 your uncle because I don't think anybody is caring for
16 you, I told your dad, because I don't think anybody is
17 caring for you here." So, we went back to Ninth
18 Street, me and my three brothers and my dad and my
19 stepmother.

20 But at the time, my father had moved from
21 the house that we originally lived in on the beach
22 because it was getting too much and the community was
23 deserted, so he moved up to -- it was a compound where
24 previously were held by some Episcopal, Episcopal
25 missionaries. They was Caucasian, white ladies, who

1 did a whole lot of social work in Liberia, but it was
2 -- they was Christian people. So, we moved, but at the
3 time they had -- everybody had left the community, but
4 my father stayed behind because he was crying "Doe was
5 still alive." As long as Doe was alive, there was
6 still hope for some things, so we stayed on Ninth
7 Street, but at the time we was in the compound where
8 the missionary live.

9 So, right about that time, it was around
10 September, when Doe died, my father was "there's
11 nothing else to do again," so we just had to abandon.
12 But the tricky thing is instead of us going to --
13 towards the barracks, when he finally gave up that we
14 should leave, we was already surrounded by the IN --
15 the NPFL. So he, when he came home that day, because
16 he realized that we was already surrounded by the INPFL
17 and that there was no way we was going to make it to
18 the barracks, so in less than like 20-35 minutes, while
19 we was packing, we had to go through a whole new
20 socialization. We was about to embark on a whole new
21 journey where everything we knew about our past and our
22 true identity was supposed to be suppressed in order to
23 live. One mistake would have led to our death. So,
24 for like 25 minutes, my dad was lecturing us on how the
25 new life was going to be because we was headed towards

1 the rebel-held territory, not going to Grand Gedeh, but
2 we was going to my stepmother's father's house.

3 My stepmother's parents lived in Bong
4 County, the headquarters of the NPFL, in this town
5 called SKT, Sergeant Kollie Town. That's where my
6 parents lived. It was like 15 minutes from Gbarnga,
7 Charles Taylor's capital. It was like five or
8 10 minutes from the university, fee -- what's the
9 university -- Cuttington University, and Phebe Hospital
10 in Suakoko, Carey, and all these places to hide.
11 That's why I came.

12 For the first time to travel, we went to the
13 rural parts of Liberia. So when we got there, because
14 I'm out of time, that was the most -- it wasn't painful
15 at the time; it was just scary knowing that one mistake
16 and you were dead. We was in the lion's den, and we
17 were the people that these people was looking for, and
18 based on my experience that I already had with ethnic
19 cleansing that went on on Ninth Street by the AFC
20 soldiers, that was one of the most terrifying thing
21 ever.

22 Just one thing I didn't mention -- and I'm
23 running out of time here, we walked -- we walked on --
24 on the journey from Ninth Street to go to Bong County,
25 my father got arrested not because of his -- not

1 because he was Krahn, because soldier was looking in
2 his luggage, and he's one of those guy who like to keep
3 old paper. He mistakenly left a old pay stub.
4 Whatever he was keeping that for, I don't know. He
5 left a old pay stub, but on the pay stub it was the
6 NDPL, they had -- they had the word -- they had the
7 symbol NDPL, the National Democratic Party of Liberia,
8 so he said, "That's it. You have to be one of them,
9 you have to be," so he got tied, what the soldiers
10 called what we later learned to be the dogfight tabay.
11 If I may demonstrate it for the people. You would tie
12 with some of the hardest strengths, and you had to make
13 sure that the elbows had to touch, yeah, the elbows had
14 to touch. That was one -- that was one of the method
15 of torture that they had. So, they tied my father up
16 and told us to leave; they was going to kill him. So,
17 there we were, on the road, crying. My ten-year old
18 brother, who was the oldest at the time, he was the
19 bravest one amongst us. As soon as we left that scene,
20 I was crying, my other brother was crying, my stepmom,
21 everybody crying because as far as we was concerned, my
22 father was gone. They was going to kill him.

23 And we met this -- for the first time, we
24 met this child soldier. He was -- I've got one
25 minute -- he was just about our age, and he was so

1 eager. He had his big sack of 50-pound bag of rice
2 with him, but for some reason he took a liking to us,
3 and he was so eager to show us this Krahn -- the Krahn
4 person that he killed a few days ago, so we had to go
5 see this Krahn person that he killed, knowing that we
6 ourselves were Krahn and by saying the wrong thing, we
7 would have been dead.

8 Now, mind you, I was eight years old
9 (unintelligible), but he was a child soldier but was
10 only after the rice. Maybe by one way or other, we was
11 able to convince him to give us some rice, so we
12 followed him, and he show us the dead body. There was
13 -- it was -- it was -- the guy had a military uniform
14 on, and this kid was telling us he killed this guy, and
15 so the reason why I'm saying that was it was no
16 normalcy for me anymore. Once the war started and I
17 started seeing all these things, there was nothing
18 normal anymore. Chaos and just violence became the
19 norm.

