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TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

DIASPORA PROJECT

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

TESTIMONY OF
DR. AUGUSTINE KONNEH

TRC Commissioners:

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Vice Chairperson Dede Dolopei
Oumu Syllah
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1 PROCEEDINGS

2 (The following proceedings were had and made
3 of record, commencing at approximately 11:34 a.m.)

4 MR. SIRLEAF: Please be seated, ladies and
5 gentlemen.

6 Shall we take our seats, please.

7 Thank you. Thank you.

8 At this time we will ask all of us to please
9 turn off your cell phones and then check them in, I'm
10 told.

11 Well, those who have just entered, I
12 don't -- all of those, you need to be checked at the
13 front. The bags need to be checked and inspected,
14 please. We are strictly enforcing that. We beg your
15 indulgence.

16 Turn the cell phones off as well since you
17 will be here with us this morning. And others who have
18 just arrived, you need to check the bags, check in, and
19 follow all the rules that have been established. Thank
20 you very much.

21 At this time we will begin the hearing very
22 momentarily, but before our first witness enters, I'd
23 like to make a quick comment about the reason why we
24 are beginning with an expert witness.

25 Our first witness is a -- is a historian.

1 He's a professor of the history, who is a Liberian as
2 well. He is coming to talk to us about -- give us
3 overview of the Liberian history because, as the
4 chairman said, part of the Commission's job is to help
5 us review our history, clarify our history.

6 And so in order to do that, we have to
7 understand where we've come from and how we've gotten
8 where we've gotten to. And to do that, to create our
9 context and -- and establish that background before our
10 witnesses come, we have invited an expert historian to
11 help us understand that.

12 And so, just so that we all are not
13 confused, we are not beginning with a victim. The
14 first witness is -- is an expert witness.

15 I will now turn over to the TRC hearing
16 officer, who will begin the formal hearing proceedings.

17 Thank you all for your patience and your
18 cooperation.

19 MR. TEAYAH: Okay. Thank you, ladies and
20 gentlemen. My name is John Teayah, and this afternoon
21 we now have the opportunity to call on the first
22 witness, Augustine Konneh, to come forward to make his
23 presentation.

24 CHAIR VERDIER: Shall we kindly rise for the
25 administration of the oath.

1 AUGUSTINE KONNEH,
2 being first duly sworn to tell the truth,
3 testified as follows:

4 MR. TEAYAH: Please be seated.

5 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Mr. Witness, I want
6 to say welcome to the TROC public hearings. On behalf
7 of the Commission, I extend you thanks and appreciation
8 for volunteering to come and assist this process of
9 truth seeking, peace building, and reconciliation.

10 We are the Commission, various Liberians who
11 come forward to assist in this process because we
12 believe it is part of the patriotic duty of every
13 Liberian to support a process that will definitely lead
14 to a lasting peace in our country.

15 And most Liberians are volunteering to come
16 forward just to make their contribution, and today you
17 have come to delve a little bit into our history and
18 perhaps trace some of the root causes of our conflict
19 to the past. We appreciate that, and this is your
20 opportunity.

21 As you have surmised, this is a national
22 process for the Commissioners to conduct a hearing in
23 the U.S., but there's a library back home in Liberia,
24 it's going to be archived, transcribed, and all of
25 those will be left for prosperity. So we thank you

1 very much.

2 I will use this time to introduce the
3 Commissioners here present to you. Following that, you
4 will introduce yourself, and then you can make your
5 presentation. You may choose to stand or remain seated
6 in making your presentation. We have the podium
7 available.

8 On my left, on the extreme, is Commissioner
9 Sheikh Kafumba Konneh, Pearl Brown Bull, Gerald
10 Coleman, Dede Dolopei, Massa Washington, John Stewart,
11 Oumu Syllah. I'm Jerome Verdier.

12 THE WITNESS: I'm Augustine Konneh. I
13 happen to know this gentleman that's sitting here. He
14 happens to be my uncle so.

15 My parents are originally from Cape Mount,
16 and we were born in Nimba and then my parents live
17 in -- in Lofa. And we had the opportunity to live
18 there for some time and then go to school across the
19 border in Sierra Leone, and then came to the United
20 States in -- since 1987.

21 I'm also one of those who is a victim of the
22 war because my -- both of my parents, and he knows, my
23 mom and dad were killed during the war, and I was able
24 to get some of my siblings here with me in the United
25 States.

1 So it's a pleasure and also a very solemn
2 moment for -- for me to be given the opportunity by The
3 Advocates for Human Rights, the Truth and
4 Reconciliation Commission, to share my own thoughts
5 with regards to giving a brief history in understanding
6 the Liberian civil war.

7 So I'm glad to do that, Mr. Commissioner.

8 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very
9 much. You may proceed with your presentation.

10 THE WITNESS: If it's okay, I will stand.
11 You know, professors always like to stand.

12 I just want to acknowledge the fact that the
13 Commissioner, the chair of the -- the Truth and
14 Reconciliation Commission and Ahmed Sirleaf did say
15 some things here at the beginning that are very
16 important for us to understand with regards to coming
17 to understand our history, our diversity, and it's from
18 that perspective that I'm looking at this brief history
19 of Liberia so that we can understand the root causes of
20 the Liberian civil war.

21 For those of you who don't know where
22 Liberia is, I will say Liberia is on -- if you look at
23 the African map, it's in the Atlantic southern part of
24 West Africa. It has boundaries on the west with Sierra
25 Leone, in the north with Guinea, and on the east,

1 southeast, with the Ivory Coast.

2 The population, one might say at the time,
3 was about 3.2; others will say 3.5 million. In terms
4 of size, for Americans, we can say that it's comparable
5 to the state of Tennessee. It's slightly larger than
6 the state of Ohio.

7 Liberia do have rich natural and mineral
8 resources. We do have timber, we do have rubber, we do
9 have iron ore, we do have gold, we do have diamond, and
10 other -- other kind of resources besides.

11 Liberia is a member of ECOWAS, the Economic
12 Community of West African States. It's also a member
13 of the Mano River Union. In fact, it's the founding
14 member. Two countries formed the Mano River Union in
15 1973 - Sierra Leone and Liberia. And then in 1980,
16 Guinea joined the Mano River Union.

17 And so Liberia is in a very unique
18 situation. In fact, it's so unique that many of our
19 neighboring African countries see us as the 51st state
20 of the United States. Why? Because of this long
21 allied history that we do share with the United States
22 historically, financially, for over 100 years. So you
23 can see the uniqueness of Liberia.

24 Where do one start to understand the history
25 of Liberia? Well, Liberians are quick to say that

1 their country is the oldest African republic and the
2 only country within the continent that was not
3 colonized during the colonial period. Rather, it was a
4 country established for repatriated people of African
5 descent that were returning from the United States that
6 we call Settlers, that we call Americo-Liberians, that
7 we also call Congo.

8 You know, Ethiopia made the same claim that
9 they were also not under colony rule but, of course, we
10 do know that they were for some time under the Italian
11 rule.

12 So then the question becomes, what was in
13 Liberia before the Settlers got there. Before the
14 arrival of the Settlers in the 19th Century, there were
15 16 ethnic groups that inhabited what became known as
16 Liberia.

17 There's not enough time for me to go through
18 all of these 16 ethnic groups, but it's important for
19 us to know that they spoke a mosaic of languages and
20 dialects. But although these people were mingling
21 and -- and making this movement to the area where they
22 find themselves, they also lived in a very distinct
23 geographical areas in the region where they find
24 themselves.

25 We do not know when these people came to

1 this region. We, as historians, are still trying to --
2 to revisit and -- and -- and reconstruct the earliest
3 movement of these people into this area. But there's
4 one thing that we do believe and that we do know: That
5 these earliest people that were moving in this region
6 that became known as Liberia were coming from the north
7 as a part of the southward migration, especially when
8 we saw the great Sudanic states of Mali and Songhay
9 decline and collapsing. These people were making the
10 movement to a better place looking for land.

11 So we can say that by the 15th and 16th
12 Century, we saw this movement. And where did they
13 settle? They settled along the coastal areas. Why is
14 the coastal area important? Well, the coastal area is
15 important for sociocultural interaction. These people
16 mingled, interacted with one another.

17 But not only that this coastal area was
18 important for sociocultural interaction, it was this
19 area that these people converged for trade purposes.
20 But it was also in this coastal area that the Monrovia
21 trade was intensive, and we had all kinds of slave
22 ports being established in this area.

23 But there's one more thing that is
24 important. It was in this coastal area that the
25 Settlers first established a Liberian government as

1 they pressed inland. So this coastal area becomes
2 extremely important.

3 So it's important for us to understand that
4 prior to 1800, that there were ethnic groups that
5 established themselves in this region that became known
6 as Liberia.

7 Then came the 1800s. We saw the settlement
8 of the Settlers. When did this begin? I will claim
9 that the establishment, the settlement in Liberia began
10 in 1821, with the protection of the American Government
11 and the private sponsorship of the American
12 Colonization Society.

13 These Settlers forged American morals and
14 strategies as they established themselves along the
15 coast. One of those strategies, outright conquest, the
16 purchase of land that were not subject for sale, the
17 conversion of treaties of friendship into owners, deeds
18 of ownership, a Settler elite monopolized power and
19 resources.

20 The majority of the Indigenous peoples were
21 controlled by force. But not only that they were
22 controlled by force, their leaders, their chiefs, were
23 corrupted into a -- a system of indirect rule.

24 That's why I make the claim that even though
25 Liberia was not colonized like other African countries,

1 but the historical and political conjecture that
2 emerged from the settlement, particularly the
3 relationship between the returnees and the Indigenous
4 peoples, produced familiar colonial conditions.

5 What were those conditions? Exploitation,
6 inequality, monopolization of power and resources.
7 These conditions, I would suggest, led to deep
8 contradictions, conflicts, and suspicion between the
9 Indigenous peoples and the Settlers. Thus, I will say
10 that the nature of the settlement made the demonization
11 of the state into authoritarianism almost inevitable.

