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TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA
DIASPORA PROJECT

PUBLIC HEARING
HAMLINE UNIVERSITY
June 10, 2008
St. Paul, Minnesota

TESTIMONY OF BISHOP BENNIE DeQUENCY WARNER

TRC 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:

Monica R. Moriarty, RDR, CRR

1 (Testimony of Bishop Bennie DeQuency Warner:)

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: We thank you for coming
3 back, and we will turn it over to the hearing officer, who
4 will continue in the conduct of these proceedings.

5 HEARING OFFICER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 Now at this time, we'll call to some individual
7 witness, Bishop Warner, to come forward.

8 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Sure we can arise for
9 the administration of oath.

10 HEARING OFFICER: I --

11 THE WITNESS: I --

12 HEARING OFFICER: -- Bennie Warner --

13 THE WITNESS: -- Bennie DeQuency, Dee, Warner --

14 HEARING OFFICER: -- do promise --

15 THE WITNESS: -- do promise --

16 HEARING OFFICER: -- that the testimony --

17 THE WITNESS: -- that the testimony --

18 HEARING OFFICER: -- I have come to give --

19 THE WITNESS: -- I have come to give --

20 HEARING OFFICER: -- to the TRC of Liberia --

21 THE WITNESS: -- to the TRC of Liberia --

22 HEARING OFFICER: -- is the truth --

23 THE WITNESS: -- is the truth --

24 HEARING OFFICER: -- and nothing but the truth --

25 THE WITNESS: -- and nothing but the truth --

1 HEARING OFFICER: -- so help me God.

2 THE WITNESS: -- so help me God, so help me Allah.

3 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Please be seated.

4 Good afternoon, Mr. Witness. We are pleased to
5 welcome you to these hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation
6 Commission. In so doing, we express our gratitude that you
7 take time off your very busy schedule to come and share your
8 experiences -- share your experiences with the Liberian
9 people through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

10 Before you move into your testimony, we will take
11 time to introduce commissioners to you and ask a couple of
12 preliminary introductory questions, and then you will have
13 the floor to make your presentation.

14 We have Commissioner Sheikh Kafumba Konneh;
15 Commissioner Pearl Brown Bull; Commissioner Gerald B.
16 Coleman; Commissioner Dede Dolopei; Commissioner Massa A.
17 Washington; Commissioner John Stewart; Commissioner Oumu
18 Syllah. I am Jerome Verdier.

19 Can you kindly state your full name?

20 THE WITNESS: My full name is Bennie Dee Warner.

21 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Can you kindly tell us
22 where you reside currently?

23 THE WITNESS: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

24 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Your vocation, please?

25 THE WITNESS: My what?

1 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Your vocation. What do
2 you do? What is your current vocation?

3 THE WITNESS: I'm a clergyman and an educator.

4 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Date of birth, if you
5 don't mind?

6 THE WITNESS: (No response.)

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Date of birth, if you
8 don't mind.

9 THE WITNESS: I was born 4-30-35 b.c. "B.C."
10 stands for "before computer."

11 (Laughter.)

12 THE WITNESS: April --

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: April 30th --

14 THE WITNESS: -- 30th, 1935.

15 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Oh, '35 b.c.

16 THE WITNESS: I'm 73 years old now.

17 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Seventy-three.

18 THE WITNESS: Seventy-three, yeah. Still kicking.

19 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Really.

20 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

21 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: I'm impressed.

22 (Laughter.)

23 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

24 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. Can you tell us
25 when you move to the United States?

1 THE WITNESS: I came to the United States on the
2 7th of April, 1980. I left Liberia on the 7th of April,
3 1980; arrive JFK early morning of April the 8th.

4 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay.

5 THE WITNESS: And I've been here ever since.

6 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much.

7 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

8 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: With that brief
9 introduction, you may proceed now with your testimony.

10 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You're welcome.

12 THE WITNESS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman,
13 Vice Chairperson, and all the commissioners of this Truth and
14 Reconciliation Commission. I am delighted and honored,
15 privileged to be here by your invitation. I had a call from
16 Jennifer -- what's her last name?

17 UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: Prestholdt.

18 THE WITNESS: Yeah, Prestholdt. Yeah. To come
19 here and witness, and I hesitated coming because I had some
20 other things that I was going to do. I had scheduled to be
21 this day in Hot Springs, Arkansas, at the Methodist
22 Conference, of which I'm a member. But I considered the fact
23 that this might be the only opportunity that I will have to
24 see you in person rather than looking at Internet and seeing
25 your faces there. I then decided that I will come while my

1 memory is relatively vivid and good and the senior moments
2 have not kicked in yet, because after today, you ask me
3 anything, I will tell you I don't know. So that's the reason
4 I come, out of respect for the work that you are doing and
5 out of respect for the efforts you are making to bring peace,
6 forgiveness, reconciliation to our wounded Republic of
7 Liberia.

8 The second reason that motivated me to come is out
9 of the respect and honor of all of those who died, everyone
10 that died from 1979 to yesterday, last night. Last night.
11 Last night I heard the death of a veteran journalist from
12 Liberia, James L. Marshall. He died at 8:40 last night here
13 in this Minnesota. Out of respect for those who died.

14 The third reason I'm here is because of the hope
15 for the future of a new Liberia of peace, harmony,
16 tranquility, progress, and solidarity. And so I feel honored
17 to be here.

18 Another reason why I came is because I was in a
19 responsible position in Liberia, Vice President, elected by
20 the people of Liberia, and so I couldn't turn down your
21 invitation to come and be a witness. So that's why I'm here.

22 And since, therefore, many things have occurred
23 over the years -- and I've been here 28 years watching the
24 scenes of development in Liberia from time to time --
25 sometimes it is overwhelming to know where to begin. So out

1 of the questions that you may raise, I will be able to
2 respond directly for clarification and other things.

3 And before I go any further, I must say that I'm
4 very impressed with this Commission. No wonder you were
5 selected out of -- how many? Half a million people?

6 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Yeah.

7 THE WITNESS: Something like that.

8 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Sometimes more than a
9 million.

10 THE WITNESS: But, you know, I am really impressed
11 with the kinds of questions you ask, and you kind of
12 intimidating me because Sheikh here had some serious
13 questions he was asking the other presenter that made me
14 scared.

15 (Laughter.)

16 THE WITNESS: But I can handle it, Sheikh.

17 I thank you. I thank you for the dedication, the
18 commitment, and your intelligence and your sharpness. This
19 is my first time seeing you actually, except for one or two
20 people that I know from previous contacts and relationship.

21 But Mr. Chairman, I must say that I am very
22 impressed. For the first -- from the first time I met you
23 there, you impressed me, and I've seen you act and so on.
24 You are calm, quiet, and collected. And that is -- that is
25 very impressive.

1 Yeah, you all clap for that.

2 (Applause.)

3 THE WITNESS: Now I am a preacher, and I'm sorry
4 they moved the podium because I'm used to standing behind the
5 pulpit, but that's all right; I'll do it from here. And I
6 like an interactive congregation. I like "amen" and
7 "hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord," but since we're not in
8 church, I'm going to follow the way the thing is set up here.

9 I was born in Liberia in the Mambahn Bassa village
10 called Nyamahn Town or Nyamahnablee in 1935, as I mentioned,
11 on April the 4th. We don't have time to go -- to talk about
12 how we got -- April 30th, rather -- how we got to that April
13 and the 30th because my people didn't read book and so on,
14 but we figure out how to calculate. When was Edwin J.
15 Barclay president? All right. Then we took it from there
16 and so on. And so we counted rice farms. How many rice
17 farms were made? So we got to that, and so that's -- the
18 year is 1935. In what used to be the Careysburg District and
19 then Marshall Territory, and now the Margibi County. That's
20 where I originated from.

21 And then because of the desire for education, I
22 went several places. My father took me; we walked from
23 Nyamahnablee Town to Zeewrohn by the Du River via the canoe,
24 went to Monrovia. And my father took me to a man named
25 Nugent Gibson on Broad Street in front of the Episcopal

1 Cathedral. He was my father's lawyer, and he wanted me to
2 stay with him. You know, the system we had in Liberia, the
3 country will bring their children to the civilized people as
4 wards to get an education.

5 So that evening when we got there, there was
6 another boy staying there. I don't know his name. But then
7 Mr. Gibson called the boy and myself to the kitchen where he
8 was sitting at the table, and he took out money out of his
9 pocket and put it on the table (indicating). And the money
10 made noise. In those days, there were no paper money; there
11 was cash, Liberian coins. And because the boy got attracted
12 by the sound of the money, he did like this (indicating) in
13 the kitchen, and the man slap him. He said, "What, you want
14 to steal my money?"

15 So anyway, we went and bought bread and brought
16 the bread -- you know the fine people used to make the round,
17 sweet bread? Some of you not old enough to remember that.
18 And so we brought the bread. He ate all the bread, didn't
19 give us any. We slept near the door in the entrance on the
20 floor, on the mat. And 5:00 that morning, I run away. You
21 all laugh.

22 (Laughter.)

23 THE WITNESS: This serious business. I run away.
24 Luckily I found my father getting in the canoe ready to go
25 home. And he said, "Boy, where you going? Where you going?"

1 I said, "Pa, I run away. The man -- the man not a good man,
2 bad man." So we went home.

3 Then as circumstances would happen, I went to
4 Gbarnga. There at Gbarnga, I joined the Methodist Mission
5 there and went to school there, Gbarnga. Gbarnga Methodist
6 Mission, 1950. And then I finished the school there and went
7 to Booker T. Washington Agriculture Industrial Institute in
8 Kakata. And I graduated from there and went to Cuttington.
9 You all call it university or college now, but in those days,
10 it was Cuttington College and Divinity School. I graduated
11 from there and I became a Crusade Scholar and went to
12 Syracuse University and did my master's in educational
13 administration.

14 I returned to Liberia 1963, '62, and they were
15 going to make me principal of the Methodist elementary school
16 that they had just built there in Sinkor. We call it J.J.
17 Roberts Elementary School now. And I refused to be there
18 because, you know, Monrovia was not my kind of place; I'm a
19 country boy. So I decided to go back to Gbarnga to the
20 school where I got started and became the teacher there and
21 the principal there. And after five years there, I got
22 another scholarship, Crusade Scholar, to become a preacher
23 man. And I went to Boston University School of Theology.
24 During -- in 1968. During that time, Ellen Sirleaf was at
25 Harvard, so we interacted, saw each other every now and then.

1 I finished Cutt -- I mean Boston School, University School of
2 Theology, with a degree in theology and went to Liberia, back
3 home, almost the next day after my graduation, and I settled
4 in Monrovia.

5 I was assigned to the College of West Africa as a
6 Bible instructor and also a counselor. While there, the --
7 Robert Carey, Dr. Robert Carey, tall man -- some of you may
8 remember him or not -- he decided he was going to retire, and
9 so I was asked to serve as the chairman of the board. Three
10 people chaired the beginning part, and after that, I was made
11 the principal of the school, of the College of West Africa,
12 from 1971 to '72, just about a year.

13 1973, Bishop Stephen Nagbe, who was our first
14 Methodist bishop elected in Cape Palmas in 1964, died, and we
15 went to Buchanan, Grand Bassa, for the Central Conference to
16 elect a new bishop. And I was elected Bishop of the
17 Methodist Church on the first ballot. I served as bishop of
18 the Methodist Church up to 1980, for eight-year term up to
19 1980.

20 When I came from Boston -- I mean from -- yeah,
21 from Boston University School of Theology, I was in America
22 during a very turbulent time with the riots and -- against
23 the Vietnam War took place, and every week there was -- every
24 weekend in Boston there was demonstrations, student
25 demonstrations against the war. I participated in those and

1 signed so many petitions against the war in Vietnam. I saw
2 the Kent -- what the police did? I saw the democratic thing
3 there in Chicago and all of those things. So I -- in my
4 studies there, I saw something of demonstrations and so on,
5 so I had the background of how people demonstrate and what
6 you have to do to demonstrate and all of that.

7 I studied under Dr. Walter Muelder, the dean of
8 the School of -- the Divinity School in Boston. And my
9 concentration was in social ethics, Christian ethics, under
10 Walter Muelder and Paul Deats. Social activism became my cup
11 of tea. I was involved in social justice issues, economic
12 justice, and so when I returned to Liberia in 1971, I became
13 a social activist in the sense that I was critical about the
14 status quo of the conditions in Liberia, primarily in the
15 areas of corruption. And I exposed corruption from the
16 pulpit, talked about it, preached about it. As a school
17 teacher, I promoted justice, fairness, honesty, hard work,
18 work ethics among my students. College of West Africa, I did
19 the same thing, taught students about honesty, work ethics,
20 and justice. So these were arenas that I was already in.