20 So, I just want to make sure that I included
21 a part where my father got arrested. Luckily for us,
22 while we was -- after we went through the rendezvous
23 with this guy, we told him no, we was fine, we didn't
24 want to be soldiers, because he invited us. He said he
25 knew where he was going to take us so we could get our

1 guns and stuff and be part of the NPFL, but we told him
2 no, we was on our way to Bong County, so he said okay,
3 but we got -- we got a bowl of rice from him, parboiled
4 rice. At the time, it was like gold. You know what it
5 was in Liberia: rice was like gold.

6 So, luckily for us, when I was going, I
7 heard my dad, "Come, boy," he was calling us. Well, he
8 still had his luggage, and he was screaming. He was
9 calling our names, "Now, turn around (unintelligible)."
10 And we look and realized it was our dad, so we said,
11 "What happened?" He said, well, some -- a senior
12 officer came in and saved him, but his arm was all
13 bruised; it was really bruised. So when we got to Bong
14 County, he had to wear long-sleeved shirts for over --
15 for like two or three months until the scars were
16 healed because if that didn't happen, he would have
17 been suspicious for something.

18 But when we got to the town, we was
19 fortunate enough that my parents -- my stepmother's
20 family live on the outskirts of SKT, so my father,
21 rather than having to deal with going to the town and
22 dealing with the common people, so what he did was he
23 did his business in the bush because my father, he was
24 not -- he was not -- he was not -- since he was not
25 highly educated, he spent a lot of time in the

1 hinterland, so he learned the ways of the rural
2 economy, so that's how we started making a living. He
3 would cut the palm nuts, you know, palm nuts, and then
4 we would take it to the market and we would sell it.
5 And then we tried to make life normal though in the
6 back of our head, we was quite aware that nothing was
7 normal here.

8 And another point, since I'm out of time,
9 was my stepmother's sisters used to date some of the
10 rebels, some of the soldiers, and a couple of the guys
11 that they used to date -- well, I have to wrap it up
12 now because I'm (unintelligible) spent, but there's
13 just one thing that I would like to say before I close
14 is I'd like for you guys to take a look at the
15 situation that we find ourselves in today as a country,
16 and the manner in which the conflict was resolved.

17 If we look at African countries like Somalia
18 and some other -- Sudan, they have a prolonged civil
19 war that has intermission. Sometimes they would stop
20 for four, five, ten years, but the conflict would erupt
21 again. I'm afraid the same thing is going to -- might
22 happen in Liberia if we don't do the same thing -- the
23 same thing might happen in Liberia if we don't act, if
24 we don't do the right thing. And what I think is the
25 right thing is to address the fundamental issues that

1 first led us into this conflict.

2 We can start with 19 -- the Rice Riot and
3 all these other triggers that led into the full-blown
4 civil war, but what I personally believe was the reason
5 for the war has to do with the inequality. And I think
6 it is quite a consensus now that inequality led to the
7 instability that finally led to Doe taking over, and
8 because he didn't know any better, events accumulated
9 into the civil war. So, I think we should address the
10 fundamental issue of the war and ask -- more even
11 distribution of the wealth of the country.

12 And, secondly, when the war came, during the
13 war, we -- new conflicts developed that wasn't there
14 before the war. And I tried my best to follow the news
15 in Liberia, and to be honest with you, I was quite
16 frustrated to find out that -- I'm not trying to be
17 picking on anybody here -- that a person like Prince
18 Johnson, the former head of the INPFL, that I saw kill
19 innocent people, I mean his own soldiers, with my own
20 eyes, that he is sitting today as a senator without --
21 without answering no question about nothing that
22 happened. And I read a quote in the news -- on one of
23 those online site that he said the only way he will
24 face you guys to talk is if Samuel Doe come up from out
25 of his -- out of the grave and testify about what

1 happened to Tolbert; then he will come to you guys and
2 testify. And even the president has been dodging you
3 guys for such a long time.

4 I think that sends a very bad precedence,
5 because if we can't get past this stage, we are bound
6 to repeat the same mistakes. That's the only reason
7 why you are here today, so that we don't have to repeat
8 the same mistakes that led us into one of the most
9 violent periods of our history. So, I don't know what
10 you can do about that, but those people, it has --
11 well, see, the people try to confuse the difference
12 between reconciliation and straight out impunity. What
13 Prince Johnson and so many others is going through
14 right now is just impunity. They are not being held
15 responsible for nothing, and that's not reconciliation.

16 I'll just close right here, so I'll give the
17 other people a chance to have their testimony. Thank
18 you all for listening.

19 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you
20 very much. We are sorry that you had to be prompted --

21 THE WITNESS: That's okay.

22 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: -- in terms
23 of time, but the Commission would have preferred to
24 listen to the witness, and maybe we have questions so
25 that witnesses truly express themselves in the best way

1 they know how in any campaign.

2 THE WITNESS: Can you say that again.

3 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: I said we are
4 sorry that you had to be prompted in terms of time
5 limitations.

6 THE WITNESS: Oh, that's fine.

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: As far as the
8 Commission, we would prefer that the witness truly
9 express his or herself, and then we can waive our
10 questions, just to save time, so when we ask you
11 questions, if there is anything significant you left
12 out, you can bring that out in -- during your response
13 --

14 THE WITNESS: Okay, sure. Thank you.

15 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: -- to the
16 questions.