12 How can I prove this? We have to look at
13 the roots of authoritarianism in Liberia. What were
14 the roots of authoritarianism? The roots of
15 authoritarianism were started by the American
16 Colonization Society governing the settlements in
17 Liberia.

18 For example, the organization introduced
19 several repressive measures. What were those measures?
20 The Nuisance Law, which made it illegal for any
21 Liberian to organize or participate in demonstration
22 against the colonial government. Second was the
23 Association Law, which banned Liberians from becoming
24 members of any organization that was not sanctioned by
25 the colonial government.

1 So here what we saw, those who violated this
2 rule were subject to fines, were subject to flogging,
3 they were subject to imprisonment, they were subject to
4 having their property confiscated. So in the initial
5 stage, what we saw, that there was a suppression of the
6 Indigenous peoples.

7 But following this colonial rule, each
8 Settler independent state formalized aspects of these,
9 what I call authoritarianism in Liberia. They denied
10 citizenship to the Indigenous peoples. They violated
11 the human rights of the citizens by forcing them to
12 work in government projects without compensation. They
13 levied taxes against the Indigenous people without
14 allowing them representation. So that from the
15 J.J. Roberts administration, following to the latter
16 administration of the Settlers that we saw, maintain a
17 fine chain of this authoritarianism.

18 Let me give you an example of this kind of
19 authoritarianism by the Settler government. Let's take
20 the Arthur Barclay administration from 1904 to 1943
21 (sic). I will claim that the Arthur Barclay
22 administration laid the basis for the
23 institutionalization of authoritarianism in Liberia.

24 How? Well, under Arthur Barclay, we first
25 saw the Frontier Force. Under this arrangement, this

1 military organization was responsible for policing the
2 interior, but not only policing the interior, to make
3 sure that there is tax payment compliance; but not only
4 to make sure that there was tax payment compliance, to
5 make sure the chiefs are accountable to Arthur Barclay.

6 Thus, what we saw under Arthur Barclay's
7 regime, that the Frontier Force became the principal
8 instrument of coercion used against the Indigenous
9 people as they were suppressed with regards to their
10 rights.

11 And then we saw the -- the famous regime of
12 William V. S. Tubman, which many people believe was the
13 golden age of Liberia. I will submit that even though
14 we saw foreign investments, it was an attempt to be
15 able to bring the Indigenous people and the Settlers
16 together economically and politically.

17 I will suggest that during the William V. S.
18 Tubman regime, we saw an extension of authoritarianism.
19 How? By developing a network, a security network which
20 engaged in spying, intimidating, and imprisoning
21 Indigenous peoples who were opposing the Settler
22 government.

23 But it was under William Tubman that we saw
24 that the True Whig Party became institutionalized as a
25 single party. All of those workers for the government

1 were forced to become members of the party, and their
2 salaries, portions of their salaries were taken and
3 given for the maintenance and the functioning of the
4 party. But not only that, we also find that that
5 government used state resources to provide benefits and
6 salaries for party officials.

7 And then we saw the William R. Tolbert
8 regime. When Tolbert came into power in 1971, he
9 vacillated between liberalization and authoritarianism.
10 But it became very clear on which side Tolbert was,
11 because we saw on April 12, 1979, when Liberians were
12 out there demonstrating as a result of the exorbitant
13 high price of rice, Liberia's staple food,
14 President Tolbert ordered armed troops to shoot and
15 kill Liberians that were out there.

16 And thus, later on, those who were part of
17 that movement and that organization, like MOJA and PAL,
18 those leaders were all arrested. And even student
19 government leaders were also arrested and thrown into
20 jail, and some of them were not even given any kind of
21 justice.

22 So I will claim that given this repressive
23 political climate, the proximate conditions for
24 triggering violent regime change was ripened; and as a
25 result of this, we saw the coup of 1980.

1 What brought us to the coup of 1980?
2 There are many other factors, but in 1980, April 19 --
3 April 14, 1980, seventeen enlisted men under the
4 auspices of a sergeant known as Samuel Kanyon Doe,
5 overthrew the government of Tolbert. Fourteen of his
6 top officials were executed.

7 Subsequently we saw put in place a
8 government of civilian -- made up of civilian and
9 military officials known as the People's Redemption
10 Council came to power.

11 How, then, can we evaluate this regime.
12 Unfortunately, Doe decided to continue the same pattern
13 of administration that he inherited. In fact, I will
14 suggest that he expanded the dragnets. Here he was
15 ruling by decrees. There was one decree that
16 prohibited workers from striking. There was another
17 law that made it impossible for schools and other
18 institution of higher learning from having student
19 governments. But not only that, it was the famous
20 Decree 88A, which allowed for anyone that was suspected
21 of criticizing Doe's government to be arrested and sent
22 to jail with no justice.

23 So what we saw during Doe's regime, that Doe
24 manipulated ethnicity. Not only manipulated ethnicity,
25 also manipulated corruption, mediocrity, ineptitude,

1 and even used violence to govern.

2 And as a result of this, people became
3 despondent. In fact, it is very important for us to
4 understand that Doe used ethnicity as a principal
5 weapon to govern. He selected members who were loyal
6 to him of his ethnic group, the Krahn people, and placed
7 them in position. Edward Teye was commissioner of
8 immigration; George Boley, minister of education and
9 others. Harry Nayou was also minister of state for
10 presidential affairs.

11 And he did the same thing with regards to
12 the military. He ethnicized the military. Those who
13 were loyal to him were put in place so that they can
14 cut down on attempt coups, plots, and demonstrations.
15 In fact, many of them did. They pillaged, they raped,
16 and they arrested and tortured those who opposed the
17 Doe government.

18 But let me say here that in spite of this
19 multitude of offenses that Doe committed while he was
20 president, the proverbial straw that broke the camel's
21 back was the stealing of the 1985 election.

22 What happened in the 1985 election? Doe
23 first disregarded the approved constitution. He banned
24 those parties that he realized will create a certain
25 kind of opposition to him during the election. Parties

1 like United People's Party that was led by the late
2 Baccus Matthews; the Liberian People's Party that was
3 led by Amos Sawyer; the Liberian Action Party that was
4 led by Jackson F. Doe, no relationship to Samuel Doe.

5 And then, while denying the rights for these
6 people to run, in the guise of fairness and democracy,
7 he allowed those lesser parties that would not pose any
8 problems to him to contest in the election; like LUP,
9 the Liberian Unification Party; the Unity Party of
10 Kesselly.

11 And while the election was going on and he
12 realized that he wanted to monopolize power, he formed
13 his own political party, the National Democratic Party
14 of Liberia. And while the election took place, and he
15 realized that even at that he was losing power, while
16 the counting of the votes was going on, he ordered that
17 the counting stop and all ballots should be taken to
18 Monrovia. There in Monrovia he hand-picked people that
19 would count the ballots. And what happened? At the
20 end of the day, he became the winner, 51 percent; and
21 Doe, Jackson F. Doe, was the one that came second.

22 This really created a problem for the
23 Liberian people. So even the little credibility that
24 Doe had at this point in time vanished completely.

25 As a result of this fraudulent election,

1 there was an attempt, an attempted coup led by
2 Thomas Quiwonkpa, who originally is from Nimba, who had
3 helped Doe come to power. Quiwonkpa was killed,
4 murdered, and reprisals later on, began to surface as a
5 result of him coming from Nimba. Targets of people
6 from Man, who are Mano and Gio from Nimba, continued;
7 and as a result of this, there were more and more cries
8 by the Liberian people so that there can be a change.
9 And at the end of the day, the Liberian people became
10 despondent. And as a result of this, we saw that we
11 were also coming to a new change from a violent
12 perspective.

13 But what is important for us also to
14 understand, that under Doe's rule, the economy was also
15 in shambles. In fact, Doe and his party, we learn,
16 that really embezzled 300 million dollars. He,
17 himself, as an individual, was able to amass about 200
18 million dollars, which he deposited in banks in London
19 and other places, DCCI, and all those other places.
20 And as a result of this, there was no turning back with
21 regards to the changes that were about to take place in
22 Liberia.

23 But just to put this within a context, I
24 must suggest that the American Colonization Society
25 authoritarianism that was laid and was expanded and

1 sustained by the various leaders, starting from
2 J.J. Roberts on to Doe, I would claim, laid the
3 foundation for the civil war that we experienced in
4 Liberia.

5 Why do I say that? For long period of time,
6 the Liberian people were looking for someone to change
7 their political and economic situation. For long
8 period of time, they were -- suffered politically and
9 economically. And so when Doe came to power, his
10 failure of transforming this unjust provincial,
11 political, and economic situation created hopelessness,
12 created fear, created despair.

13 And so when Charles Taylor came and said
14 that I am the one that have come to save you, the
15 Liberian people who were dissatisfied gave support to
16 Charles Taylor. This brought us to the civil war.

17 December 24, 1989, Charles Taylor, who was
18 first in the United States, we were told that he was in
19 jail and how he escaped and then left and then went to
20 Ivory Coast. That's another story, we're not going to
21 go into that. But he was in Ivory Coast and he founded
22 his National Patriotic Front of Liberia and entered the
23 country through Ivory Coast. And here, the man started
24 with very few people. We find out that he had this
25 great number of people that joined his movement.

1 But what happened with Charles Taylor?
2 Charles Taylor was able to amass this kind of support
3 and was able to gain control of many of the -- the
4 counties within Liberia. In fact, we're told that 80
5 percent of the -- the states within Liberia were under
6 the control of Charles Taylor, with the exception of
7 Monrovia.

8 The question then becomes, why was he not
9 able to get into Monrovia. Now I can say we thank God
10 that he didn't get to Monrovia. Because Charles Taylor
11 became greedy. He became selfish. He became very
12 flamboyant. At the beginning, he wanted to just take
13 control of Doe and get him out of power, but he was not
14 able to do that.

15 His second in command, Prince Johnson,
16 was able to kill Doe, and many people said to
17 Charles Taylor, the enemy now is gone, why can't we
18 move the country forward. Of course, Charles Taylor
19 says, I want to be the president of Liberia.

20 Well, he did find out that, in the long run,
21 he was not going to be the president of Liberia through
22 the gun. No matter what happened, later on he had to
23 succumb in going through the democratic process.

