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TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

DIASPORA PROJECT

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

TESTIMONY OF
GARSWAH BLACKTOM

TRC Commissioners:

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

Court Reporter:

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

1
2 (The following proceedings were had and made
3 of record, commencing at approximately 3:34 p.m.)
4

5 GARSWAH BLACKTOM

6 being first duly sworn,

7 testified as follows:
8

9 TESTIMONY OF GARSWAH BLACKTOM
10

11 MR. SIRLEAF: Please be seated.

12 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER:

13 Mr. Witness -- excuse me -- we say welcome, and thanks
14 for coming. We at the TRC are gratified that you could
15 come to share with us in this forum as a way of
16 understanding our past in fostering genuine peace,
17 unity and reconciliation in our country.

18 The TRC was established as a part of the
19 Accra Peace Agreement where all the parties, including
20 the international community, agree that this would be
21 the way forward in redressing the abuses, the
22 atrocities and the wrongs of the past so that the Accra
23 experiences we had will not be repeated in the future
24 so that a better country can be inherited by our
25 children and our children's children. So, thanks for

1 coming, and I will use this time to introduce
2 commissioners to you. Commissioner Sheikh Kafumba
3 Konneh, Commissioner Pearl Brown Bull, Commissioner
4 Gerald Coleman, Dede Dolopei, Massa Washington, John
5 Stewart, and Oumu Syllah.

6 I will ask you preliminary introductory
7 questions, following which you can make your
8 presentation. Can you kindly repeat your name so that
9 our records are clear.

10 THE WITNESS: Garswah Abba Blacktom.

11 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Albert Gatton?

12 THE WITNESS: Blacktom.

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay,

14 Blacktom.

15 THE WITNESS: Black and, T-O-M, tom.

16 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: A date of
17 birth, please?

18 THE WITNESS: 11-20-60.

19 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Where do you
20 reside currently?

21 THE WITNESS: Chicago, Illinois.

22 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Vocation,
23 vocation, what do you do?

24 THE WITNESS: Teacher.

25 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Teacher.

1 THE WITNESS: Education.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: When did you
3 migrate to the U.S.?

4 THE WITNESS: September of 1984.

5 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. Thank
6 you again, and you may proceed.

7 THE WITNESS: Okay. Good afternoon,
8 ladies and gentlemen of the commissioner, for
9 volunteers, community leaders, Liberians and friends of
10 Liberia. My name is Garswah Blacktom, residing in
11 state of Illinois, and I was born and live in Mount
12 Barclay. That's lower Kieresbrad (ph).

13 I will commend the Commission for the
14 wonderful work you are doing, and (unintelligible) in
15 Liberia, Africa and the United States. I serve as
16 president of the Liberian community in Illinois and
17 will host a time or meeting of the commissioner, and we
18 have Commissioner Washington and Syllah, and also we
19 have our TRC member, Laura Tendence (ph), and after
20 that time, I have been in constant contact with them.
21 We also have a volunteer in -- sorry, in Chicago, Tom
22 White, the law firm help to work with the -- with TRC.
23 And whenever they have problem, they call on to me to
24 help them, for the fact that most of the Liberians in
25 Illinois were very reluctant to come to the hearing, so

1 I had to go and talk to them, help them with the
2 process. And I also volunteered to be one -- to give
3 statement so that a volunteer would know the process,
4 and after that process, I was called again to come to
5 Minnesota and help with the process for the fact that
6 most of the Liberian people are very reluctant to give
7 statement. So if the leader in the community is not
8 giving statement, you cannot tell them to go and give
9 statement. You have to lead by example. For the fact
10 that I have given statement in Illinois, I can
11 encourage them to go and give statement also and let
12 them know that the process is very easy.

13 I also want to thank Laura for inviting me
14 for the fact that on two front, I come here to lead by
15 example, and also I were lucky to meet a relative I
16 haven't seen for ten years. If he is still here,
17 Bennie Warner, I have not seen for over ten years, so
18 I'm very happy to be here and also happy to help with
19 the process.