17 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: We also want
19 to extend to you sympathy for the death of your
20 relatives and loved ones --

21 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: -- during
23 that turbulent period, and the experience you went
24 through. The past director said this is the reason why
25 we have the TROC, so that we can avoid repeating the

1 mistakes of the past. Two quick questions.

2 THE WITNESS: Sure.

3 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You had to go
4 through identity changes just to survive. Did you and
5 your family members change your names?

6 THE WITNESS: No. It's funny because I
7 was just having a conversation in the hallway. My
8 name -- my name -- my father named me after his -- no,
9 we didn't change our name. My father named me my first
10 name. He tried to name me after his grandfather. His
11 name was Sacko Asmo Sawmo Krahn. But my mom, she was
12 the educated one, my dad didn't read or write, so when
13 she went to the hospital, she put an "R" at the end,
14 and it became Sackor, it is a Kru name, and my last
15 name is Zahnee, but my dad call it Zeahne, so we was
16 able to pass.

17 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: With Sackor?

18 THE WITNESS: Yeah, we was able to
19 pass, but I made a mistake one time while I was in the
20 rebel-held territory, and I went and told a Bassa guy,
21 who I already told -- because we posed as Bassa. My
22 dad spoke fluent Bassa. That's how we went -- that's
23 how we got by. When we got to the checkpoints, he
24 would speak, (speaking Bassa). We was taught all that
25 to -- so we could be able to get by, were just taught,

1 so the name wasn't an issue.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. Let's
3 go to Ninth Street.

4 THE WITNESS: Hmm.

5 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Ninth Street.

6 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: On the beach.
8 You said there was constant killings. How frequent was
9 the killings? How long did it last? Did it happen for
10 two months and on a daily basis? What was the average
11 number of persons killed in that area?

12 THE WITNESS: Well, it didn't start
13 immediately when the war started. It intensified as
14 the fighting got closer. You remember -- do you
15 remember Lutheran? We lived on Ninth Street and
16 Lutheran was right there on 14th Street, and they
17 killed almost thousands of people in Lou King. So, to
18 a certain point I think it wasn't -- say, it wasn't
19 like every day, but in the week' time, you would see
20 two or three. Another week, a hot week, it would be
21 four or five, or sometime you might see two or three in
22 a day.

23 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: How long that
24 went on for?

25 THE WITNESS: It went on till -- until

1 the rebel got in the city and they -- they -- until
2 they was convinced there wasn't no Gio person living
3 around because if you was Gio, you was dead, or if you
4 were Mano in the coup, anybody could just say you was
5 Mano or Gio --

6 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: So you think
7 less than ten persons were killed in that area?

8 THE WITNESS: Less than ten? No, I
9 think it was more. I think you could count it up to --
10 it was something that was done consistently. You could
11 say up to 40 to 50 because, you remember, it was
12 intervals when I was there on Ninth Street when the
13 killing started.

14 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Up to 50?

15 THE WITNESS: I can say.

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you
17 very much. Now, Sheikh.

18 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
19 Thank you for your testimony. In your general
20 statement you talk about political mismanagement. Was
21 it done by the government and government officials or
22 were done by private individuals?

23 THE WITNESS: I think it was done by
24 government officials and the policy that they pursue,
25 most especially the military regime, and when -- even

1 after the election in 1985.

2 What I was trying to get at was you find
3 that in a lot of other society where -- but mostly
4 African society, where the inter-elite, the inter-elite
5 rivalry, have -- it comes down to affect the common
6 person, because they started off with the Doe and
7 Quiwonkpa stuff. That's how the Gio and the Krahn got
8 that rift, but it was just between Quiwonkpa and Doe
9 and whoever else was involved.

10 I want you to understand that wasn't
11 historical -- it wasn't a historical divide between.
12 Anyone amongst the Gios and the Manos and the Krahn, or
13 any other tribal (unintelligible), as far as I'm
14 concerned that had to accumulate into people, had to
15 kill at least at every opportunity that they get. So,
16 I think it was political mismanagement on the side of
17 Doe to blame every (unintelligible) for Quiwonkpa's
18 invasion. That was one of the main point. And the
19 subsequent, when the civil war came, they did the same
20 thing to the -- they targeted every Krahn because of
21 Doe mismanagement, or Doe -- whatever deeds that Doe
22 was into. Does that answer your question?

23 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

24 When you came to America?

25 THE WITNESS: I came in '96, right

1 after the April 6th war.

2 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

3 Are you speaking more than Jesse Jackson?

4 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Mr.

5 Witness?

6 THE WITNESS: Yes.

7 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: You say
8 you were born 1982?

9 THE WITNESS: 1982, ma'am.

10 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: And you
11 left Liberia in 1996?

12 THE WITNESS: Yes.

13 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: So you
14 talking about a political mismanagement thing of the
15 time before you were born, and even you were born after
16 Doe came?