24 But what we see here, that a new government,
25 an interim government, was put in place in 19 -- in --

1 it was put in place immediately after the death of Doe
2 in 1990.

3 This war, which is the first seven year war
4 that we experienced, claimed many lives, destroyed
5 property. In fact, I will say it really brutalized the
6 consciousness and spirituality of the Liberian people
7 and even pushed Liberia to the brink of collapse.

8 This war created and developed a culture of violence
9 and intolerance, a culture of corruption, and a culture
10 of -- of undemocratic attitude. In this war, nurtured
11 children to kill as soldiers. And, in fact, what we
12 saw, the very fragile infrastructure of the country
13 were all destroyed. Not even this institution of
14 higher learning were spared.

15 Amidst this chaos, we saw national and
16 international organizations trying to restore peace in
17 Liberia. ECOWAS played a very important role. After
18 the death of Doe in 1990, ECOWAS deployed a military
19 wing known as ECOMOG in Liberia. And then there were
20 other efforts to try to restore peace to Liberia and
21 there were all kinds of agreements that were signed.
22 There are many of you who are here who participated in
23 this effort.

24 But the -- the most prudent effort was the
25 one in July 1996, when ECOWAS's leaders went to Abuja,

1 the capital of Nigeria, and were able to come up with a
2 very rigorous timetable with regards to restoring peace
3 in Liberia, with regards to encampment, with regards to
4 disarmament, and with regards to repatriation.

5 Even though all of these things were not
6 done completely, we saw July 19, 1997, there was an
7 election that was held in Liberia, and that election
8 unfortunately brought in Charles Taylor as president of
9 Liberia. We were told that he had 75 percent of the
10 vote, and only -- the next person that was in line,
11 Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, had only ten percent.

12 I think the question many people have asked,
13 why did Liberians vote for Charles Taylor. Well, I
14 will give two reasons. There are more reasons, but I
15 will just share two.

16 One, Charles Taylor went to the Liberian
17 people and said, in Liberian English, listen, I spoil
18 it, let me fix it. That means, I destroyed the
19 country, give me the opportunity to rebuild it. So
20 that during the time of election, Liberians were
21 singing the song, he kill my pa, he kill my ma, I will
22 still vote for him.

23 But there was a second reason. Liberians
24 were voting for peace. Liberians were voting for
25 prosperity. Liberians were voting for democracy,

1 hoping that at the end there will be democracy, but
2 Liberians were also voting for reconciliation.

3 Did this reconciliation occur?

4 Unfortunately, this did not happen. In fact, under the
5 regime of Charles Taylor, what we saw, that the human
6 rights violations were in a gloom and doom. There are
7 many of you that understand what I meant by that.

8 Journalists were killed, even allies of Charles Taylor
9 were killed. The case of Samuel Dokie is very
10 prominent with regards to those who suffered there.
11 His son, Chucky, was in charge of the anti-terrorist
12 unit that went around hunting people and killing
13 people.

14 But not only that there was this doom and
15 gloom human rights, the economy was also -- remained
16 very terrible. Dismal, if you would like. Inflation
17 was high, unemployment was high. There was destruction
18 of the infrastructure. And while this was going on,
19 Charles Taylor and his cronies were living an
20 exaggerated lifestyle.

21 As a result of this misrule, that we saw an
22 imposition, a resumption of civil war in Liberia. Two
23 groups opposed Charles Taylor: LURD, Liberians United
24 for Reconciliation and Democracy; MODEL, the Movement
25 for Democracy in Liberia.

1 Sekou Conneh, no relationship to
2 Augustine Konneh standing here, was the leader of -- of
3 LURD, and Tia Sangla was also the leader of MODEL. For
4 a very long time we did not know who was in charge.
5 But it became very apparent that LURD was supported by
6 some members from Guinea and they were holding on to
7 the northern part of the country. And MODEL was
8 supported by Ivory Coast and was holding on to the
9 southeastern part of the country.

10 Here we saw an intensive fighting to control
11 Liberia. And this was the time, and I must mention
12 this, that Liberians looked up to the United States as
13 a savior. And I can assure you that if you talk to
14 many Liberians, that they were very much disappointed
15 with the way the United States dealt with the issue of
16 war that was going on at this time. For example, while
17 Liberians were being killed, what the United States did
18 was to send planes and get their own citizens out of
19 the country and left Liberians to die.

20 Second, George Bush send the Coast Guard,
21 the -- the Coast Guard right there by the seashores
22 of -- of Monrovia, and they did not come out to save
23 Liberian life. So as a result, many Liberians do have
24 a really distaste feeling about the United States.

25 But I must also say that as a result of the

1 intensive intervention of other international
2 organizations, including the African Union, and
3 including, like the latter part, because George Bush
4 was always calling for the resignation of Charles
5 Taylor, but nothing was done.

6 But because of this intervention by the
7 African Union in August, we saw August 11, this is a
8 date that many Liberians have come to see as a
9 liberation date for Liberians. August 11, 2003,
10 Charles Taylor resigned and departed to Nigeria in
11 exile. But before he left, some of you would have seen
12 that in the -- the New York Times article where he
13 stood there and said, I shall be back. Well, yes,
14 Charles Taylor did come back, but he was in handcuffs.
15 And now, of course, we do know where he is - in The
16 Hague.

17 So then the question becomes after this,
18 that there was an effort to put a transitional
19 government that was headed by Gyude Bryant. And this
20 transitional government for two years maintained some
21 form of peace. And the United Nations mission in
22 Liberia that came in that same year, in October of
23 2003, continued to help out with regards to the
24 security of the Liberian nation.

25 And then, of course, in 2005, we saw an

1 election. First there was an election that was
2 inconclusive, and then on November 8, 2005, we saw the
3 runoff, which brought in the first female president of
4 Africa and also of Liberia, President Ellen
5 Johnson-Sirleaf.

6 And so today we enjoy some form of peace.
7 But what does this mean for Liberians? I will submit,
8 in the aftermath of war, peace is not simply -- Let me
9 say this again very, very emphatically. In the
10 aftermath of war, peace is not simply the absence of
11 violence. Those who have experienced violence and war
12 must also experience healing.

13 Why? To remain unhealed is to remain
14 traumatized. And this healing that I'm talking about
15 is not only healing based upon economic and political
16 empowerment, this healing will take place in the
17 relationship between the victims and the victimizers.

18 So we are very honored that the TRC of
19 Liberia, The Advocates for Human Rights, have began
20 this process in reconciling Liberians, not only at
21 home, but also abroad. It's a process that is welcome,
22 and I call upon all Liberians to rally around this
23 effort. We cannot develop Liberia if we still have
24 people who are not healed from the wounds that they
25 encountered during this 14 and some will say 15 year

1 war in Liberia.

2 Once again, I thank you for giving me the
3 opportunity as an expert witness in providing you a
4 brief history and understanding of the Liberian civil
5 war. Thank you, Mr. Commissioner.

6 (Applause.)

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: I want to thank
8 you, Mr. Witness, Dr. Konneh, for your cursory review
9 of Liberia's history and your attempt to trace the
10 roots of the conflict.

11 At this time the Commissioners will ask you
12 a couple of questions so that -- opportunity for
13 clarification on a number of things they probably may
14 not have understood or they need further clarification
15 of.

16 I would just ask you questions which
17 appear in -- in two folds. You mentioned that
18 President Barclay in 1904 institutionalized
19 authoritarianism --

20 THE WITNESS: Correct.

21 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: -- and prior to
22 that you did a general classification of governance at
23 the time prior to Barclay.

24 I was just wondering, between 1821 and
25 1904, what was the state of affairs, the relationship

1 between the governance at the time and the Indigenous?
2 Was there a government? Were there symptoms of
3 authoritarianism during that time?

4 Then secondly, from your presentation, it
5 appears as if for -- for every action, there was a
6 greater reaction, which you obviously have informed us
7 of all of that. Does that justify the war or was the
8 war inevitable?

9 THE WITNESS: Say that again. Does that
10 justify the war or --

11 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Was the war
12 justified or was it inevitable given that we -- we saw
13 a reaction to situations?

14 THE WITNESS: Before 1904, what was there.
15 There were symptoms of authoritarianism that were not
16 very clear-cut, and at this time the -- the citizens
17 of -- of -- the Liberians, the -- particularly the
18 Indigenous peoples, were put in what's so-called their
19 place.

20 What we saw even during the colonial
21 period from 1821, even before independence in 1847,
22 there was these differences with regards to even those
23 who governed.

24 We need to understand here that the
25 American Colonization Society was led by white

1 Americans, and there was this disparity between those
2 white Americans and the Settlers themselves, and this
3 later on was passed on to even when the states became
4 independent in 1847.

5 Here what we saw, that there was a color
6 line that was created where you have the dark-skinned
7 Settlers and the light-skinned settlers. In fact, if
8 you go back and you look at our history, you find out
9 that it was only one time, E.J. Royce, that we have a
10 dark-skinned president, but he didn't stay for too
11 long. He was kicked out very quickly because the line
12 of demarcation was put in place.

13 And so later on, this continues with
14 regards to how the Settler government saw the
15 Indigenous peoples. There was this ladder that I said
16 was created; that the light-skinned Settlers were on
17 top, who were the leaders, and then the dark-skinned,
18 they were under them. But guess who were at the way
19 bottom of that ladder? The Indigenous people.

20 So that tells us that there was a system
21 that was put in place at times of suppression and
22 oppression. So that was the mechanism that we saw in
23 the times of authoritarianism.

24 Was the war justified? Let me say here
25 that a philosopher once said that violence is the

1 language of the unheard. Does that make war
2 justifiable? No. It made war inevitable.

3 If you read Frantz Fanon's work, "The
4 Wretched of the Earth," violence beget violence. And
5 so what we saw in the case of Liberia, because of this
6 violence that was perpetuated against the Indigenous
7 people, it became inevitable that war was the answer.
8 So the unheard decided, we have to let our voice be
9 heard; and as a result of that, we saw war coming to
10 our country.