21 Then as you may remember, the Vice President,
22 James Edward Greene, died, and Mr. Tolbert that I had known
23 from associations in Gbarnga at the Methodist school and the
24 Baptist educational convention then decided to look for a
25 vice president. There were several people on the short list

1 of the president. I had been to the president as an advisor
2 on some issues before this time. I had been in relationship
3 with Stephen Tolbert in some of his problems with Albert
4 Porte and so on. I had contacts with Frank, Emmanuel Tolbert
5 prior to all of these things in my connection as the Bishop
6 of the Methodist Church, so I knew the Tolbert family. When
7 I was in school in Gbarnga, there was a Mr. Wesley Bailey, I
8 think his name was, the district commissioner, related to the
9 wife related to the Tolbert family, so I knew of the Tolbert
10 family of Bensonville. Since my hometown was not far from
11 Careysburg, just about two hours' walk from Careysburg, I
12 knew all of them Careysburg people. So I had interaction
13 with many of these -- these people.

14 So it happened that after the memorial service at
15 E.J. Roye -- no, not E.J. Roye -- at the Centennial Memorial
16 Pavilion for Vice President Greene, the president invited me
17 to come to his Bentol estate. I had in mind that he had sent
18 for me to maybe give him some advice on some issues or just
19 talk with me, as he did from time to time, but he said to me
20 that I -- he was considering me as a vice president
21 candidate. He had me on the short list. And then he
22 rehearsed to me the number of persons that he had already
23 talked with and that he had on his list. One of them was
24 Jackson Doe, E. Reginald Townsend, P.C. Parker, maybe another
25 person. But he said that according to the constitution, the

1 president and the vice president can't come from the same
2 county, and therefore, P.C. Parker and others were ruled out.
3 So that remained Jackson Doe, Nimba County; Reginald
4 Townsend, Marshall Territory; and myself, Bong County. I'm a
5 transplant Margibi person from Bong County, Gbarnga man, so I
6 know how to speak Kpelle, some Mandingo, and so forth. I
7 won't start that ball rolling right now because we don't have
8 the time.

9 So the president then had another meeting with me,
10 and he said that he needed someone who would be outside of
11 the government, someone who has not been there, to give him
12 unbiased opinion about things, one who could call it as he
13 saw it, one who would not be beholding to any kind of party
14 thing or any kind -- any kind of impediment in terms of the
15 advice that he would need.

16 And so he said to me, "All right, I have decided
17 that you will be the vice president." Well, the vice
18 presidency is not -- is not a birth right of anybody. It's
19 not -- it's not like what's going on here in America now.
20 Hillary Clinton says well, because she's got 18 million
21 voters, therefore she's entitled to the vice presidency. But
22 it is the choice of the president, and therefore, Obama has
23 to make that decision. So it was also that Tolbert had to
24 make his own decision as to who he would choose to be his
25 vice president.

1 So I was privileged and fortunate to accept the
2 position based on a number of conditions, which we discussed.
3 Number one, he and I would retire immediately after the term
4 was over, and we put that into law. After that eight-year
5 term, we're both going to turn the government over to a
6 civilian -- have elections and let some civilian people rule
7 the country. I agreed to that, I supported it because I just
8 went there as time being, you know, to that (inaudible).

9 I was attracted by the president's passion for the
10 development of Liberia, contrarily to what press and other
11 people may say. But the president convinced me of his deep
12 interest in bringing development to Liberia, and we saw that
13 physically. Monrovia streets were paved; new streets were
14 opened; schools were built. "Rally Time" -- I got a "Rally
15 Time" picture here with me and the president sitting here in
16 his office (indicating), and this picture says a lot of
17 things. There's a story behind this picture, which I may not
18 have time to tell you, but that's the picture. And you see
19 that on this desk there, "Rally Time."

20 Those of you who are young enough or old enough to
21 know "Rally Time," this was the time the president was
22 motivating the Liberian people to self-reliance and
23 self-determination, farm-to-market roads, clinics. The last
24 place he and I were was in Vahun, way up near the Sierra
25 Leone border. Where the people there were living in, there

1 was no road, and the only access they have outside of Vahun
2 was to Sierra Leone. Many of the young men and women went to
3 school in Sierra Leone. In fact, they thought that they were
4 in Sierra Leone. This was Vahun. Always believed that they
5 were in Sierra Leone, used Sierra Leone money and all of
6 that. Road was there, built bridges up there, clinics were
7 built all over the place.

8 I -- as vice president, my role was --
9 constitutional role was to preside over the Senate, and I
10 didn't have to be there all the time to preside because there
11 was the president pro-tempore who would take my place when I
12 was not there. But the president designated me to do a
13 number of things. Among the things was to dedicate the
14 multilateral high schools in Zwedru, Voinjama, Grand Bassa,
15 Bong County. Also to dedicate -- you know, I was sort of
16 like a priest vice president, so I was in charge of some
17 religious dedication business. I dedicated water systems in
18 Bong County, in Voinjama. Water system, running water,
19 electric plants. I dedicated the Omega transmission system
20 that the U.S. government put up there to track satellites on
21 the ground, above ground, and whatever else they did there we
22 don't know because we're not scientific. But I dedicated
23 that, and the man who built it lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I
24 wanted to shake his hand, Native American man who built that
25 thing there.

1 The challenging task I had was the chairman of the
2 Rural Development Task Force because the president had a
3 desire to streamline government because government was too
4 big and not effective and efficient, so we did a year of
5 study along with UNDP and others to streamline government and
6 to weed out waste and overlapping and give some power to the
7 local governments.

8 In our recommendation, we recommended that just as
9 senators from the counties were elected, representatives were
10 elected, so, too, the days of the vice jurency of the
11 district commissioner or the superintendent of counties must
12 be over. That was Arthur Barclay's thing, and therefore, we
13 recommended that superintendents be elected by the people so
14 that they can be amenable to the people that elected them.
15 This recommendation was made in 1980, March 1980. We
16 report -- we made our report to the cabinet.

17 Also, that government ministries be streamlined
18 and be reduced. That in each county, for instance, public
19 works would have their county public works with all of the
20 equipment, material. We went to China. China was going to
21 provide those equipment, road building -- Japan was going to
22 provide those road equipment, and so that each county, when
23 your tractor breaks down or the battery is weak, you don't
24 have to go spend two weeks in Monrovia to wait for it, but
25 each county will have the supplies and road-building

1 equipment.

2 We also discovered that the radio broadcasts and
3 communication was very important, and therefore, to
4 centralize the communications so that from a central point --
5 and I was biased to Bong County and Gbarnga there. I look --
6 stood up there, looked this way, that way, and Gbarnga became
7 the center. And I say, "From the center here, Mr. President,
8 if you broadcast, people will hear you even in Sierra Leone."
9 We found out that wave go in concentric circles, and much of
10 what was broadcast went into the sea, and therefore,
11 centralizing it would let all of our people hear the message
12 of the officials and government. And so those were the
13 things that we were working on and recommending.

14 In the area of development and help in Liberia, I
15 went to Norway -- Oslo, Norway -- on a state visit, met with
16 business people, and there was a gentleman who had been in
17 Monrovia for three weeks trying to get a seismic report on
18 oil drilling in Liberia. This gentleman brought his report
19 to me in Norway, brought his papers, communications, telex,
20 and all of those things. And I told him make copies, give it
21 to me, and I was going to take it to the Mansion, to the
22 president, and show it to him. And I went there, back --
23 returned to Monrovia, met the president. I showed him what
24 had happened there and what I reported there. And the
25 president says, "All right, Mr. Vice President, you be in

1 charge of this. Send for the people, let them come and get
2 what they need."

3 The problem here is that we Liberians have done
4 damage to Liberia, we ourselves. And if anybody remembers,
5 in October of 1977 in my inaugural speech, I said the problem
6 of Liberia is not the country. Liberia is the most beautiful
7 country. Topography is beautiful. We got water, enormous
8 water, facilities, rivers. We got what are some of the
9 beautiful beaches. And I was Florida not too long ago. I
10 said your beaches don't match the beaches we have in Liberia.

11 So it's not Liberia, but it's us, we. What is
12 wrong with Liberia is us, and Mr. Chairman and Commissioners,
13 this is going to be the real problem because it's easy to
14 take about a month or two to build a bridge across the river.
15 It takes no time to run electric wires and running water. So
16 the infrastructure, the physical infrastructure, is easy to
17 be rebuilt.

18 (To the Hearing Officer): Pour me some water,
19 man. Please. You sitting here for nothing?

20 HEARING OFFICER: Sorry.

21 (Laughter.)

22 THE WITNESS: Yeah. But the most difficult task
23 here is to change the mind, the mindset of the people, to
24 give them a new orientation in terms of what the new Liberia
25 envisage.

1 Now, we talk about the historical background,
2 eighteen -- before 1847 and 1821 and all of that. So the --
3 quote-unquote, the Americo-Liberian, which is a misnomer, and
4 the Congo people, which is a misnomer -- I know the
5 background to all of those -- have had our time. So that
6 from J.J. Roberts to William V.S. Tubman was an era. So the
7 Americo-Liberians, Congos, if you want to join that group
8 together, they have had their time of like a hundred and some
9 odd years of that period.

10 And then you got the Tubman -- Tubman and Tolbert
11 era, which is part of the so-called Americo-Liberian, Congo,
12 as it has turned out to be, so there was that period.

13 And we, the country people, had our time. We had
14 our chance. We came at a ripe, golden stage where we could
15 have transformed the political system and make changes in
16 Liberia that we all cried about. But we squandered it; we
17 damaged it.

18 There's the Doe era, perhaps the most repressive.
19 And then following that, then you had these transitional or
20 interim governments.

21 And actually, in my own mind, the civil war does
22 not really relate that much to the past, 1821 and in between
23 there. But what I have found out, it's fueled -- basically
24 fueled by greed and grabs for power. Who's going to rule,
25 who's going to -- you heard about the ten parties and ten

1 candidates? Yeah, I saw them. In fact, I got a newspaper --
2 I forgot the name of it -- the *Daily Observer* with all of the
3 candidates and the parties. There are ten, and I said, "Why
4 can't they consolidate and run against, say, Doe or somebody
5 else?" But it's greed that fueled it, power. I've been
6 there, so I know. Greed that fueled it.

7 So that is that aspect, and I'm sure you're going
8 to have some questions of me on that. But I want to say here
9 while I'm alive that Mr. Tolbert had the genuine interests in
10 the rebuilding of Liberia. There's evidence to show it, of
11 what we did. Road building. In fact, right in that 1980
12 when I was coming from Cape Palmas, the road construction to
13 pave it was already in Ganta, and on Ganta, we were going to
14 branch off, go to Tappita, and then Tappita was going to go
15 to Cape Palmas. And then this other part was going to go to
16 Nimba County, Yekepa, and connect with the Guinea border
17 right there. On the drawing board, there was a plan for the
18 Pan-African Highway that was going to come from Senegal,
19 Gambia, Guinea, and connect with Sierra Leone and the Mano
20 River, and each country was going to do their own piece to
21 take the Pan-African Highway all across to South Africa.

22 And one of the things, the feasibility things that
23 was being done, is that President sent me to the eastern part
24 of Liberia to go and inspect with engineers, photographers,
25 and to bring back a report on what it will take to build what

1 we call the Atlantic Highway coming from Cape Mount all the
2 way to Cape Palmas on the sea coast (indicating) because most
3 roads went interior way, as you know. And before the roads
4 went interior way, the river boat -- you know, the canoes and
5 the river things happened. And that highway, we came back,
6 brought a report, how many bridges it is. Right here in
7 Minnesota -- this here St. Paul, I guess you call it -- the
8 over things? What you call the over ride? You take one of
9 those, you can connect all the bridges in Liberia.

10 So the problem was not lack of material or lack of
11 the will to do it, the resources to do it. It's just plan;
12 we didn't have plan. But this is one time we had a plan.
13 The president had a five-year plan for the development of
14 Liberia on the economic area, focusing mainly on agriculture.
15 And so let me -- let me swing into the rice thing, which I
16 call the "rice fiasco."

17 The president determined that Liberia ought to
18 feed itself because Liberia historically did that. Did you
19 know that during slavery time, that before Liberia was
20 Liberia, the pre-Liberia, do you know why they call that
21 place "Grain Coast"? That's where they came and got rice.
22 The Portuguese and all these people came and got rice right
23 from Cape Mount. Rice. Liberians were shipping tons of
24 rice. They were doing business with the Europeans long
25 before 1821.

1 Liberians are resilient and progressive people.
2 Our people had dealings in coffee; we shipped coffee. And
3 when the settlers came along the river banks there, Saint
4 Paul, Millsburg, White Plains there, they were producing
5 sugar. In the 1870s, we were shipping sugar to Europe. It's
6 in the book; it's in the history books. Cam wood, piassava,
7 melegueta pepper. They were shipping it. So the president
8 look into that, said Liberians can feed our -- we can feed
9 ourselves.