17 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

18 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: So what
19 you're talking about is not the facts as you know
20 really what happened; it's what you read about, what
21 you heard, right?

22 THE WITNESS: And also what I could
23 experience.

24 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: What
25 your experience between 1982, you were one-year old and

1 1996 --

2 THE WITNESS: I was 14.

3 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: -- you
4 were 14 years. We heard your experiences. Thank you
5 very much for participating in the TROC process and
6 telling the truth of what you know and experience.
7 Thank you.

8 THE WITNESS: Thank you, ma'am.

9 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Thank you
10 for your presentation. I want to ask you a question
11 that may be a little difficult for you, but just try
12 your best. If you feel it's not possible, then just
13 leave it alone.

14 THE WITNESS: I try.

15 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: You
16 happened to be at a very nexus point between Krahn
17 trying to exterminate a whole tribe, Gio minor, and
18 then Gio minor trying to exterminate Krahn. You lived
19 through both of these experiences.

20 THE WITNESS: Yes.

21 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: So what
22 do you think is the way forward? I'll make it simpler
23 by just asking you that question.

24 THE WITNESS: Thank you for the
25 question. It's difficult -- it's a difficult question

1 to answer, but I think it's -- to answer the question,
2 it has to go back to what I was trying to tell the
3 Sheikh over here. Before the war, I don't think --
4 like, my personal experience before the war, I don't
5 think there was a real rift between the two ethnic
6 group, for all intent and purposes. There was
7 intermarriage; there was cooperation.

8 I'm another witness. I have one daughter;
9 she's three years old. When I came to the states, her
10 mom is Mano, so I said that I just married -- after
11 what I've been through, I had to go back to a Gio girl
12 again. So, the whole thing was a myth; that's what I'm
13 saying. The fact that they say that we hate this --
14 you supposed to hate this tribe or this other tribe,
15 hate this, it's a myth. It was done for political
16 expediency. And because Doe wanted to -- he wanted to
17 do the same thing he accused the Congress of, and
18 that's dominance by one ethnic group, so he did
19 everything in his way to demonize the Gios, but in our
20 everyday lives, I think Gio and Mano gets along pretty
21 well. If you go to Philadelphia where I'm from,
22 there's a huge contingent of Gio and Mano people there.
23 We seems to get along pretty well.

24 So, maybe the best way forward is, you know,
25 we're always looking for -- we're always looking for a

1 silver bullet. As I was watching -- there is a
2 documentary, "American Stepchild: Liberia," there's
3 just a brief clip in it when Doe killed Tolbert. It
4 was this guy giving -- I don't know if he was giving a
5 sermon or what he was doing in front of the mansion,
6 and he was -- he was -- he was, he was making that
7 analogy that Doe taking over -- he even went as far as
8 saying this is like Jesus Christ, so, what -- what --
9 all I'm trying to say is -- what I'm trying to say is
10 this is all political pandering. These people really
11 don't hate each other. So what we could do is instead
12 of looking for a superstar, or the savior, we can
13 invest in institutions like the TROC. Exactly what
14 you're doing can help move the way forward.

15 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: The
16 reason I asked you that, and I'm glad you brought the
17 other point up about Quiwonkpa. You see, the rift
18 before '80 was that there was this cleavage between the
19 so-called have and the have-nots. Quiwonkpa wasn't a
20 native. Now the native came and took over, but then
21 suddenly they had a cleavage amongst themselves, so in
22 the whole, what can our nation learn from this?
23 Especially you, as a young Liberian, you know, going
24 forward, can you say that we have reconciled our
25 differences in the sense that we have shed each other's

1 blood, or is there still some other thing that needs to
2 be done to reconcile that unresolved difference?

3 THE WITNESS: That's what I was trying
4 to get to at the end of my presentation. We -- if you
5 look at the war ending, they -- they -- Doe was about
6 to run over Monrovia and take over Charles Town, and
7 thank God for Condoleeza Rice and Colin Powell and,
8 amen, President Bush: they intervened. So,
9 technically, the real issues that -- that led us into
10 the war was not addressed right there.

11 So what the -- during the war we developed
12 other conflict, like the Gios killing the Krahn and
13 the Krahn killing the Gios. So, I think that's out of
14 the hand of -- like I was saying, we have to address
15 the foundations of the problem, and that's creating a
16 level playing field.

17 A simple thing like -- I came over here
18 before I understand people. There's something called
19 primary education; everybody go to school for free once
20 you pay your taxes. People pay taxes in Liberia, but
21 you've still got to pay school fees. And the lady who
22 spoke before me, Mrs. Tolbert, Tolbert's daughter, she
23 was so eloquent how that helped so many people gain
24 education because he knew -- by the way, Tolbert was my
25 favorite president -- because he knew that education

1 was the way, you know, to move forward. So simple
2 things like acts that we sure that it's not just words,
3 but it's deeds, like, say, we have primary education.
4 Everybody in every county, like my father never went to
5 school because when he was born, his father was
6 paralyzed, and in the rural setting, he had to be the
7 man, but if we had simple things like primary
8 education, he didn't have to worry about that. Maybe
9 he would -- still would have gone to school. But if
10 the people in certain counties feel like we don't have
11 access to anything while the people in Monrovia are
12 enjoying everything, and thank you for asking the
13 question because it just lead me to one of my most --
14 it may be controversial, but what I was saying was we
15 have to change certain principles within the
16 constitution.