20 Okay. I have some issue of the Rice Riot in
21 1979. I took part in that demonstration on Gurley
22 Street at PAL headquarter. And after the soldier came
23 in, scatter us, we all went running around and went to
24 where Gurley Street and Broad Street, at the store in
25 the corner, the jewelry store, that it were ransacked,

1 and people were taking stuff out. I took a watch, and
2 the soldier, Kewah (ph), has gone and told me to give
3 him the watch. I give it to him, and he send me back
4 to take one for myself, and thank God that -- I mean, I
5 was not dumb to say, well, I'm not giving it to you,
6 but with God in my corner, I give him the watch, and he
7 told me to take another one, and I took it and ran.
8 And, I mean, there was no pause, I just start running.
9 So at that time we living in Sinkor behind the
10 APEA (sp) building and we -- I hit the wall from Gurley
11 Street, went toward the University of Liberia where
12 there were large amount of people that were shooting in
13 the air, and I mean, there were a lot of chaos, and I
14 had to walk from that area all the way to Sinkor area.

15 Also, in 1980, the coup took -- the coup
16 started. There was a coup. At that time, we were back
17 in Kieresbrad (ph) living with my mother, and I would
18 -- they were said, of course, they have people
19 ransacking everywhere, taking cars and driving around,
20 and they come in your area. If you know how to drive,
21 they give you the car key and you just going to go in
22 that car. Most of the (unintelligible) in that area
23 gone missing after this, so you took, then, they did
24 not come back of this -- this time, five or 10, but
25 then nobody know their whereabouts. In that process, I

1 lost a brother, and one of my brother got -- he was
2 killed, and I lost a -- half brother had gone missing
3 in the same process. Nobody knew his whereabouts. And
4 I lost a sister. She had a medical condition and there
5 was no medical care, so I lost a family member also in
6 the process.

7 I came to America in 1984, and since then
8 I've been back two times. My mother came to visit in
9 '88, and I had to take her back in '89. And coming
10 from Temple of Justice, my uncle work at Temple of
11 Justice, in my '80s, I went to visit him and come
12 towards Minnesota education. There was a soldier,
13 Budet (ph), and the soldier over there, they stopped
14 me. I had my (unintelligible) in my bag and they say,
15 "Oh, you one of the rebel?" I say, "I don't know what
16 you're talking about," and I was there for over two
17 hours, and they were just talking what they going to do
18 to me and all of that.

19 And luckily for me, another soldier stopped
20 by and he had a Walkman, and when they asked why was I
21 detained, and so they make up why America
22 (unintelligible) rebel, and he had just told him that
23 he had barely just came from America and brought in a
24 Walkman. Anyway, he intervned on my behalf, and after
25 two hours, I was happy to leave, and I left and told

1 you, "Oh, mom, I'm going home." She said, "No, this is
2 your home." I say, "I know that." I said, "I want to
3 go to a safer home so that in the future I can help do
4 something for you."

5 And my second trip was the end of -- in
6 2000. When she pass away, we had to go and bury her.

7 Just of our personal experiences and
8 emotion. The top root causes, I think, was that the
9 president or the leader of the government had too much
10 power. They did what they wanted to do, nobody
11 questioned them, and that was many -- the causes of the
12 war, and corruption, nepotism, tribalism. The
13 president can appoint any relative to any position, and
14 he or she might say with the consent of the cabinet,
15 but whatever he says goes, and Doe has many causes.
16 Also, the class system, the Congo, the country people,
17 I mean, most of the time they were student over here in
18 America, they have a job waiting for them in Liberia,
19 and we have student graduating from the university
20 cannot get a job, but when people leave and go to
21 Liberia, the job is there waiting for them. I mean,
22 that was one of the issue. And in terms of
23 recommendation, I mean, security system need to be
24 improved, border need to be protected and improved, and
25 I mean the child, child soldier, they need to be

1 integrated.

2 After the war, they took the gun from them.
3 What did it do for them? What did it teach them? What
4 can they do? They are used to taking thing by force,
5 and you took the gun from them, they have nothing else
6 to do. So if they want something, what do we expect
7 them to do? They will go back to violence. They need
8 to be integrated into the society, teach them the trade
9 of something that will make them an official leader of
10 the country. They have to get away from war-like
11 attitude because that is all entered in.

12 The kids, even those that come to America
13 here, they do not listen to us, they do not listen to
14 anybody because that is all entered in. They have
15 their pants dragging all on the ground. They are worse
16 than our American kids here. You cannot tell them
17 anything. They have -- thousand and thousand of them
18 every year committing crime, so to -- so that, I mean,
19 your recommendation at the end of this process, and to
20 put into your recommendation the kids need to be
21 integrated into the society or else we don't know, the
22 massacre begin, something need to be done.