11 Was it justifiable? Maybe not. Was this
12 the means to an end? Maybe for many people that is
13 what it was. But war, as we see, has no good ending.
14 All, whether we like it or not, have suffered under
15 this war.

16 And today it's an opportunity for us to
17 tell our story, to make a statement so that never again
18 in the history of Liberia that even when we disagree,
19 which has been in the past, when we disagree with each
20 other, we have a way of sitting in the parlour boards
21 and discuss and be able to come to some kind of
22 resolution not to go to war. But a climate of
23 dissension was created by politicians and ethnicity was
24 used as a basis for that kind of war.

25 So war, no, is not justifiable, but

1 it's -- it was inevitable.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you.

3 Sheikh.

4 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

5 Dr. Konneh, we want to thank you very much for your
6 presentation.

7 This is one of the reasons why the Truth
8 and Reconciliation Commission was put in place - to get
9 the views, the perceptions of Liberians from all walks
10 of life so as to enable us to make a comprehensive
11 report and recommendations that will help Liberia never
12 ever to return to a violent approach.

13 You have expressed your view about how
14 Liberia was governed, and to everything there's two
15 sides of it. You have spelled out what constitute bad
16 governance in the past, but it is said that as you are,
17 so shall be your leaders.

18 Can you tell us, what is your view of
19 the -- about the chronic tribalism sectionalism that
20 invaded itself among those claiming to be Indigenous?

21 Because if you are people who suffered the
22 same consequences, then the question is why your people
23 could not mobilize your intelligence and then approach
24 the situation in unity. What would you say about the
25 differences among the tribal people, the Indigenous

1 people? You did not make mention of that. Can you
2 tell us, what is your view of that?

3 THE WITNESS: Let me approach this question
4 by giving an answer that is very academic. This --
5 this work of Paul Ferraro, where he talks about the
6 ped -- pedagogy of the oppressed. Pedagogy of the
7 oppressed. Pedagogy of the oppressed talks about
8 people who had been oppressed, and the tendency of
9 people that have been oppressed is that to see other
10 people and oppress them.

11 The Americo-Liberians that came to Liberia
12 were oppressed in the United States. How did they
13 bring those same tenets with them to oppress the
14 Indigenous peoples. The Indigenous peoples saw these
15 tenets that were there and realized that the best way
16 to address the issues was to oppress others.

17 But given the story of Liberia, because the
18 leaders were not national leaders -- And what do I
19 mean by that? That they were taking all of the
20 concentration of the -- the population within Liberia,
21 these groups, or ethnic groups, realized that the only
22 way they can address and readdress their grievances and
23 issues were to come together and find protections in
24 their own ethnic groups.

25 Thus we saw the polarizing of groups, so

1 that even today, in this country or even in other
2 places, I -- I live in Atlanta, if you call a meeting
3 for the Liberian Association, very few people will
4 come, but call a meeting for the Bassa people, call a
5 meeting for the Mandingo people, call it and you will
6 see that there is some form of loyalty that is being
7 expressed.

8 Why? Because of the failure of the
9 leadership to pull all of these people together. What
10 is very important in nation building is to be able to
11 pull people together.

12 Like the Commissioner was saying, the
13 Chairman of the Commission was saying, for the very
14 first time, we have a song where we see all of the
15 members of the ethnic groups participating, singing
16 their own song; therefore, creating a certain kind of
17 ownership. But if that song was only in -- in Bassa or
18 in Mandingo or in Krahn, then it would leave out
19 sections of the population.

20 So, in essence, what we are saying is that
21 those ethnic groups who had suffered and experienced
22 violence, in -- instead of using this as a mechanism
23 for reconciliation, in order to protect their own
24 ethnic group, had turned around and implemented
25 violence, inflicted violence on other ethnic groups.

1 Is that what was in Liberia? You know very
2 well that the Liberia that was not like that. In fact,
3 we find out that these groups were intermingling and
4 intermarrying and -- and mixing with each other. But
5 as a result of this violence, violence beget violence.
6 And, therefore, these ethnic groups now seek protection
7 from their own ethnic group. And that's why we saw
8 ULIMO-K, ULIMO-J. Why? Because these groups now find
9 refuge in their own ethnic group.

10 And politicians are very clever. As you
11 know, they're able to politicize and use ethnicity.
12 People like our own brother, Alhaji Kromah and others,
13 use this to the best of their ability. Why? Because
14 the leadership failed to establish a unified society
15 where all can benefit from.

16 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: You also
17 talk about NDPL stealing the results of the elections,
18 but you did not talk about when the former Secretary of
19 State of the United States visited Liberia and
20 consulted LAP. LAP claimed to have won the election
21 except UP -- UP claimed to have won the election.
22 Contacted LUP and LUP also claimed to have won the
23 election.

24 What do you have to say about this
25 self-claim, self-exchange, this question of

1 individualism? Was it something proper or was it
2 something that gave strength to NDPL claim?

3 THE WITNESS: I think it's very important for
4 us to understand that wherever we see disorganization,
5 there is a tendency for self-proclaimed prophecies. In
6 fact, even in the past election, you know that one of
7 the -- the candidates did claim that the Lord told
8 him -- Wherever he saw the Lord, we don't know, but he
9 did -- he did say that the Lord told him that he would
10 be the president of Liberia. Even after the election,
11 we find out that he still believe that during the
12 inauguration a miracle will occur and he will be
13 inaugurated into office.

14 Self-proclaimed prophecy. There are many
15 individuals who do not have the nation at heart but
16 only have their own self-interests instead of putting
17 the interests of the nation forward. And so as a
18 result of this, there are many Liberians that believe
19 that the Nation of Liberia cannot go on without them
20 being in a -- a place of position. That Liberia,
21 all -- that they have a monopoly of ideas, and so
22 therefore the Liberian nation owe them titles.

23 And as a result, we saw that manifesting
24 itself during that election. That each and every
25 party, these lesser parties, I call them, claim to have

1 won the election.

2 So it was very clear that what Doe did was
3 to provide -- In fact, he gave funds to some of these
4 parties. The Liberian Unification Party, he told -- he
5 told the -- the leader of that party, who was a poor
6 teacher, you are poor teacher, let me just give you
7 some money and then you can run. And he did. Poor
8 teacher, what would you do. Take the money and run.
9 And that's what he did. So he didn't -- he didn't care
10 about what's going to happen, and so were other
11 political parties.

12 So at the end, it was their own
13 self-interests that they put in place rather than
14 caring about what's going to happen.

15 So what Doe was able to do was to divide and
16 conquer, and now he's eliminated those strong political
17 parties. These little parties, it was very simple to
18 just destabilize them and then steal the election. And
19 that's how we find ourself into the situation we find
20 ourself.

21 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: You also
22 talk about the 1997 election. History tells us that
23 thirteen political parties stood for the presidency.
24 Out of the thirteen, three were military-oriented
25 politicians. Ten were civilian politicians. What does

1 this project to you?

2 Ten civilians standing for one presidency;
3 in fact, in the immediate -- what should have been
4 called at the time in the immediate post war era. Does
5 it signify unity of people?

6 THE WITNESS: No, it does not. There are two
7 ways to look at what happened. It shows how greedy
8 people are and selfish that they are, because we
9 understand what happened in terms of those ten
10 political parties.

11 At the beginning, there was a process in
12 terms of nomination; for example, with the Liberian
13 People's Party, and that even some of our so-called
14 long-time politicians were not nominated and decided
15 that they are the answer, the solution to Liberia,
16 they're going to form their own political party. And
17 so we have an extension of all of these political
18 parties. That's one.

19 But, second, in the -- it should have not --
20 And -- and I say this, and with all respect to the
21 Carter Center, I was one of the advisers to the
22 Carter Center on the Liberian issues. Later on I
23 was -- I believe I was silenced or kicked out or
24 whatever that is, but then in the long run, I was no
25 longer called upon.

1 I don't think in the first place we should
2 have rewarded people who brought violence to the nation
3 to be a part of the democratic process. The Carter
4 Center allowed that to happen, so that those who were
5 rebels, to participate in the war in a way to try to
6 reconcile. I think, to me, as far as I'm concerned,
7 that was not the way to do it. You don't reward people
8 for doing wrong.

9 And so as a result of that, even when other
10 international organizations called upon the civilians
11 and said to them, listen, this is what is going to
12 happen: If we're going to win an election against
13 Charles Taylor, first, the man has the money, he has
14 all the radio stations, and he has all of the capacity,
15 this is what you do: You only bring one political
16 party to oppose him. All of these political gurus
17 decided that's not the way to go.

18 And so what happened, we end up with ten
19 political parties. And so all Charles Taylor did was
20 to just bring the bag of rice with his pictures; and
21 Liberians, the politics of the belly, what have you
22 done for me lately, and you've not shown me what you've
23 done for me, but here comes Charles Taylor with a bag
24 of rice and with his picture. He killed my ma, he
25 killed my pa, I will vote for him.

1 It does not justify unity because even those
2 of our so-called intellectuals could not see the wisdom
3 of unifying and putting forth a unified force so that
4 Charles Taylor could not win the election. They all
5 went into their separate ways. And as a result, we end
6 up with what we ask for: A Charles Taylor who later on
7 became a problem in the Liberian world. That's what
8 happened during that election.

9 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: You have
10 expressed yourself on the governing periods of the
11 pioneers or the Americo-Liberians, as you called them,
12 as well as that of Doe. But history also reveals to us
13 that financial and military assistance that was given
14 to Doe administration by and large outnumbered what was
15 given to the pioneers' government over the century, and
16 that government came to be through a military coup.

17 What will you say about this support, the
18 cooperation, the collaboration given by America to the
19 Doe government?

20 THE WITNESS: Well, it was very clear that
21 historically more finances and ammunition were given to
22 the Doe government by the United States.

23 We need to understand here that it was this
24 fight between the east and west. The Cold War was
25 still on. And, in fact, one of the times that Doe came

1 to -- What Doe said to the United States government,
2 if you want me to give back the money that I borrowed
3 from you, I'm going to go to Libya and get the money.
4 What happened, Ronald Reagan invited Doe to the
5 United States and said, look, you don't go to -- to --
6 to the Soviet Union or Libya, you come here and we will
7 continue to legitimize your presidency.