17 If you study the history of Liberia, we
18 copied pretty much everything from the United States:
19 the constitution, the flag, the national anthem, the
20 pledge of allegiance. I didn't even have to learn that
21 one when I came over here. I just flipped the words
22 from -- they don't have. So -- but intentionally,
23 America had the fed -- a federalist -- the political
24 structure is a federal state where you have tiers of
25 powers. Each state has its own right to take care of

1 their own economic business and their own -- they even
2 got their own educational standards and all that kinds
3 of stuff.

4 But in Liberia, what the Americo-Liberians
5 did, I'm not trying to push anything back, they
6 intentionally created a unitary form of government, and
7 that was done intentionally so that it was much easier
8 for you to control the masses once you had just one
9 central government to -- if you have one central
10 government that runs everything, that mean you don't
11 have to worry about the other powers. So, a simple
12 thing like -- that's why I'm thinking Doe had a chance
13 to -- he wrote a new constitution, but he never even
14 addressed something like that. So, I think a simple
15 thing like a federalist state, and I think the current
16 administration is moving to that direction.

17 I think they've got this thing where they
18 give out a million dollars or so to county development
19 funds, and every year is a yearly thing, so where you
20 give -- instead of us -- once again, instead of us
21 looking for Jesus Christ to come save us, we have to
22 have confidence in our people. If you give people --
23 if you give -- if you have federal powers where the
24 counties are in charge of their well-being first, maybe
25 every county won't make it, but some counties will make

1 it; some counties will provide stuff for their people.
2 That's what I'm saying, like give people the chance to
3 breathe, like the Nimbadians, who benefit from the iron
4 ore that comes from the Nimba mountain. They should
5 get the first cut before the central government get
6 their second cut. We all should function within a
7 federal system. We all should -- or federalist -- we
8 all should function and have the ability to do our own
9 stuff within the overall national structure. That's
10 what I feel.

11 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Thank
12 you.

13 THE WITNESS: You're welcome.

14 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Thank
15 you for coming.

16 THE WITNESS: Thank you, ma'am.

17 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: And my
18 sympathy for the death of your relatives.

19 THE WITNESS: I appreciate it.

20 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: You say
21 your uncle, Bestman Julu, died along with your
22 grandfather?

23 THE WITNESS: Yes.

24 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: What's
25 the name of your grandfather?

1 THE WITNESS: James Dartoe, last name
2 is D-A-R-T-O-E.

3 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: You did
4 not have the opportunity to end in your story, which
5 you have hear of.

6 THE WITNESS: That's okay.

7 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: And --

8 THE WITNESS: It's going to be in the
9 record.

10 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: So
11 there are some information we did not get, so I just
12 want to ask, apart from your uncle and your
13 grandfather, did any other person die from you during
14 the civil war?

15 THE WITNESS: Yes.

16 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Can you
17 please name them for us?

18 THE WITNESS: My sister, my older
19 sister, that I mentioned earlier, Wiladay, she died.

20 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI:
21 Willanette?

22 THE WITNESS: Her name is Wiladay.

23 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Wendy?

24 THE WITNESS: Wiladay.

25 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI:

1 Wiladay?

2 MR. ZAHNE: Yeah. She died.

3 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Julu,
4 her last name was Julu?

5 THE WITNESS: No, her name is Dartoe.

6 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Dartoe?

7 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh. She took my
8 mother's family's name.

9 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: And how
10 did she die?

11 THE WITNESS: Just -- that, we don't
12 know. We have no grave. She didn't live with us, so
13 we were separated during the war. The only thing we
14 know, we never find her. We kept -- people kept
15 telling us, well, she went to Nigeria, but then some
16 other person told us they died in her house when rocket
17 hit it, but we got no evidence, but we never seen her
18 since then.

19 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: What is
20 her husband's name?

21 THE WITNESS: Her husband.

22 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Yes.

23 THE WITNESS: She didn't have a
24 husband.

25 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Oh,

1 okay. I thought you said she died with her husband.

2 THE WITNESS: No, I said somebody else
3 told us, somebody who's supposed to know her location.

4 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Okay.
5 Thank you so much. I hope we get --

6 THE WITNESS: And my youngest sister,
7 her name was Princess Dartoe. She die from cholera
8 when we went to -- when we went to Bong County.

9 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI:
10 Princess Dartoe?

11 THE WITNESS: Yeah. I mean, Princess
12 Zahnee, I'm sorry. Then during the April 6th war, my
13 uncle, we call him Pe-Pe, he got executed. He was
14 trying to cross from the Bushrod Islands.

15 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Your
16 uncle, what's his name?

17 THE WITNESS: Pe-Pe, we call him Pe-Pe.

18 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Pe-Pe?