10 So, we had two problems facing Liberia in 1980:
11 One was how do we get away from -- because we have shifted
12 from producers to consumers. Firestone, Bong Mine, LAMCO,
13 all of this. So rice producers now became consumers of rice.
14 Firestone started off first by supplying rice for their
15 workers. And the rice was not imported from America; the
16 rice was collected from the interior of Liberia, from Bong
17 County, Lofa County. The Firestone trucks used to go there,
18 and people brought their hampers of rice and sold it.
19 Paramount chiefs were expected to produce rice for the
20 Firestone plantation, and they did it. And of course, the
21 consumers' bellies got bigger, and so Firestone had to import
22 rice. Pusava. You heard about pusava, pusava rice? Well,
23 the ration in Firestone was 30 cups of rice. Pusava is 30 in
24 the Kpelle language, 30 cups. So when you bring your bag,
25 the man will ask you, "How many pusava?" That's how we got

1 the name "pusava." It's not the quality of rice or grade of
2 rice; it's just naming how many cups of rice each person will
3 get.

4 So, what we did then on this rice thing, rice bag
5 was \$22 in Monrovia. So, the question was whether we should
6 import rice and subsidize it; government should subsidize
7 imported rice in order to keep the price at \$22 or \$30. That
8 was part of the debate that was going on in cabinet. Should
9 we rely on imported rice? That was one side of the argument.
10 The other side of the argument, supported by the Ministry of
11 Agriculture. Florence Chenoweth was Minister of Agriculture,
12 who was very much in favor of subsidizing the Liberian
13 farmers so that they could produce their own rice.

14 So we made a study. We made a study: What would
15 it cost for a hundred-pound bag if produced in Liberia by
16 Liberians? We brought in Firestone. By this time, Firestone
17 was experimenting with their swamp rice. They had the bag of
18 rice there; how much would it cost? Labor intensive of
19 course rice is, rice production is. We had people from
20 Gbadin. When you go into Cape Mount, there's a big area that
21 was cleared. They were going to produce rice there locally.
22 And so, should government get away from subsidizing imported
23 rice and subsidize the Liberian farmers?

24 So, we send the Minister of Commerce and
25 Transportation, Mr. John Sherman, to all of the

1 rice-producing countries around the world. Well, "around the
2 world," that's stretching it too far. But from the most
3 rice-producing countries. There's a place called Stuttgart in
4 Arkansas. And by the way, Arkansas is the number-one
5 rice-producing state in America. Texas, Louisiana, those are
6 next, but Arkansas, we had rice on the table a long way, from
7 here (indicating) over yonder. Mr. Chairman and the ministry
8 brought rice samples from these countries. Different grades,
9 broken rice. You know, fine rice also. Labeled. Labeled.
10 How much it cost in that country, how much it cost in China,
11 how much it cost in Taiwan, how much it cost in Arkansas, how
12 much it cost to import the rice.

13 There were some people who had -- government had
14 given the license to import rice. So you can see the
15 contention here. The rice importers, with their license to
16 import rice to make profit, wanted to keep the rice imported.
17 Firestone, Gbadin, rice people, Liberian farmers, small
18 albeit, wanted to do Liberian rice. We have survived on
19 Liberian rice for a long time. I remember when rice go up --
20 salmon cup -- they used to call it a salmon cup -- was 2
21 cents. I saw it during 1941, during the war. During the
22 war, where did food come from? From the Liberian farms. So
23 Mr. Tolbert felt that we could go back to producing rice. So
24 he said by year so and so, Liberians should feed themselves.

25 Before -- the cabinet would determine whether to

1 increase the price of rice or substitute -- subsidize
2 Liberian farmers or subsidize the importation of rice.
3 Before we could make the decision, it leaked out that rice
4 price was going up and Mr. Tolbert was going to benefit from
5 it. I wouldn't -- Mr. Tolbert had no rice farm, you know. I
6 flew over that -- I had my own airplane, church airplane, not
7 government plane. And I didn't see no big rice farms in
8 Bentol or in Gbalatua where there is rubber farm. I saw
9 rubber plantations.

10 But I knew people who were engaged in rice. James
11 Phillips, Thomas Phillips engaged in rice production.
12 Private people engaged in rice production. Between River
13 Cess -- between River Cess and Sasstown -- remember the
14 Cavalla River basin, there was a Liberian group were
15 interested in mechanized rice production in that area down
16 there. Very flat land, just like Arkansas. They could have
17 done that.

18 So the thing leaked out, and so then word got
19 around to the agitators and said Tolbert's going to benefit
20 from rice production, and therefore, Tolbert carry rice price
21 up and so on. And so the demonstration was planned. The
22 planned demonstration occurred on a Saturday, and you all got
23 the dates and all of that because you Commissioners I know
24 got people doing research and studies and all of that. And
25 you are sharp, you know. I'm going to tell you that. You

1 sharp. You got those sharp questions you're producing here.
2 Very sharp. So I expect you to shoot me down when I get
3 through.

4 (Laughter.)

5 THE WITNESS: But the demonstration got started.
6 It started in New Kru Town. It started in New Kru Town, and
7 gradually it was coming, and they were monitoring it across
8 the Vai Town Bridge, and it was getting up Randall Street or
9 some street there. So the question was whether we should
10 stop the demonstration or let the demonstration occur.

11 Because of my experience from Boston in the '60s
12 of demonstrations and all of that, all that was required was
13 to get a permit. It was not illegal to demonstrate, but you
14 get a permit. And so the Minister of Justice refused to give
15 permit and said this thing was illegal and they were going to
16 stop it.

17 You know, the political dynamics begin to play
18 here. It was Defense and Justice against those of us who had
19 seen other experiences and said, "Well, let them demonstrate.
20 Give them police van and police escort. Let them come to the
21 Mansion and present their papers or whatever they want to do.
22 Let them do that." And I made the comment that, you know,
23 these people got nothing to lose. This government's going to
24 have something to lose. If, you know, we prevent them, you
25 stop them, you're going to create a conflict. Well, that's

1 history.

2 The president never ordered for anybody to shoot.
3 And the first person that died was my student at the College
4 of West Africa. He was a police officer. He got shot. And
5 I was -- I was right there in the Mansion with the president,
6 and I could see the sadness on his face that this thing has
7 burst loose into a riot that killed people, in which people
8 died. Yeah. It was not easy on him. I was right there. I
9 honestly did see it. I was standing right there with him
10 monitoring the riots as they move up.

11 We were told as the reports came in that soldiers
12 had -- people had put on soldiers' uniform and the
13 soldiers -- this is the -- this is the looting part now; that
14 the demonstrators now have turned into looters and the
15 soldiers were helping to shoot the locks off of doors. You
16 know those up-and-down doors? For people to get in and get
17 the stuff there. Those were reports that were coming in.

18 There's another critical thing that happened
19 during this time here. Guinea and Liberia had a joint
20 security thing. The question was whether to bring in
21 soldiers from Guinea to help with the assistance. There was
22 some who was against that because they said Liberia, we had
23 never had foreign intervention in our country by foreign
24 troops and so forth. And if foreign troops came, it will be
25 a blow to our own soldiers. Their morale would be lowered,

1 and therefore, we shouldn't get the soldiers in.

2 Before that discussion could be completed, they
3 had already landed at Spriggs Payne Airport. And of course
4 you know the history of what happened. Our soldiers didn't
5 take that lightly. The next morning, which was Monday
6 morning or perhaps it was Sunday morning, President called a
7 meeting of the military people, and we met there on the top
8 of the Executive Mansion and talked about what had happened.
9 So that's that aspect.

10 Now, I came to America because I had previous
11 commitment as the bishop of the Methodist Church. Member of
12 the Council of Bishops were meeting 8:00 that morning in New
13 York and in Indianapolis on the 8th of April. And so that
14 evening of the 7th I left Liberia, 1980, with my wife and two
15 children. We left one child home. And my mother-in-law and
16 my nieces were in the house, contrary to what the people said
17 I brought my dog and cat and mortar pestle and fanner and all
18 of that. We came for three weeks, to go back after the
19 General Conference of the Methodist Church. Every four years
20 it's the Methodist General Conference. In fact, there is --
21 Her Excellency, Ellen Sirleaf, just left one where I was, and
22 I got a picture right in this here to show with me and her in
23 Fort Worth, Texas, at the Methodist General Conference.
24 Every four years Methodists have a General Conference.

25 So that's what I came to, and I think it was

1 providential because I missed the party by five days, the
2 coup. Had I been there five days longer in Liberia, I
3 wouldn't be sitting here talking to you. And I believe
4 that's the reason why God plucked me out of there.

5 I'll tell you the secret. (Pointing.) Some other
6 time. But that's how it was.

7 So, when the coup took place, I got a call early
8 that morning. I was in little place called Nashville,
9 Indianapolis, at the Council of Bishops meeting. That
10 Saturday morning, I got a call from the Embassy around about
11 5:00 in the morning, Washington D.C. The ambassador called
12 me and said the government has been overthrown, the president
13 has been assassinated. And as day -- as the day grew up, the
14 information start filtering in that the government has been
15 overthrown and politicians were being -- either turned
16 themselves in or were being arrested and that a court had
17 been set up to try them.

18 So I said to my wife, I said, "Well, you all will
19 have to stay here and let me go and turn myself in" because,
20 you know, I -- I -- as I sit here, I can't -- I cannot --
21 unless somebody will come -- you know, Liberian man can lie
22 on you, so I don't know who has got vengeance or grudge on me
23 that would have come and said I did this, did that that I
24 didn't do. And people used to bring their things to me as
25 vice president and to pawn it. One time one man brought a

1 chicken, big ol' rooster. They say -- they said I was on my
2 farm when they brought the rooster, and they say he brought
3 it for my soup. And then out of the same breath, he said, "I
4 want to come and to help you to get a pickup truck so we can
5 haul food to Monrovia." So I give my chicken to my man and I
6 say, "Kill it and cook soup," and we did. And me and the man
7 ate the chicken, and after we got through, I said, "Well, you
8 ate the chicken, too, so I don't owe you anything."

9 (Laughter.)

10 THE WITNESS: I said, "I don't owe you anything."

11 But so, you know, I couldn't see even now anything
12 I've done against anybody. Anything I got from anybody, I
13 either pay you back or I bought it, so -- and I don't own no
14 house in Liberia. People are looking for houses in Monrovia
15 for me. I don't own a house or a kitchen in Monrovia. The
16 only house I got is in Gbarnga that I built out of my own
17 pocket with student help, my onset built before I became vice
18 president. That's the only house I got, and Charles Taylor's
19 brother stay in it. The man went to collect rent. Charles
20 Taylor's brother say, "I know who own this house, and you
21 humble me, I will burn it." So I told them, I said, "Leave
22 the man there, let him stay there," because, you know, you
23 can't worry over earthly property. You can't take anything
24 with you.

25 Mr. Wal-Mart died here quite recently, not too

1 long ago, Sam Walton, the owner of Wal-Mart. And they had
2 the funeral, and on the television, the hearse passed with
3 his body and the family car and the second family car, the
4 third family -- I was looking for the 18-wheeler to come back
5 with his property to the cemetery, but it didn't. So the
6 only thing he carried was that suit made in China that he put
7 on.

8 (Laughter.)

9 THE WITNESS: You know, so I felt that property
10 was nothing to fight over. I had 50 cows on my farm that I
11 paid for. Franklin Smith used to haul them from Kru Coast
12 and bring them to my place there, and the people ate all of
13 that and it's gone. And, you know, so -- and I'm still here
14 trying my best, you know, trying to look all right.

15 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Still kicking.

16 THE WITNESS: And the ladies still looking at me.

17 (Laughter).

18 THE WITNESS: But so I was ready to go back. So I
19 got a call from Monrovia, said "Don't come, don't come." I
20 said, "Why? I'm coming." He said, "No." He said, "First of
21 all, they have set up a kangaroo court. Number two, these
22 people are drunks and dopes and got no sense of justice." So
23 I said, "Huh." "And they said they got one M16 rifle with
24 your name on it." I said, "Oh, okay. Let them keep it."

25 (Laughter.)

1 THE WITNESS: So it was that we are still here.
2 But now I don't know where the M16 rifle is, but I plan to go
3 back in 2009, February. But then I heard news that Mr. Doe
4 made a speech in which he invited me. It was the 26th day.
5 Made a speech, said Bishop Warner can come back, you know.
6 Then I remembered Aquino, the Filipino man. Marcos say "You
7 should go home," and before the man could put his foot down
8 on the ground, they shot him. I said, "Ah, this thing is a
9 trap."

10 (Laughter.)

11 THE WITNESS: So I wrote Mr. Doe. I called his
12 ambassador. What was his name? Washington. I called
13 Washington, to George Toe Washington. I said, "You got
14 anything from Liberia about me going back home?" The man
15 said, "No, no telegram" -- these were telegram days, no
16 faxes, no -- you know, none of this stuff you all got now,
17 iPod and so on. He said, "No, we got no information." So I
18 wrote him. I said, "Well, I don't have anything in black and
19 white." Now, if I said, "Mr. Doe said I'm going to go home,"
20 what does that show to people that say he sent a letter? So
21 I didn't go. I didn't go. I saw Clarence Simpson the other
22 day. He said, "They didn't do anything." I said, "Well,
23 that's you. You were not vice president. I was vice
24 president, you know."