8 And so what we saw here, just like we saw
9 what happened in South Africa when the United States
10 supported the apartheid regime, because of their
11 thinking of the Cold War and that all the other people
12 were communists and they were going to go against the
13 United States, therefore we will support those that we
14 believe that are on our side.

15 And this is not only Liberia, but that was
16 the same case in all of Africa. What happened, the
17 United States supported terrorists, now they call them
18 terrorists, but even supported dictators who were not
19 good to their own people and then in the guise of
20 communism, even though these people did not have good
21 governance attitude in them.

22 And so as a result, the same thing happened
23 in Liberia. Doe was bad, but what will be the
24 alternative as far as the United States was concerned.
25 Yes, all we need to do -- In fact, it was Reagan who

1 said to Doe, just have other parties to run with you.
2 Now you've banned these others, just have other
3 parties. Because what Doe kept saying, these other
4 people are communists. And that's all he needed to say
5 to the United States - that the other people are
6 communists. Yes, they will support you, no matter what
7 happened.

8 And this is what -- exactly what we saw the
9 role of the United States. It's beginning now to see
10 and to realize that not everyone is a terrorist, not
11 everyone is a communist; and, in fact, it's in their
12 best interests to begin to support good governance and
13 transparency in parts of the world, including Liberia.

14 But that's exactly what happened, the United
15 States supported this man because the others were
16 communists.

17 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: With the
18 presentations you have made and the answers you have
19 given, yes, you have talked about healing,
20 reconciliation, but what you can now present to us as
21 the general way forward in the case of Liberia and
22 Liberians as well as America, that is considered as the
23 stepfather of Liberia?

24 THE WITNESS: Well, let me -- let me just say
25 this, that -- And I've said this many other times.

1 That there is no royal road to reconciliation. There's
2 no royal road. Reconciliation is a process. It's
3 painstaking. There are people who do not want to
4 recount what has happened to them because it's painful
5 to talk about what has happened to you.

6 It's painful that I would talk to my -- my
7 dad just two days before he was killed. It's very
8 painful to recollect that. It's very painful for me,
9 when I was at the refugee camp in Kenema, to see a
10 woman who was so traumatized because they killed her
11 husband right in front of her, and she was pregnant,
12 that she died in the hospital in Kenema. It's very
13 painful. It's very painful. We all do have stories to
14 tell.

15 It's very painful when we moved the Liberian
16 people from the Kenema Refugee Camp when Taylor's
17 people were coming there to Waterloo, and three babies
18 died that very night. It's very painful to recall like
19 that.

20 But as much as painful that it is, it is
21 more painful for us not to say what has happened to us.
22 And I think this forum provides us the opportunity to
23 be able to tell our story, by the same token, so that
24 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission now been given
25 the mandate to be able to select cases so that those

1 cases can be made, so that we can make an example of
2 those cases so that we cannot make people, who have
3 been part of this process of claiming lives and
4 destroying, to go unpunished so that we can come
5 together as victims and victimizers to understand that
6 we as a people owe accountability to each other.

7 It hurts me going to Monrovia, and I was
8 there with you when the United -- when all this press
9 were at your house and they were talking about the
10 process, the question of land that was taking place in
11 Gbarnga and other places, and I was furious to see that
12 people who have committed atrocities are now enjoying
13 and moving very freely, but that's why we have this
14 process.

15 People ask me the question of, how can this
16 person be the senator of so and so and so. It's all
17 about the process. So what I recommend, that we should
18 not falter in this process, that we should continue
19 this process, we should put mechanism in place that
20 will help those who have suffered and even those who
21 have committed suffering on people.

22 Those mechanisms are going to be based --
23 And this is what I want to say. That any mechanism
24 that we put in place in times of this healing process
25 must be rooted in the customs, tradition, and history

1 of Liberia. If not, it's not going to happen.

2 You remember for very long time after the
3 first seven year war, you was part of the -- that --
4 that process, where we were saying to the Charles
5 Taylor government, why not we put a truth and
6 reconciliation process in place. He just denied and
7 neglected that. And I am glad now it has come to
8 fruition, that now we have the opportunity to come and
9 tell our stories.

10 So we need mechanisms to put in place, and
11 this -- I think the TRC is doing a wonderful job, not
12 going to all of the counties, but also to begin to
13 revisit our history. And I think it's a process where
14 we have to come back and revisit and -- and revise our
15 history so that we can understand where we've come --
16 we fall short and have made a mistake, so that this
17 process will help us in reconstructing what now we do
18 have in Liberia.

19 As I spoke when I was in Liberia, I believe
20 it and I know it, that Liberia shall rise again. And
21 now people are writing more books and I have to begin
22 to call those people to give me some royalty because I
23 thought I was the founder of the words "Liberia shall
24 rise again."

25 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Thank

1 you very much.

2 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

3 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Dr. Konneh, I
4 want to say thank you for your presentation of Liberia
5 history in that telling also your story and making
6 recommendations to the TROC.

7 You also reminded us of the era where
8 rewards were given to those who did wrong to the
9 country. At least we should be reminded of the lessons
10 that we learned from that.

11 You were called as an expert witness on
12 Liberian history to give some presentation. An expert
13 witness is a -- well, treated a little more than an
14 ordinary witness, and for the public and for us,
15 could you -- You told us that your parents came from
16 Cape Mount and you were born in Nimba County and you
17 came to the United States in 1987.

18 For me, I need a little more. Your
19 presentation spoke for itself, but since these things
20 are being documented, could you tell me a little more
21 about yourself to convince me to put you in the
22 category of an expert witness on Liberian law (sic).

23 THE WITNESS: You know, I just -- After
24 schooling, I was just in the streets of Atlanta driving
25 taxis and, you know, and other kind of things. No,

1 I -- I'm just kidding.

2 COMMISSIONER BULL BROWN: I warn you --

3 THE WITNESS: I'm just kidding.

4 COMMISSIONER BULL BROWN: Yeah, I know you
5 are.

6 THE WITNESS: No, no. Let me just say --

7 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: We all had to
8 do all sorts of work when we came to America.

9 THE WITNESS: Let me -- let me -- let me just
10 say this: I grew up in Songhay and -- and Yekepah,
11 Area H, and all those places. My father was a medical
12 doctor there, Foday Konneh, and -- and later on he left
13 and then went to Lofa and established a pharmacy there.
14 And we -- we stayed in -- in Yekepah. And then later
15 on I was sent to one of our uncles that was in
16 Sierra Leone and I went to school there.

17 And then I played -- I played, we call it
18 football, for one of the prominent teams over there.
19 And then one of the prominent teams in Liberia went
20 over to Sierra Leone to play and then they said, you
21 better come back home, you know, because you -- you
22 can't come here and be with these people, why are you
23 playing against us.

24 So I had to return home and then played for
25 Cedar and then played for I.E. for some time, and then

1 decided that school is more important than just -- than
2 playing football in Monrovia. And so I went to
3 Cuttington in 1983 and graduated in 1986.

4 In 1986, when we were graduating, you
5 remember after the election, Emmett Harmon was the
6 speaker of Cuttington, and I, being the valedictorian
7 and also a member of the student government, said that
8 we were not going to participate in that -- in that
9 ceremony, but since being the valedictorian, I was
10 forced to participate. And all of my relatives were
11 there to congratulate me; I could not stay away.

12 But then in 1987, I got a Fulbright
13 Scholarship to come to the United States, and my
14 intent -- you know, I went to Indiana University. My
15 intent was to, after I finished my master's and Ph.D.,
16 was to go back home. In fact, at Cuttington, there
17 were people who were calling and saying, they have your
18 name everywhere, are you going to come back home, and
19 then the war. We just destroyed.

20 And so I didn't know what to do after -- It
21 was time for me to do my field work, my dissertation
22 field work. I decided that since I could not go back
23 to Liberia, because my dissertation was involved with
24 Indigenous entrepreneurs and capitalists, what I was
25 doing, what I did in this dissertation, was to refute

1 the fact that capitalism came to Liberia as a result of
2 the coming of the Settlers.

3 And what I was trying to show, that
4 capitalism was already there before the 19th Century.
5 It was not called capitalism. It was called a
6 different name. That the Indigenous peoples in that
7 subregion were involved in certain kind of capitalism.

8 And so I was able to go to the archives in
9 London since I could not go back home, but then later
10 on I decided I have to go and make a contribution. At
11 this time someone had already told me what happened to
12 my dad and mom, and I said, well, I probably might see
13 another relative. And that's how I left London and
14 went to Kenema and stayed at a refugee camp for a year.

15 And the United Nations asked me to be the
16 head of the educational committee. We each were taking
17 Liberian kids to the various kinds of schools in -- in
18 Kenema. It worked out very well.

19 And then, then came the Charles Taylor
20 movement and we have to move the people to Waterloo.
21 And in Waterloo many people said, look, you need to go
22 back home, you need to go back to Liberia and to the
23 United States and finish your Ph.D.

24 Because of all of this, I decided, I came
25 back to the United States, wrote my dissertation. Now

1 there was nowhere to go home. So a friend of mine,
2 George Kiah said, listen, Konneh, there's no home to go
3 to right now. You better look for a job. And I was
4 reluctant at first.

5 I decided to move from Indiana. I taught a
6 semester at Indiana. I decided to move from Indiana
7 and go to Atlanta, where it's now become a second home.
8 I've been there since 1991, and I've been there from
9 1991 teaching at the Atlanta University Consortium,
10 which is made up of Morehouse, Spelman, Clark Atlanta,
11 Morris Brown, and the Morehouse School of Medicine.
12 And I've been there since that time teaching.

13 So I believe, after -- Well, let me -- let
14 me say this again: Chairman Verdier and I, of course,
15 we've come a long way. During those political parties
16 back -- back home, we used to be --

17 Was that Central Street where we used to go
18 and stand there and the people come and beat us up?
19 Was it -- It was Central Street; right? But, you
20 know.