19 THE WITNESS: Yeah, Pe-Pe Dartoe, but
20 he fought when ULIMO came. He went to Bomi Hills and
21 he took up arms, so.

22 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: He
23 got executed by whom?

24 THE WITNESS: He got executed by the
25 forces that came to -- I'm not sure which, because

1 during the 1996, April 6th war, all the other warring
2 factions came to Monrovia, but the story that we got
3 was ULIMO-K who killed him. He got executed at the new
4 bridge trying to cross because he understood that
5 because that he fought for ULIMO-J and the area he was
6 in got over, the ULIMO-K are just coming to Monrovia
7 during the April 6th, so it wasn't safe for him to be
8 across the bridge, so he was trying to get over to the
9 barracks where his ethnic people was. That's when he
10 got caught.

11 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Okay.
12 Thank you so much.

13 THE WITNESS: You're welcome, ma'am.

14 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON:

15 Mr. Witness, for a very young man, I must commend
16 you -- your ability to remember and recount the
17 experiences, and also your commitment to follow the
18 history of Liberia and just sort of stay with the
19 country, even though you here, but you seem to be on
20 top of what has happened there, so congratulations.

21 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

22 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: The
23 theme of this diaspora hearings is confronting our
24 difficult past for a better future, that the diaspora
25 experience, so my question, my first question, to you

1 centers around the experiences of Liberians in the
2 diaspora, and, basically, the youth. I consider you a
3 member of the youthful class. You, like many other
4 young Liberians, migrated here during a time of, you
5 know, actual conflict in a country. What has been your
6 experience or maybe the experience of your community as
7 a youth, and how has what happened to you in Liberia
8 impacted what is happening with you now in the United
9 States in terms of assimilating into the culture,
10 embracing the various issues that this new society
11 brings your way as a youth who has experienced a lot of
12 trauma? Can you throw some light on that for us?

13 THE WITNESS: Because America is such a
14 wonderful place to be, so it is really not that
15 difficult living here, so -- but you a mother, I'm not
16 -- I'm sorry, but you may be a mother, so most Liberian
17 families, we was taught to -- we don't even say I love
18 you that much to our parents so, for a larger extent,
19 we suppress our innermost feelings. For a long time I
20 really didn't -- I never put this story together as one
21 collective event until I came here and was doing a
22 school newspaper and they kept bugging me: You've got
23 to get your paperwork done. I'm like, oh, I've got a
24 nice story. Maybe I can just tell them the story about
25 the war.

1 That was the first time I actually let out
2 my feelings about it, but I don't think -- because we
3 suppressed the feelings so strongly, I don't think --
4 and my parents was there for us, they would make sure
5 we was in line, so I don't think that the trauma that
6 we went through down there, it didn't affect us to -- I
7 think it did positively because when we came, we lived
8 in what they consider the ghetto area. It was bad, it
9 was bad stuff, but when we looked at it, we knew what
10 bad is, so the shootings and the robberies and those
11 stuff really didn't bother us because we was used to
12 worse. So, I think it was not traumatic, it was
13 actually helpful in a certain way that it was -- we
14 just brushed these things off because we know what --
15 what's real suffering is. So we go to school and the
16 people say, ah, this inner city school is not
17 well-funded, and the school looked like a heaven, so it
18 was quite different. I think we had -- we had a great
19 experience. We was just happy to be here, so we didn't
20 look back. We just moved forward.

21 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Thank
22 you. A follow-up to my question, I -- you're from
23 Philadelphia.

24 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

25 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: I live

1 in the Philadelphia area myself. I fled Liberia in
2 1999 and went back home two years ago to join the Truth
3 Commission, and one thing we saw happening to the
4 community there was that in the past four years, there
5 have been a lot of problems with Liberian youths in the
6 Philadelphia area. A lot of them are being picked up
7 now by police, some even involving the issue of murder,
8 drugs and, you know, those kinds of things, which has
9 been very disturbing for Liberians in the Philadelphia
10 area and also Liberians in, you know, the United States
11 overall. How -- how is your community, again as a
12 youth, how are you guys coping with all of this
13 negativity now that seems to be coming out of the
14 youthful population in Philadelphia, and how does it
15 affect the community's own outlook on people like you
16 who came from, you know, home and a troubled past?

17 THE WITNESS: I think you hit it right
18 on the nose. You really are from Philadelphia. The
19 problem really didn't start until like a few years ago,
20 and not like it wasn't a problem, but it got worse like
21 four or five years ago, just like you said.

22 We try to make fun of other people from
23 Buduburum and say these other people from Buduburum are
24 different people, but it's not having a good impact,
25 but some -- what it did was it motivated someone like

1 me to try to take up leadership because I had an
2 experience where in Liberia, it was so -- it was quite
3 common in the community, the first social organization
4 that you belong to is a soccer team. So when we came
5 over here, we tried to do the same thing, and we set up
6 -- I set up this soccer team. It was youth, mostly
7 youth.