25 So that's part of the story that I have to tell

1 here, especially on that rice riot issue. It may not have
2 happened, but it did happen, so that's passed.

3 The thing I'm wishing for is that, Mr. Chairman
4 and Members of the Commission, either before your work is
5 ended or by the time your work is ended, I would love to
6 see -- I hope that a number of things will happen as a
7 reconciliation process. Number one, that a national
8 remembrance day be declared in Liberia, just like we got
9 prayer and fast day, we got Armed Forces Day and so forth.
10 But in recognition of the over two hundred -- now, see, this
11 two-hundred figure I have trouble with because I saw human
12 bodies floating down the Cavalla River. Nobody was there
13 counting them. So that number is good for the western
14 consumption or the U.N. report. But more people die, you
15 know. I have -- my guesstimate is like 300,000 people died.
16 Died. I'm not talking about the refugees, which are still
17 out of Liberia. Some are trickling in; some are still there.
18 A national day in remembrance.

19 And that a national monument be established, just
20 like -- you know you got the Holocaust Memorial in America?
21 You got the Vietnam Memorial? You got the World War II
22 Memorial? In Israel, you got lots of memorials. And this is
23 to help the future generation not to forget what happened in
24 our history. We can't put it under row, we can't cover it
25 up. They must hear the story and see.

1 And also, a museum be established, special
2 building to be established as a museum where the Truth and
3 Reconciliation Commission would have their records there.
4 People can come and do research and study. You can have
5 videos, VCRs. You can have this, that, and the other in
6 there. Maybe some ex-soldier's something, not the real one.
7 But, you know, this is something that should be carried out
8 for the generations to come so they won't forget.

9 I like the Jewish people thing. You know, that
10 Holocaust Memorial thing. Don't forget, never forget.
11 There's a reminder always of what happened in your history.
12 Don't repeat it. It'll be good for the peace process. Yeah,
13 those things that I would like to see happen.

14 And then, of course, the -- as you all indicated
15 here, this reconciliation is a process, and it's good for
16 people who can come and confess and forgive and heal. There,
17 as you know more than I do, since you've been all over
18 Liberia, lots of people hurt, are in pain today. There are
19 children, orphan children, don't know what happened to their
20 mothers and their fathers.

21 I saw this "Blood Diamond" thing the other day,
22 "Blood Diamond," Sierra Leone. I don't know if you all saw
23 it, but I saw it. You all should look at it, the Sierra
24 Leone "Blood Diamond" thing. But, you know, did you see it
25 had a good ending? This guy reunited with his family, and he

1 had a bag of money, he had a nice suit on. That's not in the
2 Liberian given. It's not there like that. And you have
3 rightly stated that the Liberian situation is unique and
4 different. South Africa might be fine, but it doesn't
5 compare to our situation where you have 14 years of war,
6 destruction, and devastation, to the point that Liberia was
7 declared -- close to be declared a failed state.

8 All right. I mentioned the fact that country
9 people had their time, Congo people had their time,
10 Americo-Liberians had their time. The time now is for
11 Liberian people, Liberians. We, the Liberians. United
12 Liberian front. We're all tribal people. The diversity is
13 good. We can use that, our diversity, in a positive way. We
14 can teach our dialects or languages in our schools so we
15 don't forget it.

16 And then, Mr. Chairman, there's something also
17 that's brewing that I have observed in the diaspora, and I
18 have been pleading and fighting ever since I've been here,
19 the diaspora. There's more disunity in the diaspora than
20 anywhere else that I've observed, and I'm saying to them how
21 can we serve as a role model if we, who have been exposed to
22 a developed country -- you come to stoplight, you stop; you
23 go to work 8:00; you -- and, you know, they got this thing
24 called "Liberian time." Can you imagine that, "Liberian
25 time"? Liberia never made no time. We all operated by

1 standard time of GMT and other times, which Mr. Tolbert
2 introduced for us to get up early and go to work. Time is
3 time. We need to develop a new sense of identity. I think
4 somebody mentioned that. Work ethics. Work ethics, strong
5 work ethics needs to be developed in our country. Bring back
6 the Tolbert policy of total involvement and Rally Time and a
7 wholesome, functioning society. You still need it.

8 I refuse for a long time to go to speak to any
9 Bassa group and Bassa man, Mabahn Bassa. You know we got
10 different Bassa group: We got Mabahn Bassa. We got Gbii
11 Bassa people. We got people called Kokoyah Bassa. Dewoin
12 people, upriver people. We got the Hwen Gba Kon. We got the
13 River Cess Bassa, and all of that. I refuse to go to any
14 kind of meeting that has that connotation.

15 So I go to alumni associations, BWI especially
16 because that's integrated. And we, the Congo boys and the
17 country boys, all mingle together. BWI, when I was there
18 five years, there was no tribalism, nothing at all of that
19 nature. Here's a Congo man sitting down there, Willy Page.
20 He and I used to go up and down there. We never talked,
21 discussed tribal thing. We were there for one reason, to get
22 an education. And we were Liberians. That's what we need to
23 instill in this new Liberian dynamic --

24 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you.

25 THE WITNESS: -- so that our country can move

1 forward.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you.

3 THE WITNESS: And it's a process. It's a long
4 process. It will take education. The thing I didn't hear
5 about so far is the high rate of illiteracy. We got two
6 societies in Liberia: We got the tribal society that has
7 been brought up on the tribal political system of
8 chieftaincy, paramount chief, clan chief, and so forth. So
9 there is that dynamic. And then we've got this
10 constitutional thing, and the two have not yet merged, and
11 the only way the two can merge is through education.

12 Look at me sitting out here, country boy from
13 Nyamahablee, got tie on, and the white people respect me in
14 this country. That's the passport to progress: Education.
15 And education will solve much of our diversity and bring
16 about healing and reconciliation.

17 The other thing that I've been dealing with is the
18 economic thing. And I'll end very soon. I don't know how
19 much time you give me here, but I'm glad you're not sitting
20 out here with a clock to time me.

21 But, you know, you talk about corruption. I was
22 one of the strong fighters of corruption. I exposed
23 corruption. And let me just give you one example of
24 corruption that I saw that I brought to light. Some of you
25 may remember the river across going to Brewerville. What do

1 you call the river bridge there?

2 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Saint Paul River.

3 THE WITNESS: And they had a railroad track on top
4 of the bridge? Railroad track on top of the bridge. And I
5 had just come from America to travel around. I never saw
6 cars and railroad track parallel. So I investigated that,
7 and I found out that when the company got there, they had
8 \$1.5 million left and they said that was not enough to put a
9 bridge -- extra bridge cross the Saint Paul River. And
10 therefore, the people said, "Put it down here, and then we'll
11 split the money." And that's what happened. So we built a
12 new bridge across the Saint Paul River to avoid that mistake
13 that was made.

14 Let me pick up on what I said concerning my report
15 from Norway. We found out the minister wanted some
16 under-table thing, "Rub my belly, I rub your belly." The
17 president sent for him and fired him right away. That's how
18 we got Cletus Wortorson as Minister of Lands and Mines. I
19 made an observation in the cabinet my first month, and I
20 said, "Mr. President, our cabinet doesn't represent Republic
21 of Liberia. And therefore, we need to change the color of
22 our cabinet." So we brought in Troho Kparghahai. We brought
23 in James Y. Gbarbea. We brought in Kesseley; of course, he
24 was there already. We diversified the cabinet, and you look
25 at the cabinet before I was vice president and after I was

1 vice president, you see the difference.

2 Liberia has been shortchanged, and the damage that
3 the coup and the civil war has done is not on us, on us. I'm
4 73, you know? But it's on our children and grandchildren.
5 Their future has been robbed. Go to Monrovia right now and
6 see the child soldiers. No education. I told Ellen Sirleaf,
7 I said, "You know, I don't envy your position because you are
8 dealing with different type of people, not the same people we
9 had during our time." This is a different generation.
10 Mosquito bite can't do anything to them anymore.

11 (Laughter.)

12 THE WITNESS: Yeah. And these are people who have
13 not learned the value of labor, to earn income. They want
14 everything free. So, massive education.

15 I said something controversial the other day: I
16 think probably during this period of time, what Liberia need
17 is what we used to call "benevolent dictatorship."
18 Benevolent dictatorship. You know, there's some things you
19 just can't get through legislature. Legislature may block
20 things and prevent progress from moving fast. So sometimes
21 you need to go to executive orders and things like that. But
22 that's a tough job that lady has, and I'm praying for her,
23 I'm telling you.

24 And you all -- you all, I take my hat off to you.
25 You're doing a tremendous job. I am glad about the Sheikh

1 Konneh, glad about the interreligious council that you all
2 have established because that's how it was. You know, I was
3 chairman for a time when the Muslim-Christian dialogue,
4 Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Liberia, you know. So we can work
5 together. We work for the same man up there. You call him
6 Allah; we call him God. The same man, you know. We have the
7 same beliefs and so on, so I thank you all, your contribution
8 and your participation, and all of you will help to bring
9 healing in the country.

10 Well, I've talked too much. I've rambled
11 basically since I don't have a text. Usually when I preach,
12 I preach five minutes and I'm gone. But I'm honored to be
13 here and responding to your call, and so I'll sit down now
14 and give you thanks for what you -- I have a deep
15 appreciation for what you are doing. Any time I hear
16 Truth -- I will be praying for you all so you all can go
17 through.

18 I was hoping that -- and you have already
19 mentioned that you have expanded -- you have a holistic,
20 comprehensive view that you want to develop, taking it as far
21 back as you can, 1979 and to the end of this civil conflict
22 and put all that together. That comprehensive piece is very
23 important. So I appreciate deeply very much what you're
24 doing. I've been an advocate for peace and people working
25 together in Liberia for a long time. So I thank you very

1 much, and I rest my case.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much.

3 (Applause.)

4 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much,
5 Bishop Warner, our witness, for coming and sharing your
6 insight with us, especially on issues and events that
7 occurred during our mandate early period. And it's such a
8 true light on a number of things that we thought have
9 happened, and all of this refers to a portion of the mandate
10 which has to do with clarifying myths and falsehoods of the
11 past. It was very insightful.

12 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You took up a lot of our
14 time, notwithstanding, and so Commissioners will be asking
15 pointed questions, and we hope you can give pointed responses
16 as well.

17 THE WITNESS: Yes.

18 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: And ours is also an
19 inquiry commission by the way we were established and by our
20 mandate, and so some very intrusive questions may be asked.

21 THE WITNESS: Yes. Yes.

22 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: So thank you very much.
23 And we will start with Commissioner Oumu Syllah.

24 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you very much,
25 Bishop Warner, for that brilliant presentation. And on

1 behalf -- we also thank you that in spite of the busy
2 schedule, you've been able to come today to give a lot of
3 information as to what really happened during the past era.

4 Now I'm glad that -- the notion about Congo and
5 country. You were in Tolbert government and from the native
6 background. My question now is when a demonstration was
7 about to happen --

8 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

9 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: -- were there any prior
10 knowledge in the atmosphere? Did you get any information
11 that this thing actually was going to happen? I'm talking
12 about the rice riot.

13 THE WITNESS: The demonstration or the coup?

14 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: The demonstration.

15 THE WITNESS: Yeah. Well, that Saturday morning,
16 I was going to my farm. I usually go Saturday to my farm. I
17 remember that date I'm going to grow some cassava and get
18 some palm oil and so on, and I was called to the Executive
19 Mansion Saturday, cabinet meeting. I said, "Oh, I have
20 cabinet meeting Saturday." So that's where I was when I got
21 the news that the demonstration has already started. So
22 before that, personally myself, I had no warning that it was
23 going to happen. I know the PPP people were meeting and the
24 different groups who are meeting. The MOJAs were meeting and
25 all of that. But didn't realize when this whole thing began

1 to merge into a demonstration. So I had no prior knowledge
2 until that Saturday we were at the Mansion and the
3 demonstration was occurring.

4 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: In terms of figure, can
5 you put any number as to how many person actually died during
6 that demonstration?

7 THE WITNESS: Yeah, I don't know. I really don't
8 know how many persons died. I don't. I don't have that
9 information, but there are various numbers that have been
10 given.

11 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: And then while you were
12 in the United States and the riot happened, can you share
13 with us what happened to your family back home. You said
14 your daughter was there when the coup actually happened.

15 THE WITNESS: Can you repeat that, please?

16 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: When you came to the
17 United States --

18 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

19 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: -- you were called,
20 told that President Tolbert had been assassinated, and you
21 left a child back home.

22 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh. Yeah.

23 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: So what happened to
24 her?