21 And -- and -- and so the story that I'm
22 trying to make here is the fact that after all of this,
23 I decided that when Charles Taylor became president,
24 what I did, before that -- And I'm glad I came to
25 Morehouse as -- as a professor, because it has helped

1 us to recruit a number of our Liberian students to come
2 to that institution and to get an education.

3 In fact, the last thing I did, and
4 Chairman Verdier would know, I went to Liberia and went
5 to all of the high schools and recruited. At that time
6 we did not have any kind of an agreement with Spelman
7 as a female interested, so most of the people that we
8 brought were male.

9 In fact, we have over 40 students who have
10 now graduated. The last batch just graduated. In
11 fact, Ousman, Oukelay and Sidikie just graduated. They
12 have jobs. At least they can go back home, but they --
13 you know, the jobs here, when you graduate, you have
14 all this knowledge, they just take you and give you all
15 this money. So now he's going to North Carolina. He's
16 working with Wachovia.

17 And so only now that we're beginning to
18 bring female students. In fact, the last time when I
19 was there, we were looking very strongly with regards
20 to how we can help our female students to bring them to
21 the United States and advance their educational system.

22 So I have been -- After the war, in fact,
23 I did -- I wrote a letter to the president,
24 Charles Taylor at the time, and he invited me to
25 return. We -- And my -- my uncle. We said, well, you

1 know, if I come with you, they will say I'm the one who
2 told you about all of these things. So we made
3 Michael, the Bishop Francis, to take us to meet
4 Charles Taylor. That's when I knew we were in trouble.

5 In fact, after -- after that meeting with
6 Charles Taylor, we also had a conference that we call
7 Collapsed States, and Chairman Verdier was a part of
8 that conference where we got a -- we got a -- we got a
9 grant from Ford. We had this conference right there at
10 Mama Point.

11 And the next day, Charles Taylor -- well,
12 first Charles Taylor said he wanted to be the opening
13 speaker, and we refused, because we had asked the --
14 the -- the minister of foreign affairs at the time to
15 be our speaker. He was a friend. Because he said, if
16 the president say he wanted to be the opening speaker,
17 I can be, and so we -- what we did is we brought in the
18 United Nations director in Liberia to -- to be the
19 opening speaker.

20 The next day Charles Taylor deployed troops
21 all over the place. We had to go through the -- the --
22 the ambassador, the U.S. ambassador, to leave the
23 country very quickly.

24 So I'm saying all of this to let you know
25 that I have been a part of the process. I don't want

1 to be president of Liberia. I want to work behind the
2 scene, but I want to make a contribution, and I'm doing
3 it in my own little way.

4 And I continue to do that. In fact, in the
5 past, this -- this government that is in place, as my
6 uncle would tell you, I have visited them two or three
7 times with the hope that I will return home, and -- but
8 I keep telling them this: I don't want to work with
9 any government. I want to do what I need to do to help
10 Liberians. I don't have to be the minister of foreign
11 affairs. I don't have to -- In fact, the thing I was
12 going to do was to go to the university. It was going
13 to work out, and now I don't know where it is, so I'm
14 still waiting and -- and doing what I need to do. But
15 my intent is to go home.

16 In fact, it's very clear that one of the
17 things that people are afraid of is that I'm going to
18 leave and go home at any time. But I -- I say this so
19 each one of you will understand that this process that
20 we're doing is a process that is very important that
21 will help us to rebuild Liberia for it to be -- not
22 only to be where it was, but to surpass where we have
23 been.

24 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Thank you for
25 that explanation, because in what you said, you've been

1 there, you've done that, and not only that, but you're
2 making history now by participating in the TROC
3 process. So you've convinced me of being the expert
4 witness.

5 THE WITNESS: You speak like a lawyer, a
6 judge. We -- we know that. Yes, a judge, I know you.

7 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Loyal for 26
8 years.

9 THE WITNESS: Right.

10 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Just for --
11 Maybe it was lapsed lingual, and for those who maybe
12 want to say something, just let's look at what you
13 would say, and I think you talked -- said that from
14 1904 to 1943, when you were talking, you mentioned
15 Arthur Barclay as the president. Well, I think,
16 just for those who didn't -- who may have picked it
17 up, I guess, because we had Arthur Barclay, we had
18 CDB King --

19 THE WITNESS: CD -- Barclay.

20 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: And then we
21 had Edwin Barclay.

22 THE WITNESS: Edwin Barclay, yes.

23 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Because
24 Arthur Barclay, that would have been -- from 1904 to
25 '42, would have been 39 years.

1 THE WITNESS: Thirty-nine years, right.

2 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: And the only
3 history, our history say there was Tubman/Boley was
4 there for 29 --

5 THE WITNESS: Well, that's -- that's okay.

6 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: -- 27 years.

7 THE WITNESS: Yeah. He defeated Barclay.

8 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: So just let
9 us -- Yes. What happened during that period was a
10 system of authoritarian. Just for those who maybe
11 picked it up and known that was just a lapsed lingual.

12 THE WITNESS: Sure.

13 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: And also you
14 did say about Doe, President Doe manipulating
15 ethnicity, you know, during his era. History will
16 prove that and maybe the fact is known.

17 You just again talk about -- refer to
18 Harry Yuan and not Harry Nayou as the minister --

19 THE WITNESS: Harry Nayou, yes.

20 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: -- of state
21 for presidential affairs.

22 THE WITNESS: Sure. Right. Right.

23 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Yes. But
24 with that, thank you very much, Mr. Expert Witness.
25 And I -- I chair the historical review for -- the

1 institutional review for the TROC, and you've made my
2 work even easier. Thank you.

3 THE WITNESS: Well, thank you.

4 (Applause.)

5 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Thank you very
6 much.

7 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

8 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Normally I
9 would not have asked a question, but considering your
10 position as an expert witness and my concern for how to
11 go forward in this country, I would like to present a
12 situation to you and ask you to please give me your
13 opinion about it.

14 THE WITNESS: Okay.

15 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: First of all,
16 from what I'm seeing as I listen to you, I realize
17 there's a feeling that the -- the non Democratic
18 self-interest political leadership of our country over
19 the years, coupled with wide-spread ignorance of our
20 people as in illiteracy, higher literacy, led to
21 widespread poverty, social marginalization and
22 injustice, which created a fertile soil for change in
23 the '70s.

24 Then we see that regrettably in the '80s,
25 Liberia chose a path of change that was quite similar

1 to the Bolshevik revolution in Russia; that is, violent
2 revolutionary strategy as compared to the rule of law
3 or using the policies or methods at hand.

4 Now, because of this, it ended up turning
5 the whole nation into a failed state and shifting
6 leadership, meaning just putting -- you know, like
7 musical chairs, you move one set of leaders, you put in
8 another one, you destroy the nation, but there's no
9 vision, there's no new direction to carry us forward.

10 So my original question was to ask for your
11 recommendation, but then my colleague did ask you, and
12 I saw that you gave us things like we need to ensure
13 that those who are responsible for the process are
14 punished, which means justice. We need to look into
15 the issue of lustration, where those who brought the
16 sorrow don't end up becoming leaders again; and we need
17 to put mechanisms into place to help those who have
18 suffered, meaning reparation, and we need to revisit
19 the history and learn better from it.

20 But even as I look at all of these
21 solutions, they seem to again be external; meaning,
22 like, you know, the mind and the body, they're
23 structural changes, but will those structural changes
24 really bring a change when the inner heart and
25 spiritual values of our leaders and the people have not

1 changed from selfishness to unselfishness?

2 So I would like for you to, you know, just
3 give us some comments in that area from your
4 experience.

5 THE WITNESS: Well, one of the things that I
6 said, we -- we just finished a conference of
7 gender-based violence in Atlanta at Emory University.
8 Commissioner Washington was there and I was there. I
9 was invited as a -- a Liberian historian in aiding,
10 providing certain kind of structures. And one of the
11 things that I said to them was, I think it's very
12 important for us to re-establish our value systems of
13 moral authority. And I think it's very important to do
14 that.

15 How do we re-establish those value systems
16 is to engage those who are in leadership. And this
17 means religious leaders, local leaders, and other kind
18 of leaders. And I think it's very important for us to
19 do that so that we can begin to look at what worked
20 when we were not part of this new system, particularly
21 this system that I believe is imported from the
22 United States that we do now have.

23 What happened to the customary system? How
24 did it work out for us? And I think when we are able
25 to do that, we will be able to hold each other

1 accountable. So that's one way.

2 But there's another thing. Whenever a
3 country comes out from this kind of war, conflict,
4 there's impatience by the people. So even if there's
5 structures that you're going to put in place, the
6 question that people are asking, what is there for me
7 now; not in the long run, but in the short-term.

8 So whatever structures -- And I always
9 bring back my colleagues and others to look at what
10 happened in Ghana. In Ghana what happened, even though
11 they did not go through this kind of protracted war,
12 there was a time where they had their own shortcomings.
13 And when Kafua came into power, he began to put
14 structures in place, and people said, this is not what
15 we're looking for; we're looking for results now.

16 But guess what happened? That had played a
17 very crucial role in providing dividends in what
18 happened to the country. We even now know that even
19 the currency of Ghana is equivalent to the dollar of
20 the United States, if not even slightly more. So their
21 structures are there.

22 And I remember coming from Liberia and going
23 through to Ghana. I was in one of the taxi driver's
24 car where I asked him, I said, do you think what this
25 man is doing is going to help them. He said, well,

1 many people don't see it that way, but, in the long
2 run, it's going to help us.

3 What is the point that I'm making here? It
4 is good to put the foundation and structures for the
5 long-term development, because Liberians, what we want
6 is a quick fix. Let's fix it right now. If we fix it
7 right now, what's going to happen in the long run is
8 something very different.

9 So it seems to me that there are structures
10 that are very important that appear to Liberians, all
11 Liberians.

12 One of the things that we did when we were
13 in Monrovia, and I took some -- some colleagues with
14 me, is to begin to look at this question of national
15 identity. And we did talk with my uncle here about it,
16 what does it mean to say I'm a Liberian. And if you're
17 able to create a national identity where everybody will
18 see themselves within that scope, then we can begin to
19 know that it would be wrong for me to hurt you; because
20 why? You belong to me and I belong to you either
21 through religion or through marriage.