8 But I had to go to college, so the team
9 broke down. But on that list of my players, like half
10 of them, was doing the same thing that you was talking
11 about, was getting arrested, was selling drugs, was
12 getting -- like the worst thing, so that prompted me
13 like -- when I came back from college and was -- it
14 kept getting worse, so that made me to realize the
15 importance of the soccer team and the various -- the
16 local -- there really wasn't that much leadership
17 within this community until now. We starting to see
18 action, like Acona (ph). And I think -- I'm sure
19 you're aware of Acona and some other -- it has prompted
20 other Liberians to take up leadership because we know,
21 by and large, that we don't behave like this, but who's
22 to tell what these -- the people who is behaving like
23 this, who's to tell whether they are not -- they are
24 not responding or this is not a result of what they
25 experienced during the war. All we can do is to try to

1 help them make it work.

2 But in overall, my answer to that is I think
3 it has sparked awareness in the community, and we are
4 getting some positive responding, including myself.
5 I'm helping with the youth coaching and try to
6 straight -- be a positive role model to some of the
7 younger guys and just try to talk to them. We play
8 soccer, but we don't try to keep it at soccer because
9 it's a game. We're trying to use soccer to get to
10 them, and if -- if you give them a few time, it's going
11 to get better instead of getting worse.

12 I think one thing is that we associate with
13 the rap music, and don't get me wrong, I'm a big fan of
14 hip hop, but I'm not a big fan of the gangsta' rap, but
15 most of the kids who come in, they listen to the
16 gangsta' rap and they can't distinguish between,
17 because their favorite artist is saying stuff that they
18 think is true, and they can't distinguish between the
19 lifestyle that somebody is just rapping and what is
20 true that somebody actually is doing, and so I think
21 it's the culture, too, the music and the attitude, and
22 some people are just bad.

23 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Thank
24 you very much.

25 THE WITNESS: You're welcome, ma'am.

1 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Thank you
2 very much. You -- it's like my colleague said, as a
3 young person, you come across to me as somebody who has
4 a lot of hope, determination, and ready to play a role
5 in seeing that the community is, I would say, robbed of
6 it's -- this hopelessness that you like characterizing.
7 What would you say are the -- are the major challenges,
8 problems, that young Liberians, male and female, face
9 here in America, especially in the inner cities? What
10 do you think are the major challenges and problems, and
11 how you think they can get around it, though you
12 already listed that using football as a way of kind of
13 therapy in getting people together and inspiring them
14 to aspire to a better life rather than getting them in
15 drugs and things like that. So what would -- you said
16 are major challenges, and what kinds of dreams do these
17 kids, young people, have for their homeland, for their
18 country? Do they ever look forward to going back or
19 just a lost ship on the sea?

20 THE WITNESS: Thank you. Well, I
21 really haven't given that question a lot of thought.
22 But the whole negativity thing is just a recent event,
23 but if there was one thing that I can put my fingers on
24 is if you look at African-American community, they're
25 facing a lot of issues right now because at one point

1 all the dads lefts: either your daddy's in the prison
2 or he just abandoned you. I'm not saying that we
3 having the same problem here, but the fact that some of
4 us come from single parents' homes and our parents, you
5 know, to make a living -- you know we Liberians, we
6 workaholics, we work way too much, so sometimes in the
7 household, my experience, I barely never got to see my
8 mother when I came. We saw her late in the night and
9 early in the morning, on her way from work or on her
10 way to work, so there really wasn't that much
11 supervision. She just entrusted us to behave in a
12 certain way, but that may not be true for everybody,
13 but I think that could be a problem where after school
14 kids don't have nothing to do, there's no supervision
15 at the house, and they go astray sometime. But by and
16 large, I think I won't consider it -- it's alarming,
17 but -- well, it's cause for concern, but I don't think
18 it's alarming yet.

19 I think, for the most part, young Liberians
20 are engaging themselves in very positive things, and
21 doing big things for this country just is going to have
22 to take time. A personal friend of mine making it to
23 the NFL is somebody that I knew from we played video
24 games together, and all kinds of other things like lots
25 of kids, lots of people my age, goes to college and

1 taking up leadership positions and got their mind on
2 Liberia. Why -- there may be one or two bad apple. I
3 think, by and large, I think we -- it's not a big
4 problem. I think we okay compared to -- it could be
5 worse, but I think we okay. It's not -- with the
6 exception that maybe when these parents can create more
7 time to spend with the kids and the community gets more
8 involved with the after-school program.

9 And one thing is also is to reconnect. Some
10 kids is growing up here and they have no idea where
11 Africa is on the map. It's not there for us because
12 they went to school here, and when you go to school
13 here, there's not too much attention paid towards the
14 geography and the African culture and stuff like that,
15 so you get disconnected and you behave in a certain
16 way. But because you know where we come from, we --
17 the discipline -- discipline is a little tougher over
18 there, so I'm not quite sure what -- because I don't
19 think it's a big problem, that's all, but it is a
20 growing problem, but not -- I don't think it's anything
21 major yet. Until then, we can just do -- take up
22 leadership position, mentor, and be positive role
23 models.

24 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Thank you
25 very much.

1 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you
2 very much for coming to share experience, and have my
3 sympathy for the death of your relatives you lost
4 during the war.