25 THE WITNESS: Well, the soldiers at my house, at

1 the vice president's house, took my mother-in-law and the
2 child, took them to a safer place. The guards. You know,
3 the vice president had a detail assigned to him, so I don't
4 know who exactly initiated that. But I came to America with
5 two security people, like I always did. One was the chief
6 one, and I rotated others at different times so that they
7 will also have opportunity to travel with me. Whether the
8 security did or not, but I'm told that the soldiers that were
9 at the house, at my house, took my mother-in-law, my two
10 nieces, and my child and took them to a safe place. And that
11 night or that day, the soldiers did not come to my house
12 until maybe two or three days later, when they came and bust
13 the house and scattered everything out in the street.

14 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Now the policy of the
15 former president during your regime was very good. What
16 really went wrong then and we had this problem, because
17 according to you, you had a laid-out plan as to how long you
18 stay in power, what your activities will be like, but yet and
19 still, this thing happened. Can you tell us what was the
20 reason?

21 THE WITNESS: Well, what -- we can look back now
22 hindsight and maybe think about what might have given rise to
23 all of this. Mrs. Tolbert has a book in which she has her
24 views on it. It happened to her; she was there. And I'm
25 sure that you all might have seen that book.

1 But I can only think that from a broad
2 perspective, that we were now in a political situation where
3 we were in a period of the downsliding of the Cold War. And
4 perhaps our policies might have led to that or contributed to
5 that. We felt that we were an independent country, and
6 unlike the Tubman administration, who was a staunch supporter
7 of the West, America in particular, we felt that we ought to
8 have the freedom to expand our relations with other
9 countries.

10 So perhaps our establishment of the Russian
11 Embassy, our travel to China, other so-called Communist
12 countries at that particular time might have triggered that.
13 And this -- I'm just guessing on these things, that they
14 could have probably contributed to that.

15 I went to Romania, which was a Communist country,
16 on a state visit. We were going to do trade agreements with
17 Romania. The Bong Mine, Bomi Hills had closed down, and the
18 Romanian government was going to bring in with -- bring us
19 farm tractors, and they were going to get plywood
20 manufactured up there in that part of Liberia.

21 Then the second thing that might have contributed
22 to the situation might have been the fact that after the OAU
23 conference, the president called a meeting of all of the
24 economic ministers of West Africa of the OAU, all economic
25 ministers because we saw some disparities in terms of our

1 produce and the prices. We said why is it that we in Liberia
2 if we produce rubber or coffee or cocoa, iron ore, why is it
3 that we cannot determine what our price should be? Why must
4 the price be determined by London, New York, or Washington?

5 We were dealing with communications issues.
6 During that time, if you call Sierra Leone, which is right
7 next to us over there, your call goes through London before
8 it comes to Sierra Leone. I had to go to Bobangi to go
9 represent the Liberian government at the coronation of
10 Emperor Jean-Bédél Bokassa, which was a fascinating
11 experience. But I had to fly from Monrovia to Paris,
12 overnight, then come back to Africa to go to Bobangi. We
13 couldn't understand these dynamics. There were African
14 airlines, of course, controlled by the multinational
15 corporations, even if they had African names on them. So
16 whether these things contributed to the downfall of our
17 government, that I don't know.

18 Internally, I know that several people wanted
19 change. They wanted radical change, immediate change in
20 government. At this meeting right here (indicating picture),
21 the president called together all of the, quote-unquote
22 radicals: Baccus Matthews, Tipoteh, Sawyer. All of them
23 came to this meeting on this picture here.

24 The president's conciliation or spirit of
25 conciliation was taken as a weakness, and therefore, the

1 agitators took advantage of that, I believe. And the
2 president said to them right here (indicating), he said to
3 them, "Gentlemen, what is it you all want? We want to build
4 a country. I want you to join me. This is Rally Time."

5 (To the Hearing Officer): Please pass it around
6 so they can look at it. Don't sit here for nothing. You got
7 to work.

8 (Laughter.)

9 THE WITNESS: Yeah. Yeah, the president invited
10 them, said "What do you want?" And I remember very
11 distinctly Baccus Matthews said, "I want that chair you're
12 in." Yeah. And the president said, "Baccus, you can't do
13 anything to me. We are related. We are related. Your ma --
14 or grandma, Georgia Payne Cooper, secretary to the Senate,
15 we're all related."

16 So, I don't know. But I don't know what drove the
17 people. And in fact, I have come to know now that actually
18 it was not Doe that led the coup. We give credit to Doe:
19 Doe led government and Doe led coup and all of that. It was
20 Jebo, Major Jebo that I'm told was the leader of the coup.
21 They were going to arrest Tolbert at Bentol that night, but
22 somehow it changed, and the president went to the Mansion
23 instead of going to Bentol.

24 The second part of that piece, which I don't have
25 verification, was that Monday -- that Monday, the president

1 was going to Zimbabwe to go see the installation of Robert
2 Mugabe, who now refuse to leave office.

3 (Laughter.)

4 THE WITNESS: 1980 he was going there, he was
5 scheduled to go there that Monday. And the other picture was
6 that when the president left, they were going to do like they
7 did Kwame Nkrumah, and in flight they were going to take over
8 the government.

9 So, we still hope that someday the truth of this
10 coup thing will come out, so we just got bits and pieces and
11 so forth and so on. Some people believe that the coup was
12 not staged by Liberians but by some foreign -- foreign
13 soldiers and all. I don't know, maybe in your -- in your
14 going about, you may have heard different -- different
15 stories. I don't know. It's the same thing I've heard over
16 on this side, you know, so I don't know actually. But, you
17 know, we can just guess.

18 But I believe that we were soft in our
19 administration, unlike Tubman, who was highly security
20 conscious and didn't even allow a fly to pass -- cross his
21 security line. We wanted the country to be lax and
22 relaxed. And if you were 10, 15, 20 years old at that time,
23 then you know the freedom of press we had there, freedom of
24 press, freedom of expression that was in Liberia. I saw more
25 newspapers during this time than any other time in the

1 history of Liberia. Tubman time, the press was controlled.
2 You know that. Yeah. So whether we were too slack too soon,
3 I don't know.

4 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you very much.

5 THE WITNESS: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am.

6 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: Bishop Warner --

7 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

8 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: -- thank you very
9 much for coming --

10 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

11 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: -- and providing
12 some insight from the other side, from the other perspective.
13 Let me say perhaps you and I share the unique distinction of
14 being perhaps the only two persons in this room who I can say
15 were connected to those incidents that you have just spoken
16 about.

17 At the time in 1979, the picture which you showed,
18 I suppose I was at a meeting. I was a student leader at
19 University of Liberia, Chairman of National Affairs, and we
20 were invited by the president along with others, including
21 the late Baccus Matthews, to discuss the issue of the
22 proposed increase in the price of rice. I'd just like to ask
23 a few questions perhaps as we undertake a historical exercise
24 to rewrite our history.

25 I would just like to ask you two questions, and I

1 will ask the questions and then I will give you the
2 opportunity to respond, so I will not ask one and then you
3 respond and then I ask another.

4 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

5 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: Looking at rice
6 riots, in aftermath of the rice riots, the president
7 commissioned a body to look into the disturbances, and that
8 body was headed by the late Nete Sie Brownell, and they
9 produced a report containing several recommendations. I'm
10 sorry; I don't have a copy of that here with me, but for
11 those of us who -- those of -- any Liberian who may be a
12 student of history, that report is contained in the history
13 book written by George Boley, Dr. George Boley. The full
14 text of that report is there. To the best of my knowledge,
15 that report was shelved, and nothing became of it. I don't
16 know why. Perhaps you will be able to provide some
17 explanations as to why.

18 The other aspect is that prior to the
19 demonstrations, there were already stories that the
20 government had used force. And in the aftermath of the
21 demonstration, the late Albert Porte wrote a piece entitled
22 "The Day Monrovia Stood Still" in which he outlined how he
23 made several attempts, some of them desperate, to get the
24 president to concede into allowing the demonstration to go
25 ahead and not to use force. And according to the late Albert

1 Porte, in that article he wrote, "The Day Monrovia Stood
2 Still," that he even felt defeat of the president. And the
3 president said to him, "Government cannot appear to look
4 weak."

5 THE WITNESS: Government cannot do what?

6 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: "Appear to look
7 weak, and the demonstration should not go ahead."

8 On April 21st, 1979, I and Mr. Conmany Wesseh
9 turned ourselves in to the government, having been charged
10 with treason, placed on the wanted list, \$5,000 reward. And
11 in that meeting with the president, I remember you were the
12 last official of government that came in, into the office of
13 the president. And the president made a remark, which I
14 recall, and maybe for the benefit of posterity, I can just
15 repeat those words. And in that meeting was the late Albert
16 Porte, the late Richard Henries, and other officials, and you
17 were the last, and you came wearing a khaki suit with a
18 wide-brim safari hat.

19 And the president said -- he said, "There has been
20 a cry for blood. There has been a cry for blood."

21 THE WITNESS: There has been a what now?

22 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: "There has been a
23 cry" --

24 THE WITNESS: For blood?

25 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: -- "for blood."

1 It was echoing from around him. And perhaps -- and "But we
2 are a Christian nation, and we will choose not to go that
3 route." Then he said, "I always told my people, if you take
4 time to kill Mission Ants, you will see the gut." "Not so,
5 Mr. Speaker." "Yes, Mr. President." "Not so." "Yes,
6 Mr. President." Then he further said, "Perhaps they say I
7 have been too patient, but then again, patient dog eat fat
8 bone." And then you remarked, "But that's the big bone
9 you've got now." I always wondered then what that meant.

10 (Laughter.)

11 THE WITNESS: What was that now? Would you repeat
12 that last -- last thing?

13 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: Said -- and you
14 said -- he said -- he said, "I've been too patient and too
15 kind. I've been too kind and been too patient."

16 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

17 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: "But perhaps, as
18 I said, patient dog eat fat bone." And then you remarked,
19 "But that's the big bone you got now."

20 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

21 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: That was your
22 remark, and I always wondered then what you meant by those
23 words. I never had the opportunity since April 21st, 1979,
24 was the last time we saw.

25 THE WITNESS: So you waited 28 years to ask me

1 that question.

2 (Laughter.)

3 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: The other thing
4 is, as you mentioned that -- you attest to the fact that
5 representation at the level of the cabinet was not perhaps
6 inclusive enough --

7 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

8 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: -- and if you
9 compare the cabinet before your term and after your term, you
10 see that it had become broader.

11 THE WITNESS: Yes. Yes.

12 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: I remember in
13 1979, elections for the Mayor of Monrovia was due, and the
14 True Whig Party candidate was Mr. Chuchu Horton, and those
15 elections were canceled for whatever reasons. And
16 subsequently, the registration of the Progressive Peoples
17 Party, PPP, was denied.

18 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

19 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: Perhaps as former
20 vice president, you will be able to provide some explanations
21 as to why.

22 And then lastly, you mentioned that news of -- got
23 leaked from the cabinet that the government was about to
24 embark on this plan to produce rice locally to stop the
25 importation of foreign rice. And of course, there was the

1 widespread impression through the public that the president
2 stood to benefit. His brother, Mr. Daniel Tolbert, was one
3 of the largest importers of rice.

4 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

5 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: And so there was
6 a lot of mixed messages in the air. And perhaps as a living
7 witness to all of this, perhaps you can throw some light,
8 some insight.

9 But after that meeting at the Mansion on 21st of
10 April, 1979, I went to prison. In the meeting that -- which
11 picture you showed, most likely I was in that meeting because
12 I remember the president call that meeting and you were
13 invited, and I was in attendance.

14 So as we -- you have said, the Nazi Holocaust and
15 other historical events --

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Be brief,
17 Mr. Commissioner.

18 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: -- and people
19 doing it for history so that people will not forget and chart
20 the same path and perform the same mistakes that were made.
21 Can you please provide some insight as to what was the
22 mindset behind the beginning of the demonstration and all of
23 the things I have just said.

24 Thank you very much.

25 THE WITNESS: Good. Thank you. Thank you,

1 Mr. Stewart. Good question. And the short answer that I
2 have would be you will read it in my book.

3 But out of courtesy of the fact that, you know,
4 this is a historical meeting here today, I will try to answer
5 you. And by the way, let me suggest to you to speak up loud
6 because I got only one ear. You see, at -- this one can't
7 hear (indicating). That's why I got to turn to this man this
8 way to hear what he's got to say. This one can hear and so
9 forth. I don't wear that ear thing because it irritates my
10 ear. So I just want to make you aware of my handicap here.

11 So let me see if I can start from the bottom up.
12 I think your last statement had to do with the rice thing?
13 Rice? The rice riot? Am I clear on that?

14 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: Yes.

15 THE WITNESS: Yeah. As I mentioned, that -- the
16 discussion was on at the cabinet. We were in the three weeks
17 of it. We sent the Minister of Commerce abroad to bring rice
18 samples so that we can have facts when we discuss this issue.
19 I think that the reports that went out either from outside
20 the cabinet or from people surmising out there were
21 inconclusive in the fact that no decision that arrived -- was
22 arrived at how much the rice would cost.