22 One of the profound things, and I
23 always tell people this, not that I'm glorifying
24 Prince Johnson, but there's one thing that he said when
25 he was interviewed one time, he said, how can we do

1 wrong to each other because we are now one another
2 through marriage and through religion.

3 And that was so profound except that he did
4 not practice that, but, you know --

5 (Members in audience speak.)

6 THE WITNESS: But that -- but that was so
7 profound. It was so profound, that if we're able to
8 have the structures that remind us, and if people begin
9 to see ourself, because what we need is a national
10 identity. Because all of these emblems that we're
11 using now, we do not see ourself within them. So maybe
12 the TRC can make recommendation.

13 One of the things that I really admire about
14 South Africa is even the flag now appeals to the
15 population. They see themselves within the flag. At the
16 beginning, they were saying, what does this got to do
17 with us. Until they were able to change a simple fact
18 and they saw themselves, oh, I'm part of this life. It
19 talks about agriculture. It talks about peace. It
20 talks about -- I can relate to this.

21 And what do we have to be able to produce
22 to relate to Liberians, as we struggle to be able to
23 put structures in place . Only then that we will not
24 go back to those things that brought us back to war.

25 But there's another thing that is very

1 important. We can put all the structures in place. We
2 can do all of the things that we have to do. If we did
3 not address the immediate situations of empowering
4 people economically and politically, we're going to --
5 And particularly economically. We must empower people,
6 especially those who have suffered, but also those who
7 are victims.

8 In fact, at this gender-based conference, I
9 said to them, we can talk about -- we can come and
10 intellectualize and put all of these things, but the
11 question is the politics of the belly. If you -- if I
12 don't have food to eat, if I don't have water to drink,
13 if I don't have electricity, the Liberia man -- it's
14 very easy to fool a Liberia man. Let the man get
15 something to drink, food to eat or rest there, and
16 everything, it will be all right. But if he has no
17 electricity, there's no water, they cannot pay the
18 school fee for their children, then there's going to be
19 a problem.

20 So we have to address those immediately.
21 While we are looking at the long-term, we can look at
22 those immediate things that will provide jobs and will
23 provide certain kind of things that will help our
24 Liberian people.

25 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Thank you very

1 much.

2 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Thank you,
3 Mr. Konneh, for that presentation, and I want to assure
4 you that it will go a long way in helping us to realize
5 our mandate.

6 You talk about ethnic groups that were
7 already present in the country before the Settlers
8 came. When we were a small kid and going to school, we
9 learned history in school, and our history learning
10 started from the Settlers and we saw nothing about the
11 Indigenous people except for one aspect on Bob Gray,
12 the Bassa chief.

13 And so it came as something different when I
14 heard you say there was the same ethnic tribes in
15 Liberia long before the Settlers came.

16 And so I would like to know, could you
17 please name those tribes that were present? If they
18 are present, if you put it in your presentation to us,
19 that would be all right.

20 THE WITNESS: Okay.

21 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: And then
22 where did these people come from.

23 THE WITNESS: Okay.

24 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: And how were
25 they distributed in the country --

1 THE WITNESS: Okay.

2 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: -- before the
3 Settlers came.

4 THE WITNESS: Okay.

5 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: This is my
6 question, and thank you very much --

7 THE WITNESS: Okay.

8 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: -- for that
9 fine presentation.

10 THE WITNESS: Sure. I will give that to you,
11 because I don't want to take much time in regards to
12 it, you know. But I'll give that to you in the form of
13 a presentation so that you will be able to -- But I
14 think it's very important for us to -- to know that.

15 In fact, one of the things that I'm doing,
16 I've taken -- I've also taken a task. I am doing a
17 his -- a comprehensive history of Liberia. We don't
18 have a comprehensive history of Liberia. Indiana Press
19 has accepted that, and so I will see -- And my purpose
20 of doing that is to come up with a document that, you
21 know, will represent the Liberian people.

22 When I was a student at Cuttington -- And
23 I'm going to say something that we know. I -- I had a
24 dialogue. I should call it a dialogue. It's not a
25 debate. It's a dialogue between myself and my

1 professor, Joseph Guannu, who claimed to be the
2 historian of Liberia who now does -- you know, and I'm
3 sure he knows now that, no, he's not. I mean, you
4 know... But my dialogue with him was how can we --
5 Because when I -- I -- As a student, I read those
6 pamphlets. I call them pamphlets, they're not books to
7 me, but he called them books, and we were forced to buy
8 them as students. How can you have this kind of
9 pamphlet that only talk about the coming of the
10 Settlers from the onset and then minimize the role of
11 the Indigenous as an Indigenous person yourself. So,
12 you know, it was --

13 But so the task that I've undertaken is to
14 write a comprehensive history of Liberia. I'm still
15 working on it. I'm hoping -- I'm working very hard on
16 it. I'm hoping that it will be out and be out very
17 soon so that -- for consumption, so that we will be
18 able to see how that it would help to revisit our
19 history as a people.

20 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Okay. Thank
21 you, and the TROC also has that mandate to look at the
22 history of the country --

23 THE WITNESS: Sure.

24 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: -- which
25 Commissioner Bull is the oversight for --

1 THE WITNESS: Sure.

2 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: -- to make
3 sure that those things that are missing from our
4 history will be placed there so that we know more about
5 the country.

6 THE WITNESS: Fine.

7 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Especially if
8 you look at Bong County.

9 THE WITNESS: Sure.

10 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: We had a
11 woman chief or a leader, a queen or whatever.

12 THE WITNESS: Right.

13 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: And
14 Suakoko --

15 THE WITNESS: Suakoko.

16 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Suakoko.
17 You cannot find it in any history of our country, but
18 she played a very important role --

19 THE WITNESS: Yes.

20 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: -- in our
21 history.

22 THE WITNESS: Um-uhm.

23 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: If you look
24 at Cuttington today, they came into Bong County because
25 Madam Suakoko was able to provide the land; whereas,

1 other people refused to provide land for that
2 university to be built there. And so we need to bring
3 all of these things into our history so our children
4 will learn about the Indigenous people.

5 THE WITNESS: I agree.

6 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Thank you so
7 much.

8 THE WITNESS: Yeah. The very first time I
9 mentioned that, I was the speaker -- Quite recently
10 they had the Bong County Convention in Atlanta, and I
11 was asked to be the speaker for the convention. And I
12 brought that for the very first time and somebody said,
13 how did he know that, you know. So one of the things
14 that I did when I was a student is to look at that kind
15 of history; how did Cuttington come into being, you
16 know, in Bong County.

17 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: It's a
18 miracle.

19 THE WITNESS: Yes, it's a miracle. Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER WASHINGTON: Okay. I have two
21 short questions for you, Dr. Konneh.

22 You took us into the joining of the
23 different eras and the different presidencies, and you
24 spoke of some of what was attained at the time
25 basically from the left perspective.

1 I'm looking at President Tolbert. The
2 reason being that I was born in the Tubman era but for
3 my generation Tolbert was the one we knew. He was the
4 president when I was in school and was assassinated
5 when I was in junior high school.

6 Tolbert introduced a lot of policies that
7 are arguable today, a lot of people are arguing over
8 those policies. But equally so, the other side of the
9 argument is that they thought he would have been the
10 ultimate president perhaps had he not been assassinated
11 early in his life or in his administration.

12 For example, he introduced the From Matt to
13 Mattress policy. He also introduced a Total
14 Involvement for Higher Heights and he introduced a
15 war -- War Against Ignorance, Disease and Poverty, and
16 also reform of the educational system.

17 I remember in high school, junior high
18 school, he introduced a system where students entering
19 the university who had passed both subjects, the
20 English and math, could get a scholarship to go to the
21 university as a form of incentives to encourage higher
22 education. He also introduced self-reliance in food
23 production as well as introduce other measures,
24 agricultural offices into the different counties.

25 And Tubman also introduced a lot of policies

1 that people thought were good, like the open door, even
2 door, it is debatable, and the reunification of
3 Liberians, and he brought in a lot of Indigenous into
4 main-stream politics.

5 Now, with what has happened here with these
6 two presidents, basically Tolbert is someone like me.
7 I'm asking the question and, of course, I pose that
8 question to you, what happened, what went wrong?
9 Because all of these policies, if for nothing else but
10 from the nomenclature, seems to be very decent policies
11 that would have definitely moved the country forward.
12 What went wrong there? Was he misunderstood or was
13 there a struggle or a conflict?

14 And my second question, in all that has
15 happened to our country in terms of the destruction and
16 the evil and the hatred, do -- one, do you think greed
17 plays a part in what has happened in Liberia? If it
18 does, how much of a part do you think greed has played
19 in the destruction of this country? Thank you.

20 THE WITNESS: Well, I think I would say that
21 the policies of Tubman and -- and Tolbert -- First the
22 question of the open door policy of Tubman. How open
23 was that policy to incorporate and -- the -- the
24 Indigenous groups within that policy.

25 In fact, there is a book that is written out

1 of that called Growth Without Development. Yes, there
2 was -- there were policies for growth, but was that
3 development in terms of the manpower that was within?
4 I would say, no, that was growth without development.

5 Total involvement, these are very symbolic
6 and cosmetic ideas, but in terms of the implementation
7 of those ideas -- I was also at junior high, high
8 school at the time, and I remember we used to go to
9 Tolbert's son, that was -- used to live around
10 U.N. Drive where we used to go and talk to him about
11 our aspiration and our ideas, and -- and you would
12 re-echo these ideas of total involvement and all of
13 that.

14 To what extent that structures were put in
15 place for this total involvement rather than holding
16 Indigenous people -- Because we used to go there and
17 said, we want to be totally involved; how can we as
18 young people. You know, we can't pay our school fees,
19 our parents can't help us out. How can we be totally
20 involved in -- in this process of developing the
21 nation. It was very difficult for us.

22 So they are very cosmetic, but in terms of
23 the implementation, we did not see that.

24 The question of greed. There is no doubt,
25 in fact , greed has played a paramount place with

1 regards to the decadence that we do see in Liberia.
2 There's many people who believe first they have
3 monopoly in terms of position and monopoly in terms of
4 ideas.