5 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

6 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: You talk
7 about your experience in Gbarnga and the little kid you
8 met. He told you that he kill a Krahn man, and you,
9 too, at that time were very young, but can you guess
10 the age of that kid at that time?

11 THE WITNESS: Just by going by height,
12 my older brother was ten years old, he wasn't taller
13 than my brother, so maybe he was -- he was a child
14 soldier. He was about -- he could not have passed --
15 if he was just short, he could not be more than 15. He
16 was either between 10 and 15 because his gun was almost
17 big as he was.

18 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Okay. I
19 want us to go back again on Ninth Street. You say over
20 40 person were killed on Ninth Street?

21 THE WITNESS: Yeah, I think it was a
22 lot more.

23 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Yes. And
24 your father lived there, and he talked for one of the
25 persons who you --

1 THE WITNESS: He talked for several
2 other people.

3 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: He talked
4 for several other people?

5 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

6 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: And the
7 relationship between he and the soldiers at that time,
8 they didn't make any change?

9 THE WITNESS: No. It was just like --
10 because he was quite confident that they wasn't going
11 to do nothing to him.

12 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Not him,
13 now, the people that they were killing all the time,
14 people they used to bring on the beach to kill.

15 THE WITNESS: Oh, these people that
16 they was killing was not -- except for Afra, that I
17 knew, these people were not neighbors. They would go
18 somewhere and bring these people. Quite possibly they
19 was going to Lutheran and getting people and bringing
20 them before the massacre happened. They was taking
21 them from other places. I can't even guarantee you
22 these people was Gio or anything. But we didn't
23 interact with these people. Most of these people we
24 didn't know. The only time my father interacted was
25 when there was somebody's from the neighborhood, but by

1 that time, if you was Mano or you was Gio, you knew
2 better that to try to get out of there. So, there
3 really wasn't too many people still left in the
4 community; there really wasn't too much interaction
5 going.

6 Most of the people who stay around was
7 either Krahn or they have some kind of a -- some kind
8 of a confidence that they was going to be okay, but if
9 you was Mano, if you was Gio, you had no business
10 there. You had to leave. So, they -- we didn't
11 interact too much with these people, except for Afra.
12 I knew him -- I knew him when I was a kid before the
13 war, and then they shot him like right there when I was
14 there looking. And I saw so many other people got
15 shot, even when I went to (unintelligible), the same
16 thing continued. Killing people was the norm. There
17 was no law and order.

18 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: So, I
19 checked when your father had a pay stub of NDPL on the
20 pay stub?

21 THE WITNESS: I didn't hear the
22 question.

23 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Your father
24 had a pay stub and on this pay stub it was marked NDPL?

25 THE WITNESS: Yeah, the NDPL was

1 for coming.

2 THE WITNESS: You're welcome.

3 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: I just
4 want to ask, what was he doing with the pistol?

5 THE WITNESS: What did he do with the
6 pay stub.

7 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: What
8 was he doing?

9 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: The pay
10 stub. Okay.

11 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Oh, a
12 pay stub. Okay, okay, okay.

13 THE WITNESS: A check stub.

14 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: A check
15 -- okay, okay, okay. So where is he now? Where is he?

16 THE WITNESS: My father.

17 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Yeah.

18 THE WITNESS: He lives in Darby. We
19 all migrate over here.

20 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Oh,
21 okay. And your mother?

22 THE WITNESS: Yeah, she was the first
23 to come over.

24 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Okay.
25 Thank you.

1 THE WITNESS: You're welcome.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Mr. Witness,
3 is there anything else you have left to say you haven't
4 said?

5 THE WITNESS: Except the fact that I
6 think I know you, I think I do, but somebody told me it
7 was your brother I was thinking about, but I think your
8 brother is Teja CWA (ph).

9 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Yeah.

10 THE WITNESS: Yeah, it was your
11 brother, not you, but same last name.

12 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Yeah.

13 THE WITNESS: Other than that, there is
14 nothing. I want to give other people a chance to come
15 up here and say their testimonies.

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: The Sheikh is
17 suggesting if you have anything else, you can
18 communicate --

19 THE WITNESS: Yeah, it's going to be --
20 I'm going to leave my statement, I'm going to leave it
21 here before I leave.

22 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. Thank
23 you very much. We appreciate you coming and sharing
24 your experience, and you went a little bit beyond your
25 experience you had, recommendations and suggesting that

1 we address the fundamental problems which put us in
2 inequality in a distribution of opportunities and
3 resources in our country. We think that's a very
4 profound statement coming from a young and enterprising
5 Liberian as you are.

6 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you
8 very much.

9 THE WITNESS: Thank you very much. God
10 bless you all, God bless Liberia, and God bless
11 America.

12 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay.

13 (Applause.)

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Holly Nordahl, a Registered Reporter, do 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 11th day of June 2008, at the time and place specified.

DATED: July 29, 2008.

/s/ _____

Holly Nordahl, RPR, CRR
Registered Professional Reporter
Minnesota Association of
Verbatim Reporters & Captioners
P.O. Box 375
Marshall, Minnesota 56258 U.S.A.
www.mavrc.org