23 The thing was rice was two dollars -- \$22, and the
24 projected price that they say they were going to do it was
25 \$30. Twenty-two to 30, that's a big gap. There was the

1 question of price control in Liberia. I was one of those
2 people who felt strongly that the salesperson or the producer
3 should be responsible for transporting his goods to where he
4 will sell it so that there will be a standardized price. So
5 why should people in Monrovia pay less for cement or for rice
6 than the people in Careysburg or in Kakata? As you --
7 farther you went, the price went up. And you ask the man,
8 "Why is your price high? Why is it not like Monrovia?" He
9 said, "That's transportation."

10 Well, who's supposed to be responsible for
11 transportation? You. You go to grocery stores here, and you
12 pay for what they charge you, but they don't say well,
13 because the truck brought it here, so you got to pay the
14 transportation. Only thing, you pay tax.

15 But the question about people benefiting from the
16 rice production, whether it was imported -- the debate was
17 imported rice versus Liberian-grown rice and the government
18 subsidy. At this time, government was subsidizing the
19 importation of rice in order to keep the price down to 22.
20 That was the argument. Anything else that occurred during
21 the rice thing, Mr. Daniel Tolbert or whoever was producing
22 rice or who was going to benefit from that, I was not aware
23 of that. To tell you the truth, I was not aware.

24 The statement I made about the president's desire
25 for conciliation was one that many of the government

1 officials did not understand because you see, you got to
2 realize that these people came out of the Tubman era where
3 Mr. Tubman didn't take any nonsense. I was in Geneva,
4 Switzerland, with my friend Canon Carr, and President came
5 over there for health thing in Zurich. My friend and I took
6 the train, went to Zurich to go pay respect to the president,
7 as we usually do. And it was reported that the security
8 people had come from Liberia to report to the president that
9 something was brewing in there, in Liberia. Somebody had
10 written something on the wall or something like that.
11 President immediately took action and sent people there to go
12 find out who did it and arrest them.

13 But that was Tubman era. Tolbert era was
14 different. He wanted to talk to you. He would invite you,
15 and you -- you said you are a witness of the fact, you're
16 going to come in and witness all of that, you're invited to
17 the Mansion to dialogue. I remember one day sitting in my
18 office -- oh, what's the man name? I forgot his name right
19 now. Came to my office, put his hand in his hip pocket, and
20 showed me money that the president had given him. He said,
21 "Look what the president gave me." He said, "Go buy you rice
22 or buy you something," you know. So that was -- that was
23 what I saw and witnessed in terms of the president's take on
24 this thing. I don't think the president on his own desire
25 wanted to jail people or have them killed or have them shot.

1 That was not my experience or witness or impression.

2 When the rice riot took place, immediately --
3 immediately, right away -- the president set up a commission
4 you just mentioned -- Nete Sie Brownell was chairman -- to go
5 into the reasons, look into the reasons. In fact, I have a
6 list of the -- there's a book, somebody's book, either --
7 let's see. What's the man's name?

8 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: George Boley?

9 THE WITNESS: That somebody written about the
10 first republic.

11 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: That's Dr. George
12 Boley.

13 THE WITNESS: Got the list of the -- of the
14 commission members and all of that. Also, the True Whig
15 Party thing in Grand Bassa, the young people's wing and all
16 the people, people like Emmanuel Shaw and them were all up in
17 that thing there. So, you know, you have to look at it from
18 the point of view of where the president was coming from in
19 terms of integrating youth, young ideas, and young blood, if
20 you wish.

21 I think it was Massa that talk about the education
22 opportunities that we were trying to provide. In fact, we
23 determined that elementary education should be free up to
24 12th grade, and from 12th grade, based on the grades you
25 make, you get scholarship. Books would be free. Those were

1 some of the plans, so that's what I know.

2 Now with the detailed thing that you and the
3 president, you all talk about, you know, I usually may have
4 said something that needs explanation about the big bone and
5 so on. You know, I'm an old man now and so I don't remember
6 that, but you got good memory, and thank you for letting me
7 know that I said that.

8 No, the president was very concerned about the
9 agitation and the disruption of the process. I remember one
10 time the president said, "Gentlemen, let's keep this thing
11 safe. Let's not start anything that will take a long time to
12 cure." He said that. Among the young, young people. When
13 Baccus Matthews then came with the PPP thing from America,
14 President invited them, put them in Duko Palace hotel, give
15 them car to go travel all over the country to see the
16 development that was taking place, the self-help projects.
17 They came back to the Mansion and they -- some of them said
18 they were not impressed or it was not fast enough and so on.
19 Yeah.

20 So those are things that were going on, and the
21 president was very concerned about the disruption, and it
22 looked like he was misunderstood, as I said before; that his
23 spirit of conciliation was misinterpreted as a weakness. And
24 by the time people decided to take action, things got out of
25 hand.

1 So I'm not sure if I answered your questions all
2 together, but maybe that's because I didn't hear them
3 outright. But an investigation -- you mentioned the fact
4 that the recommendations of the commission were not
5 implemented. No. You know, when you -- and you will see
6 this. Letter of recommendations will come to you. That's
7 paperwork; that's talk. Talk is easy and cheap.

8 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Yes.

9 THE WITNESS: And action is hard. How you going
10 to implement all the things you're going to pull together?
11 That's going to be the real difficult part. You need money,
12 you need talents, resources to implement them.

13 But one thing the president did was set up a
14 Corruption Bureau headed by Isabel Karnga, head of the
15 Corruption Bureau, to investigate, to receive reports of
16 corrupt actions and so on. So I think if you look at it
17 overall, one might say that there were good intentions and
18 views and plans in the Tolbert administration. That's my
19 perspective.

20 I hope that helped to answer some of your
21 questions. And remember, I'm not going to -- I may not be
22 able to answer all your questions probably, but I'll give it
23 a shot. And then you can meet me in the hallway, have a
24 private conversation if I missed anything that you said.
25 Thank you very much, sir.

1 COMMISSIONER JOHN H.T. STEWART: Thank you.

2 THE WITNESS: Yes.

3 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Mr. Witness, first
4 I would like you to please -- you spoke of the late President
5 Tolbert vision and plan for Liberia. I didn't get all of it,
6 so you can always fill it in later.

7 And then I come to my main question. You spoke of
8 his five-year plan for Liberia, and you spoke about
9 agriculture and roads. I didn't get the other three.
10 Somewhere in between there, you went to other issues.

11 You also spoke that in 1980, there were two
12 problems facing Liberia, and you spoke of the issue of rice
13 production and of the increase in rice globally, but you
14 didn't speak on the second one, so I'm hoping that if not now
15 because of time limitation, but later on you can properly,
16 like you say, in the corridor field that.

17 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

18 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: My question -- I
19 have a question here. Again, I'm looking at the
20 administration of the late President Tolbert. My question is
21 not intended to question the late president's legacy or to be
22 critical or to even praise him, per se, but as part of our
23 work, we are to investigate antecedents of the Liberian
24 crisis. And we all know that the issue of the rice riot in
25 1979 played a huge role in what happened in 1980, and it was

1 just a ripple effect. So again, I will be looking at the
2 rice riot.

3 I remember as a junior high school student when
4 the riot took place, our parents had to lock us up in the
5 house, and we were standing in our room -- in our bedrooms
6 looking through the iron bar at the entire neighborhood gone
7 amuck. People had died from looting. People had died --
8 people just took the law in their hands, and that was my
9 first introduction to violence. It was very, very scary at
10 the time.

11 The question -- my question here borders around
12 the fact that we knew for sure that the late Albert Porte,
13 like Commissioner stated, was one of those who was mediating
14 between the government and also -- you called them the
15 agitators, but in the TRC process, we don't label people, so
16 I will just say those who were calling for change. And he
17 was trying to get the government to properly allow the
18 demonstration, but at the same time, he was also negotiating
19 with the Progressives at the time to find a more moderate
20 path instead of the demonstration. And everything he did
21 fell on deaf ears from I guess both the administration and
22 also the Progressives at the time. But the government had
23 sufficient information that perhaps if they had used force,
24 it would have been a deadly -- the result would have been
25 catastrophic.

1 My question here is with all the information that
2 the government had, why was it necessary to deploy police
3 officers on the streets that day, on the day of the
4 demonstration, police officers with uniform and also with
5 guns, knowing that the Progressives were determined in
6 holding this demonstration anyhow? Couldn't the government
7 have just allowed the demonstration, and even if they were
8 concerned about the destruction of property or so, but not to
9 allow uniform police officers with guns? Because just
10 looking -- just seeing police officers with uniform was
11 another form of agitation. That's one -- a portion of my
12 question.

13 The other portion is from your explanation, it
14 seemed to be that the president was conflicted as per that
15 demonstration because, like you said, his deep-rooted concern
16 for Liberia or for peace for Liberia. And apparently from
17 what you explained, he seemed very worried that the
18 demonstration could have gotten out of hand and probably
19 people could have gotten killed or so. So because of that,
20 you said it took him like three weeks debating that one issue
21 of whether to grant a permit or not.

22 My question here is if the president at that level
23 was conflicted, could he really reach a decision on whether
24 to allow the rice riot or not, who else besides the president
25 in the government -- say, the cabinet ministers -- who would

1 have been as powerful to give the command on the morning of
2 the demonstration to allow the shooting? Because you just
3 clarified that the late president did not instruct anyone to
4 shoot. So who besides the president could have been powerful
5 or could have taken upon himself based upon the power that
6 they had within the government to give the order to shoot
7 into the crowd or to even allow for the police to go to the
8 scene of the demonstration?

9 THE WITNESS: Very good question and very good
10 observation. As vice president, which I have been, and I
11 don't know how many of you have been vice presidents or not,
12 but if you are working with the president, you are not in
13 every detail of the sharing of either advice or consultation.
14 You are there at the request of the president: "Come at this
15 meeting" or "Be at this meeting" or "Be at this hearing" or
16 "Be a part of this" or so on.

17 But this rice thing here, like I said, it was on a
18 Saturday. I was heading to my farm. I got called to be at
19 the Mansion because the demonstration was occurring. During
20 this time, it was -- it became the issue of the Justice
21 Ministry and the Defense Ministry, and it is the Justice
22 Ministry that issues permits. They are in charge of the
23 police, and they issue permit for people to demonstrate.
24 That was not the first demonstration. There was the
25 demonstration that I -- that I participated in against

1 gambling, against gambling. I helped to lead the gambling
2 fight in Liberia, and the president vetoed that bill. And we
3 got permit. We went right straight to the Justice Department
4 with permit.

5 So the argument in this discussion was why not
6 grant them permit to demonstrate, which would have been a
7 peaceful thing? So when the Defense said we can stop it, we
8 will not let it occur because it's illegal, and Justice says
9 the same thing, you have -- you have to put yourself in the
10 position of the president and the vice president. The vice
11 president does not have -- he's one person. He ain't got no
12 army behind him. I ain't got no police. I can't order
13 police. I can't order the army. That's not my authority.
14 It's not my constitutional provision, you know.

15 I can tell my security man -- one of them is
16 somewhere around here. I say, "James Hunder, go get this for
17 me" and "Go get one chicken for me," you know. I can do
18 that. But the army -- the army is controlled by the Minister
19 of Defense. He knows how many battalions. I don't even know
20 how many soldiers we had. That was not part of my
21 prerogative, you know, because I didn't want to be president.
22 President supposed to know all that. And I didn't have to go
23 anywhere to do -- asked me, said, "How many soldiers you got
24 in the army?" Like one time, a big police man went to Sierra
25 Leone and they ask him, say, "What's the strength of your

1 army?" And the man say, "Well, so and so weighs 300 pound
2 and this other one weigh 500 pound, you know."

3 (Laughter.)

4 THE WITNESS: And the police -- the Justice
5 Department has police. So if you were president sitting down
6 there and this thing is occurring, who are you most likely to
7 listen to? Is it me, the vice president, who has not been in
8 government at any other time in my life except to be a clan
9 chief clerk when I was in the fifth grade? That's the first
10 government position I had, so I learned how to issue writ,
11 writ of arrest and writ of summons, 50 cents each. And I'd
12 take the 50 cents and the chief took 50 cents because I had
13 to write the writ. Only government job I had.

14 So, this whole issue of the demonstration to
15 happen or not to happen was basically persuaded by Justice
16 and Defense. There were some of us who might be called "the
17 dove." You know, you got hawks and the dove. The hawk says,
18 "Stop it. Don't let it happen. We can stop it. We got the
19 army." And the dove says, "No, let's find a different way
20 out." By this time, this dialogue was going on, the
21 demonstrators had already come to the capital -- what the man
22 name? Justice -- Temple of Justice. That's where the
23 gunfire broke out and the whole thing burst loose. Who shot
24 it? To this day, we don't know. Nobody has come up and
25 said -- did an investigation as to who shot that first gun or

1 who fired that first gun. We don't have no ballistic
2 intelligence people to see whose gun to look at and see what
3 the bullet thing was. So that's what happened on that.