5 And as a result of that, we have seen that
6 people have amassed benefit. You know, I mean, we were
7 looking at, from a qualitative kind of research, just
8 looking at the resources that we do have in Liberia.
9 When you take the resources that you have in Liberia
10 and you look at the population, it's enough to get
11 around. How can one group, small elite group,
12 monopolize all of this, and just make it for themselves.

13 And since then what we are seeing, all of
14 those that have come to power -- In fact, there are
15 many Liberians believe if you want to be -- if you want
16 to be rich, just be a movie star or be the president,
17 then you'll be rich, instead of going there to work for
18 the people. So greed, of course, played a very
19 important part in terms of the situation of where we
20 are.

21 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Thank you very
22 much, Professor Konneh, for your presentation.

23 Only due to the limitation of time, I
24 perhaps may not be able to ask you the questions I
25 would like to ask, and -- but there's just two -- one

1 or two things I would like to draw your attention to.

2 And, first, is the linkage. I think -- I
3 didn't -- I didn't get -- I didn't see you highlight
4 that, the linkage of economics to the evolution of
5 politics in Liberia and how that helped enhance the --
6 the slide into authoritarianism.

7 And like I said, because of the limitation
8 of time, perhaps if we look at the history of Liberia,
9 especially in the -- in the 1870s or so where we saw an
10 economic decline. Prior to that Liberia was competing,
11 we had ships, plane, exporting produce and what -- what
12 have you, but with the advent of the 1870s, we saw how
13 that growth basically on trade faltered as a result of
14 uneven competition between Liberian traders who were
15 then not using the steamships that Europeans were
16 using. And all of that helped facilitate. If you look
17 at our history, you can see there's a close linkage
18 between economic decline and political
19 authoritarianism, so to speak.

20 But most importantly, I would like to find
21 out from you or see where the linkage can be drawn to
22 the role the U.S. has played. You talk about the
23 U.S. -- the role the U.S. played in the founding of the
24 Liberian state. As a matter of fact, the composer of
25 the United States National Anthem was one of the

1 founders of the American Colonization Society.

2 The role the U.S. has played at one point in
3 our history, Liberia was considered a strategic partner
4 of the U.S., was considered the Achilles heel of the
5 NATO Alliance, but with the decline of the Cold War,
6 the whole situation changed and what you saw was like a
7 hands-off policy. But we saw that in the 1985 election
8 and which Doe stole, the U.S. Secretary of State said,
9 by African standards, the elections are free and fair.
10 When Liberians are complaining about unfair elections
11 and how the results were stolen -- I don't remember
12 who was the Secretary of State then, but I think it was
13 Schultz. Yeah. He said by African standards, the
14 elections are free and fair.

15 And -- and also, the role the U.S. has
16 played, the U.S. official government policy, has played
17 in the destabilization of Liberia, including the
18 assassination of President Tolbert and all of that.

19 But, again, like I said, time perhaps does
20 not permit us --

21 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

22 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: -- the luxury to
23 explore all of this --

24 THE WITNESS: No.

25 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: -- and so I will

1 just stop right there.

2 Thank you very much.

3 THE WITNESS: Well, let me -- let me just
4 say this: That, you know, time is not on our side. As
5 you saw in the 1870s, Liberia was in debt. In fact, at
6 one point Germany and other countries wanted to come in
7 and help Liberia resolve their debt problem. And then
8 the United States said, hold on, we are now very much
9 interested in this country.

10 So there's no doubt that that economy that
11 was there played a very significant role with regards
12 to the decline of the situation and bringing in
13 authoritarianism, and we do not have time to be able to
14 do that.

15 But the question of the role of the United
16 States. When I came to the United States, I was very
17 much troubled because all of the things that we were
18 told about our relationship with the United States, and
19 first -- the first shock that I had was when someone
20 introduced me somewhere and said, this is Augustine
21 Konneh, this is this guy who is coming from Libya. I
22 said, what? You remember at that time Libya was not in
23 the good books of the United States, and everybody kept
24 looking at me, Libya. I said, hold on, hold on; not
25 Libya, Liberia.

1 So people have told us about how we were
2 such -- this great ally with the United States. And
3 even people here don't even know like where Liberia is,
4 don't even know that there are Americo-Liberians that
5 left here and -- and settled over there and they
6 started to have this long relationship. They don't
7 even know that.

8 But people don't even know, in terms of how
9 the United -- how Liberians supported the United States
10 during the Second World War. People don't know that.
11 That's why we have that Omega in that area.

12 And people don't even know that during the
13 industrial revolution period, when there was this
14 competition between England and the United States, it
15 was Liberia's rubber that played a very significant
16 role. People don't know that kind of history. So it
17 very well --

18 So that means at the time when we had our
19 own problems, we looked at the United States as a
20 result of this relationship, but it's also important
21 for us to understand, United States played a very
22 significant role in terms of the problems that we do
23 have.

24 Doe came to the United States and got those
25 ideas about going back about -- about all the question

1 about Indigenous people and then created a coup, and
2 then they supported Doe for a very long period of time.

3 Then when the civil war -- When Doe was not
4 doing the right thing, it take somebody to get Doe out.
5 So for the bad person, you look for another bad person
6 to come and take that bad person out, and when that bad
7 person doesn't do what you want him to, then you look
8 for another bad person to put there. That's the kind
9 of policy that the United States do have.

10 So there's no doubt that the United States
11 has been -- that played a role, whether good or bad, in
12 terms of the establishment of what has become Liberia.
13 And we still continue.

14 I said to the president recently -- You
15 know, I had dinner at Emory University in Atlanta and
16 we had dinner with her. One -- I told her, I said to
17 the president, I know you're going -- you're going to
18 hate me for saying this, but I don't think I will
19 forgive you for allowing our -- the base to come to
20 Liberia when all the other countries were, you know,
21 denying having that base to come over there. Why
22 should we be the one, you know. But it's that kind of
23 situation. Because we always think that we have this
24 long history with the United States, and we always have
25 that, but United States does not --

1 In fact, one of the -- the Secretary of
2 State said it very well: We have no more economic
3 interests in Liberia, strategic interests in Liberia,
4 so we don't care what happens to Liberia. You can
5 destroy the Omega, you can do whatever, you know, we
6 don't have any more economic interests, and this is
7 very clear even today.

8 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you very
9 much, Dr. Konneh, for the review of the Liberian
10 history, and I would like to ask you two questions.

11 THE WITNESS: Okay.

12 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: During your
13 presentation you talk about the governance during the
14 process from 1904 to 2000, and then you talk about the
15 Indigenous people. What was life like, what was the
16 relationship between the Indigenous people before the
17 arrival of the Settlers?

18 THE WITNESS: They were very cordial. In
19 fact, there was intermingling and intermarrying. In
20 fact, we do have evidence in terms of their laws and
21 terms of -- there was not -- not -- I don't want to
22 paint a picture here where we can say that everything
23 was perfect in terms -- you know, because there were
24 people were fighting for land, there were people doing
25 other kind of things, but to a larger extent, there

1 were some kind of cordiality and some kind of
2 collegiality, if you would like, that brought these
3 groups together so that they would be able to interact
4 with each other.

5 There's a -- a piece that I wrote with
6 regards to this kind of interaction that went on with
7 regards to the Indigenous groups, how they -- And time
8 wouldn't be able to permit me to -- to elaborate on
9 that with regards to it. But by and large, the
10 question of ethnicity did not surface in Liberia until
11 modern day politics became the throne, because before
12 that, ethnic groups -- I mean, because you can even
13 see, even during the war, it doesn't matter whether you
14 belong to the right ethnic group or not, people still
15 were killed. Even though they were belonging to the --
16 You can even say, well, I'm -- I'm Krahn. They will
17 say, no, but you're not, or on this they will say no.

18 So the point I'm making here, that ethnicity
19 did not play a divisive role with regards to what
20 happened in Liberia prior to what became known as
21 modern day politics in Liberia.

22 What we're seeing now in terms of ethnicity,
23 surfacing as a divisive element is because leaders have
24 used this and brought it out for people to begin to see
25 that they can have protection within their own groups

1 and to isolate others. So therefore it has become what
2 one writer says, you know, is trying to scramble for
3 prominency, you know, among these ethnic groups as a
4 result of this pluralization that we see here.

5 So in initial stage, there was this
6 mingling, and I hope you go back to that, because even
7 more now, we -- we can't even tell the difference
8 between the different groups because of this -- you
9 know, we belong to the same religion, we now
10 intermarry, we do have kids, and do have -- You know,
11 that should be able to provide the kind of unity that
12 we need to come together.

13 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: And the last
14 question would be, as an expert in history, there's
15 some misconception as to what actually happened to
16 E.J. Roye. Can you clarify on that?

17 THE WITNESS: That's a long story. Let me
18 just put it in -- in basic terms. This question of
19 black -- well, light-skinned and dark-skinned, created
20 a dissension whereby there's some kind of alleged story
21 about corruption that end up getting E.J. Roye out and
22 later on, you know, whatever they did to him, got sick,
23 you know. We're still trying -- What we do have on
24 E.J. Roye right now is very tentative and subject to
25 kind of revision. But it's this fight that was going

1 on between the light-skinned Settlers and the
2 dark-skinned Settlers. And E.J. Roye, being a
3 dark-skinned Settler, were just kicked out of the place
4 and used all kind of allegations against him so that he
5 would not continue his presidency.

6 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you very
7 much for coming to the Commission.

8 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Dr. Konneh, I want
9 to thank you very much for coming and making a
10 presentation. You may leave.

11 THE WITNESS: Thank you very much.

12 (Applause.)

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Well, ladies and
14 gentlemen, we want to thank you for joining us this
15 morning for the first half of our hearings today. We
16 will now take a 15 to 20 minute break and then we'll
17 resume with our second witness. Thank you very much.
18 See you in 20 minutes.

19 MR. SIRLEAF: The hearings will reconvene at
20 2:30 in this same hall. Thank you very much.

21 (Proceedings adjourned at 1:39 p.m.)

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