4 You know, we can come now and say what -- you
5 know, hindsight 20/20. You can say now this should have
6 happened, this should have happened, this should have
7 happened. It's quite easy to do that. But if you are right
8 on the position in the heat of it, decisions become critical
9 and difficult to make. But I know as a witness and a part of
10 that government, and I want to reiterate that, that the
11 president, William Richard Tolbert, Junior, had good,
12 passionate intentions for the development of the Republic of
13 Liberia. He didn't live to see all his goals achieved.

14 We can do a "if" thing. "If." We can say if this
15 had not happened, where would Liberia be today? And those of
16 us who had the vision and the dream of the kind of Liberia
17 that we were hoping to see, as we have experienced in this
18 developed country, can now look back and say, oh, this could
19 have happened, this could have happened, and so on. I don't
20 know. Somebody did a Internet thing about what Liberia would
21 look like 2020 or twenty something. They got all these
22 high-rise buildings and crossover bridges and say Monrovia
23 look like this, Sinkor will look like this, and all of that,
24 sort of like a dream thing, you know. I looked at that I
25 say, "Huh, that look neat on paper, but it's rough on the

1 ground."

2 So that -- in your other testimonies and other
3 witnesses, like Mr. Stewart, you know, they would have more
4 information from their vantage point than from where I stood
5 and from where I saw things. So mine may not answer all your
6 questions, you know, as you may hope to get them. And mine
7 might be fragmentary because, you know, I -- men of the
8 cloth, men of the gospel are of peace, and so was the
9 president. You know, we believe in peace and we believe in
10 dialogue. We believe in dialogue. We believe in
11 conciliation, you know, and maybe that is where our politics
12 took maybe the wrong turn. I don't know about that. I
13 cannot make that judgment.

14 But also, let me just let you know that I was
15 not -- I was never a member of the True Whig Party. I was
16 not party affiliated. I never pay one cent to True Whig
17 Party. But I was incorporated into it by the president's
18 recommendation of me and the True Whig Party accepting my
19 candidacy. And I didn't fight it. I didn't -- because it's
20 the same Liberian people. You see, what -- people ask the
21 question, "Why did you" -- "Why did you become vice
22 president? You're a bishop of the church." But, you see,
23 the church and the country had the same vision of education,
24 of development. We were promoting those things. Of justice
25 and social and economic development. We all promoted those

1 things.

2 We all lived in the same country, we're all in the
3 same boat, and that's why I'm happy that on this -- on this
4 TRC, you got the Reverend brother there and you've got the
5 Sheikh, you know, who reads the Koran, and he's reading the
6 Bible, International Version you got here. And so the blend
7 of that is good because, you see, we don't only have
8 political responsibility for the building of a nation, but we
9 must have a sense of moral responsibility. And I think that
10 is what you are bringing in here, that moral and political
11 responsibility. And I think we were operating on both those
12 ends because to develop a wholesome, functioning society, you
13 got -- you got to have people loving each other. You got to
14 have neighbors -- who's my neighbor's keeper or my brother's
15 keeper and those kinds of things. Those things go hand in
16 hand.

17 I had a debate with Amos Sawyer one time on
18 television, ELBC or EL something there, about ideology -- the
19 ideological thing there, and they were trying to promote the
20 ideological part of it. You know, whether it's communism,
21 socialism, or capitalism, and things like that. And I said,
22 "For the average Liberian," I said, "look at it. The average
23 Liberian, what he really needs is not so much of what
24 political ideology will bring anything to him. He wants to
25 know how his children will go to school, where he will get

1 health help, where he may sleep, those kinds of things."
2 Basically food. Food. To provide food. Provide health.
3 Provide education for his children. That was the thing.
4 That's why the Liberians work so hard, and for the average
5 Liberian man like me from Gbarnga or Mabahn country, when you
6 say "communism," it doesn't mean anything. When you say
7 "rice," it makes a lot of difference. Yeah. When you say
8 "cassava," "dumboy," it makes sense. When you say "school,"
9 when you say "faith" and "hope," it means a whole lot. So
10 it's not -- it's not one-size-fits-all kind of thing. You've
11 got to have this diversity to develop all the issues.

12 So thank you so much for the question, and you can
13 meet me on the sidebar and we can discuss further, if you
14 have that. I'll be here all day tomorrow, I understand, so
15 if I don't clarify anything, you can check me out.

16 COMMISSIONER REV. GERALD COLEMAN: Bishop, thank
17 you for your presentation.

18 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

19 COMMISSIONER REV. GERALD COLEMAN: I've really
20 been inspired by certain things you said, especially your
21 comparison to the situation of our nation being a Grain Coast
22 where our people were producing food --

23 THE WITNESS: Yes. Yes.

24 COMMISSIONER REV. GERALD COLEMAN: -- and
25 exporting food --

1 THE WITNESS: Yes.

2 COMMISSIONER REV. GERALD COLEMAN: -- even before
3 1800.

4 THE WITNESS: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER REV. GERALD COLEMAN: And yet the
6 pioneers came, developed a new nation, and ended up with a
7 failed state where we could not even productively take care
8 of, feed our own people all those years. So it's really
9 surprising because it makes me wonder did our issue of
10 development and our so-called development planners in the
11 history of our country --

12 THE WITNESS: Yes.

13 COMMISSIONER REV. GERALD COLEMAN: -- what have
14 they been focusing on? Because I understand the issue of the
15 open-door policy, but why do you open the door if you have no
16 vision or plan for the people? You know, all it does, it
17 brings investment in and tends to just take away from you.
18 So it makes me realize that even the Firestone project, which
19 brought huge development -- the largest rubber-producing
20 company in the world -- but there's no value added for the
21 Liberian people involved, except for a few measly jobs, when
22 we could be producing food and exporting it on a larger
23 scale.

24 So when you look at that, I see that your
25 administration, from what you're telling us, was really

1 trying to make a difference, but yet you got caught up in the
2 issue of social-political change, and that difference turned
3 into death, hate, and destruction.

4 So when you look at all of that and you think of
5 how we're now trying to go forward in a new direction, what
6 would be your salient guidance to the future leaders of this
7 country with regards to ensuring that we properly kickstart
8 this process of national development this time around? That
9 would be my challenging question to you.

10 THE WITNESS: Let me touch on the open-door policy
11 thing. During the administration of Edwin James Barclay --
12 and probably King, but mainly Edwin Barclay -- starting
13 1930's to '44, it was a closed-door thing. No European could
14 do any business outside of Monrovia. That was the law. And
15 if any -- if any OAC, PZ, CRC did business outside of
16 Monrovia, they had to do it through a Liberian agent, a
17 Liberian agent. And that's how Liberian entrepreneurship
18 developed. Liberian people managed the European business in
19 Greenville, Sinoe, in Cape Palmas, in Buchanan, and Gbarnga,
20 and all of those places.

21 And during that time, you had Sam Smith and Sons,
22 business people. You had Vamuyan Corneh, business people and
23 transportation. You had Richards, business people and
24 transportation. You had James York, business and
25 transportation. Liberians. And Solo Pepe. You all know

1 Solo Pepe on Carey Street? Business people. Liberian people
2 business flourished.

3 Tubman time now, a different era, new thing,
4 open-door policy. And the open-door policy then opened up
5 the floodgate, and Lebanese people went to places that were
6 unheard of. You cross by canoe and they were out there
7 barefooted selling stuff all over Liberia. So the business
8 entrepreneurship, acumen, all went down. The competition was
9 too high because, you see, I don't know how it is today in
10 Liberia, but, you know, we were never profit oriented, so
11 when we do a little business, we ate the profit and the
12 capital all together and produced some -- it's like eating
13 the chicken and the chicken egg, so you end up with nothing.
14 So Solo Pepe went out of business. York was the last one.
15 Samuel Smith and Sons went out of business and all of that.

16 You know, so -- so the open-door policy did not
17 actually help the Liberian because we didn't set policies
18 whereby to limit, draw line, say, "All right, Europeans, you
19 do this business." You go to Ghana now, in Ghana, Ghanaians
20 are in charge of the business because they have drawn the
21 line. "Europeans, you do this much; this is your part.
22 Ghanaians, you do this part." Same thing could have been
23 done during that time to encourage the Liberian
24 entrepreneurship and business progress. So that's how that
25 happened.

1 So in this new Liberia, we got to encourage more
2 Liberian business and we got to draw the line somewhere to
3 bring peace and harmony and reconciliation. We got to enable
4 people, enable Liberians to have ownership and investment in
5 the country. Look in this country, right here in Minnesota.
6 Mr. J.B. something -- yes, Sears. Been here for years and
7 years. You can't go to Liberia now and see a long, 50-year
8 business or 100-year business. It's not there because
9 there's no continuum. They don't have no continuum.

10 So maybe in this new dynamic, we can begin to
11 start businesses the Liberian people can own. I think during
12 the Tolbert time -- and say what people may say about
13 Mesurado Group of Companies, but that was a Liberian company,
14 enterprise, and many Liberian businesses developed. There's
15 Oriole with the Weeks brothers or P.C. Parker. They had
16 paint and all of that. There was J.D. Phillips. Liberian
17 businesses were taking roots at this particular time. Parker
18 with paint; Clavenda Bright with pharmacy, pharmaceutical
19 things. It was taken up. But all of those things gone now,
20 so we cannot spend too much time -- of course it's necessary
21 for you to do that -- on the past, the past.

22 There are -- there are three days, two of which
23 don't mean anything: The past, which is yesterday, and
24 tomorrow, which is out there. Today is the most important
25 day. What are we going to do now? Where do we go from here

1 now? So I'm sure you're going to work on those things.

2 I got word that I shouldn't talk too long, so
3 thank you, man.

4 COMMISSIONER REV. GERALD COLEMAN: Thank you very
5 much.

6 THE WITNESS: Yeah, Mr. Sheriff. You sheriff?

7 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: I'm Commissioner
8 Pearl Brown Bull.

9 THE WITNESS: Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Bishop Warner,
11 when did you become vice president of Liberia? What year?

12 THE WITNESS: On the -- I was inaugurated on the
13 31st of October, 1977.

14 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: All right, that's
15 31 years ago.

16 THE WITNESS: Yes. But I was not vice president
17 that long.

18 (Laughter.)

19 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: 1980. That was 28
20 years ago.

21 THE WITNESS: Yes.

22 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Okay. For one who
23 have seen development and destruction in Liberia, I want to
24 say thank you for coming because you gave your reasons, what
25 motivated you to come.

1 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

2 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: And you said there
3 was respect for the efforts the TRC are making.

4 THE WITNESS: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Respect and honor
6 for all those who've died and your hope for the future --

7 THE WITNESS: Yes.

8 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: -- of Liberia --

9 THE WITNESS: Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: -- as we confront
11 our difficult past for a better future.

12 THE WITNESS: Yes. Yes.

13 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: You gave your
14 opinion on the late William R. Tolbert, Junior, that he had
15 good and passionate vision for Liberia and he believed in
16 peace, development, dialogue, and reconciliation.

17 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

18 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: The TRC work
19 starts from 1979, and thank you for giving us a clear picture
20 of the 1979 riot. You were in the inner cycle, and you give
21 an idea of what the Tolbert government were discussing during
22 that period. They wanted to see how they could stop
23 subsidizing the investors, those who were investing in rice,
24 and trying to subsidize the farmers, who were -- with this
25 concept of.

1 You also told us -- gave us they should come and
2 get away from subsidizing importers of rice to subsidizing
3 the farmers. And since you were with President Tolbert, you
4 were able to ponder with him on the welfare for Liberia at
5 that time. And that was you also gave him condition for your
6 involvement in the government, in his government.

7 With the rice riot, you also told us the role the
8 Defense and Justice Ministry played in our rice riot; the
9 role of political expediency or in expediency in the decision;
10 the role mostly -- which we didn't really ponder about -- the
11 economic interests of the private sector, those who had
12 interests, the importers, in this change where it was from
13 sub -- deviating from subsidizing importers of rice to want
14 to now subsidize the farmers.

15 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

16 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: You gave us the
17 vision that you all had of five years' plan for the country.
18 You talked about decentralization of the government.

19 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

20 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: You also talked
21 about reduction of the ministries, the various ministry,
22 centralizing the broadcast system, and mostly about
23 agriculture. Okay. We want to say thank you because by
24 giving us an idea of what really happened, we can understand,
25 and also by telling us today the truth that you knew nothing

1 about the war and your reason for not being in the country
2 April 12th, 1980; that you came to a conference and you were
3 to return.

4 So I want to say thank you because we have a clear
5 picture in law: You say the best evidence is always the --
6 the best evidence is the best evidence, what one really
7 needs, so you lived to tell the story. So I want to say
8 thank you very much, and as the TRC is comprised, like the
9 chairman said today, of people from various political,
10 ethnic, religious, and demographic areas of Liberia.

11 Commissioner Stewart just reminded me that he was
12 one of those from the Progressives, and I can say to you I
13 was one of those from the True Whig Party. I was the
14 national chairman of the women wing of the True Whig Party.
15 You were out of the country, but when they made the
16 announcement, all those who should come should give in --
17 give themselves in, I said, "Lord, I'm not going, and let
18 them forget my name." So today I'm here to tell that story,
19 and we want to continue to tell you thank you for putting
20 things in perspective.

21 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

22 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: I want to know, do
23 you have intention of -- I see you still contributing to
24 Liberia by giving a history and by being upright, saying the
25 truth, fear nothing but to do wrong. That was another

1 statement of the president --

2 THE WITNESS: Yes.

3 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: -- and I'm sure
4 those who worked with him shared the same vision. Do you
5 intend to return to Liberia? You said next year; right?

6 THE WITNESS: Yeah, next year. April -- I mean,
7 February. The first week in February I should be in
8 Monrovia, Liberia, by God's grace. Yes.

9 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: The mandate of the
10 TRC is to call everybody who can help us to contribute to our
11 work.

12 THE WITNESS: Yes.

13 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: And before
14 February next year, if we have the need to call on you, will
15 you be willing to come?

16 THE WITNESS: Definitely. Yes, definitely.

17 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Thank you for
18 being a part of the TRC process and contributing to our work.

19 THE WITNESS: Yes. My job is not over yet.
20 That's why -- that's why Allah got me here.

21 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Thank you.

22 THE WITNESS: Yeah. Let me just -- I'm coming,
23 Sheikh.

24 Let me just clarify one point on the rice thing.

25 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Sir Witness?

1 THE WITNESS: Yes.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Can you kind of just
3 combine that with your last response to Sheikh's questions?

4 THE WITNESS: Sir?

5 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Can you hold it?

6 THE WITNESS: Okay. Okay.

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: We'll hear from Sheikh
8 first.

9 THE WITNESS: Okay. Yeah. Very good. Thank you.
10 Thank you, sir.

11 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Thank you,
12 Bishop. Thank you for your presentation, your testimony. I
13 have combined questions.

14 Why did you decide to take oath on both Koran and
15 the Bible? That's number one.

16 THE WITNESS: Yes. Very good. Because, you see,
17 I embrace --

18 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Okay. Number
19 two: You talk about diversity among -- differences among
20 Liberian and the diaspora.

21 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

22 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: As one who
23 believed in unity and conciliation, what has been your role
24 in narrowing that gap of differences between and among the
25 Liberians --

1 THE WITNESS: Yes.

2 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: -- in the
3 diaspora?

4 THE WITNESS: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Number three,
6 it is said that charity, honesty, kindness begins home.

7 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

8 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: While you
9 were bishop in Liberia, the talented, young Georgian returned
10 to Liberia in the person of Dr. Taryor, and he was assigned
11 in Nimba County --

12 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

13 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: -- when at a
14 time the slogan was "You hold a position, not who knows you,
15 but what you can," were placed under somebody in Ganta that
16 could hardly read and write as superior, as pastor.

17 Number four: Yes, it is the prerogative of the
18 president, of a president, to nominate his lieutenant, his
19 running mate, and that you were listed among other prominent
20 Liberians. But those who were around knew that the consensus
21 were built around Jackson F. Doe, who the party and many
22 politicians agreed that he should be the running mate in
23 order to reduce the suspicion, the mistrust that was
24 inherited by the late Tolbert. And for some reason, he came
25 out to say he had a dream, he had a vision, which of course

1 dream, vision, it's between God and the person who claims to
2 have received that vision. But you, as a bishop, who were
3 very critical at the time and were aware of -- was aware of
4 the political tension at the time, don't you think it could
5 have been appropriate for you to decline and say in order to
6 reduce tension, let go -- let the man who consensus has been
7 built should be the running mate?

8 These are my questions.

9 THE WITNESS: Yeah, that -- that was a
10 possibility, but I was not privy to the discussion or the
11 consensus as to whether Jackson Doe was the one to have been.
12 I was outside of the loop in that -- in that arena. I only
13 learned about his name when the president called me to Bentol
14 to tell me who all he had talked with. And I had -- I had no
15 reason not to accept his offer for me to help him in the
16 direction that he wanted to lead the country.

17 That is that part. And what was the next
18 question? You got it all written down there, so --

19 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Why did you
20 take oath on Koran?

21 THE WITNESS: Yeah, because I saw it is an
22 opportunity for me to be of help. Because, you see, it is
23 one thing to criticize something from the outside. It's one
24 thing to say oh, you ought to do this, you ought to do this,
25 but if you are invited to come in and help in doing the

1 things you criticize or right the wrong, I felt it my
2 patriotic duty. Being a bishop doesn't mean that you are not
3 a patriotic citizen of the country, so I saw it as an
4 opportunity in which I can exercise my patriotic duty to
5 serve at a limited time, which was that -- because I came in
6 after Greene, so it was not retroactive that I go back for
7 that time. At the end of that term that the president was
8 elected for, we both agreed that we will step down. So I
9 saw -- I saw this.

10 And I think for that very short period of time
11 that I'd been there, the two years, I made some impact, I
12 made some contribution, and history is to judge that one way
13 or the other. But the reason, the direct reason why I
14 accepted is because I was activist and I wanted change. I
15 was one that was criticizing the government. So your
16 government say well, come and help, so I couldn't say no.

17 In the Methodist Church, the person who comes up
18 with an idea and say we ought to do this, that's the person
19 you put that committee on and you chair the committee because
20 he has the vision, he sees it, and he can better plan it and
21 do it. So I accepted that. And I don't think -- in my own
22 conscience, in my own heart, I don't think I did a wrong
23 thing, you know.

24 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Okay. Why
25 the opportunity --

1 THE WITNESS: That's why at night when I go to
2 sleep, I sleep.

3 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Why the
4 opportunity was not given to Dr. Taryor?

5 THE WITNESS: Okay. The question of Dr. Taryor --
6 you see, I assisted Dr. Taryor to come to school in America.
7 Through my initiative, he was at Atlanta at Gammon
8 Theological Seminary. I give him scholarship to go to the
9 school there in California, he and his wife. I helped them
10 come back home. I appointed him at Gbarnga School of
11 Theology. He was a professor there and a dean.

12 When the riot took place, the rice riots took
13 place and Taryor fled to Guinea, I was the one who brought
14 him from Guinea to my house. His mother was at my house, ask
15 him. And the Nimba students at Cuttington sent me a
16 resolution petition to help get Dr. Taryor back into Liberia.
17 I did that. So -- and then -- and then I appointed him at
18 the church in Cape Palmas, at Mount Scott Methodist Church.
19 The people say well, they don't want to receive him. I, as a
20 bishop, I cannot force anybody. That's not how our system
21 works. I cannot force a pastor on the people because the
22 people have to support him and live with him and all of that.

23 So, I consulted with him, and we went to Tappita.
24 I went to Tappita and married Taryor and his wife up. So --
25 and then when they came here, Taryor and I came on the same

1 airplane. And what did I do when they came here? His bishop
2 where he wanted to work in -- this is in Chicago here -- came
3 to me and asked me for a recommendation of Taryor. I give
4 Taryor the recommendation, and he got appointment right in
5 that Chicago. So I don't think that I did anything wrong to
6 Taryor, you know. It's just a misunderstanding.

7 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: The diversity
8 among the Liberians, the differences among the Liberians,
9 what have been your effort?

10 THE WITNESS: Differences among --

11 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: You in your
12 testimony said that there are differences.

13 THE WITNESS: Well, the thing is, see, I have been
14 a promoter of peace every opportunity I have, and the people
15 here in Minnesota who were at this twenty-six -- what year,
16 twenty-six it was -- can talk about my outcry for unity,
17 unity, united Liberia. That's the only way our future will
18 be bright and right. So I have not kept silent on the issue
19 of coming together and being united.

20 Kerper Dwanyen was here. Is he here now? He's
21 gone? But there are witnesses. Minnesotans who are here are
22 witnesses to that effect and wherever I went. Just recently,
23 I was in Florida, Ft. Pierce, raised \$10,000 one night to
24 build three clinics in Bassa B District -- or Bassa 3, Bassa
25 4 -- District 4 -- District 3, 4, and 5. Five is in River

1 Cess. Clinics. And they're going to do it, they're going to
2 put clinics there. Or I can talk about the money I've raised
3 to establish schools in Liberia through the Methodist Church.
4 So I'm not here sitting idle hiding somewhere, you know. I
5 am promoting Liberia and initiatives.

6 Bishop John Inness, the man I raised -- helped to
7 raise and sponsored him in school, he's the bishop now, and
8 he's doing dynamic work in the country. They're building
9 schools and rebuilding schools, so education is going to be
10 one of the key points, the pillars in bringing reconciliation
11 to Liberia. May I sit down with a Gio man in the classroom
12 and we studying the same thing, we doing the same ABC, we
13 become friends. And that's the way I, Bassa man, got Loma
14 friend, Gio friend, Mano friend. I used to have girlfriend
15 like that, too, but --

16 (Laughter.)

17 THE WITNESS: Ha, ha, ha. And so forth. But I've
18 been -- I've been a very friendly, outgoing person, you know.

19 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Thank you.

20 THE WITNESS: But I help Liberians. Each time I
21 talk, I tell them about coming together, coming together.
22 And you see, here's the thing: The Liberians here in the
23 diaspora, they are enlightened, they have a better chance
24 because they know the system, how it works here. They know
25 when you come to stop sign, they stop. When they see red

1 light, they stop. So they are disciplined in a way, and they
2 could help Liberia in the development in the future.

3 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you.

4 THE WITNESS: So I'm promoting those kinds of
5 things, sir.

6 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Thank you
7 very much.

8 THE WITNESS: Thank you. And the reason why I
9 took both books is because I embrace all faiths that are for
10 justice and peace and harmony. I lived with Mandingo people;
11 I used to eat sumabean right in Gbarnga there with my hands.
12 So when that mosque was built there in Gbarnga, I was
13 standing right there to dedicate it, you know. So I don't
14 discriminate in religion. I was secretary of the interfaith
15 community in Syracuse, New York, for three years.

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you, Mr. Witness.

17 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir. Thank you very much. Now
18 I talk too long. You all get me started here. You all get
19 me started here now.

20 (Laughter.)

21 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: It's just that we have
22 constraints that are beyond our control.

23 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

24 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: We would have loved to
25 continue and ask you more thought-provocative questions, but

1 such are the limitations for now. But just one last
2 question.

3 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

4 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You made a profound
5 statement that the first person who was shot or who died
6 during the 1979 riots was a student?

7 THE WITNESS: Yes, Gabriel Scott. His name is
8 Gabriel Scott.

9 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Gabriel.

10 THE WITNESS: Gabriel Scott, yeah. Gabriel Scott.

11 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: And he was a police
12 officer?

13 THE WITNESS: Yeah, he had joined the police force
14 after high school graduation. He had joined the police
15 force. Yeah.

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: So does that suggest
17 that the demonstrators were provocative, they fired the first
18 shot?

19 THE WITNESS: We don't know where the shot came
20 from. It could have been one of these pass-by shots or
21 something, but it may not have been aimed at him, you know.

22 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: May have been a street
23 bullet.

24 THE WITNESS: But one of these flying things. You
25 know, that could have happened that way.

1 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Gabriel Scott. Okay.

2 THE WITNESS: Because, you know, the whole -- the
3 presence of the police actually was not intended -- our
4 hope -- it was not intended to stop the demonstration because
5 if the demonstration could start from New Kru Town and cross
6 Vaitown Bridge and come up on -- what the street -- Johnson
7 Street and come Johnson Road and come to capital, and it was
8 not stopped anywhere in there, why would they stop it at the
9 Temple of Justice?

10 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: It was getting too close
11 to the Mansion.

12 THE WITNESS: We are too close to the Mansion.
13 That's another reason. But, you know, we just thought it was
14 one of those accidental bullets, and that set the spark off.

15 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Yeah.

16 THE WITNESS: That set the spark off.

17 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much --

18 THE WITNESS: Thank you, sir.

19 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: -- Vice President Warner
20 for coming and sharing your insight and perspectives with the
21 Commission. Apart from your direct testimony, you've made a
22 couple of recommendations, which we feel are very, very
23 important.

24 THE WITNESS: Yes. Yes.

25 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Memorialization and

1 making sure that our people do not easily forget the past.
2 Thank you very much. We appreciate it.

3 THE WITNESS: Yes. Thank you. Thank you very
4 much.

5 (Applause.)

6 (Testimony of Bishop Bennie DeQuency Warner
7 concluded.)

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I, MONICA R. MORIARTY, a Registered Diplomate Reporter and Certified Realtime 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 10th day of June, 2008, at the time and place specified.

Dated: July 14, 2008

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