23 So, I guess a short comment I have to make,
24 I mean because of time factor, and I mean, I said as a
25 community leader, I'm doing this so that I can

1 encourage other people in the community to come and
2 speak up, because they are afraid to come and speak up,
3 and we, as leader, if we are now coming to say
4 something, and if you tell and say, "Oh, you have to go
5 and visit TROC," they say, "For what? Have you gone
6 there?" If you tell them no, they say, "Why do you
7 want me to go there?" So, I'm here living as an
8 example that the system is easy: come and tell your
9 story. If you do not tell your story, somebody will
10 tell the wrong story, and then you just say, well, that
11 is not truth, but if you want the truth to be heard,
12 come and tell your story. Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you
14 very much. I say thanks for your testimony and the
15 morals you have imbedded in your testimony that we
16 should learn to lead by examples. I think that is a
17 lesson for all of us and something our country can
18 learn from. At this stage, the commissioners will ask
19 you some questions.

20 THE WITNESS: Sure.

21 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay.

22 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you
23 very much, Mr. Witness, for volunteering to come to
24 give the testimony today. You talk about a Rice Riot.
25 Most Liberian believe that our problem actually started

1 from this Rice Riot, and you say you was one of the
2 participants. Besides you, can you remember the name
3 of other participant in the Rice Riot? If so --

4 THE WITNESS: Pardon?

5 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Other people
6 besides you that participated in the Rice Riot, can you
7 remember some of them? Are they still around?

8 THE WITNESS: No, no, no, uh-uh, no. I
9 just agree to attend a PAL meeting, and they have
10 planned a mass demonstration, so we just all went and
11 supported the organization to take part in the
12 demonstration, but I do not know any one of them.

13 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: So after
14 all this years, if you sit to reflect, can you say the
15 Rice Riot was justified?

16 THE WITNESS: During that time we did
17 not know better; we did not understand what the
18 circumstances were. It were true that Baccus Matthew
19 say that he could get a bag of rice for \$10, and the
20 price for rice has gone up to \$20, so we feel that it
21 was not right. And, I mean, the person who benefitted,
22 for the fact that he was a businessman, he has made to
23 run the rice project. Do not -- we did not know
24 better; I did not know better. The information I got
25 was that Tolbert has made that we're going to sell rice

1 and he were going to benefit from it, but now that I
2 know better, I mean, I won't go back to -- to -- to --
3 to join a rally.

4 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you
5 for that. You also talk about children coming to the
6 United States with this war-like attitude. As
7 community leader in the Liberian community, what are
8 you doing to assist these children because you learned
9 that some of them grew up in this war, was brought up
10 in the war, and as a result, they have been
11 traumatized. As community leader, what are you doing
12 to help these kids?

13 THE WITNESS: We try to talk to them.
14 We found psychologies, and whatever, to talk to them,
15 but the kids, they are not addressing like the
16 immigration issue. Those that have the problem when
17 you bring immigration through to talk to them, they do
18 not show up. The kids are very difficult to deal with,
19 but we try our best to talk to them on a one-on-one
20 basis, and that's all we can do. We keep on telling
21 them, now listen, you need to do something for
22 yourself. You need to prepare yourself. In case you
23 get deported to Liberia, what are you going to do?

24 Some of them left Liberia when they were
25 five or 10 years old. They live in refugee's camp for

1 10-15 years, and they came to America. Some of them
2 had ten years of -- they do not know nothing better.
3 And after March of 2009, if the GED process is not
4 okayed, they are going to be going home. The same
5 thing happened in Ghana. What are they doing? And
6 when you bring the issue, they don't want to listen to
7 you.

8 Some of them come in with good opportunity;
9 they get green card when they get here. Somalis came
10 who had to go through a lot of process to get green
11 card, but most of the kids are coming with green card.
12 They do not want to go to school. When you talk to
13 them, "Hey, ol' papa, get away from here." I mean, you
14 can't say -- you can't say too much. You say what you
15 have to do, and if you know they did not listen to you,
16 what else can you do? You know, you just try your
17 best.

18 COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you
19 very much for coming to share your experience.

20 THE WITNESS: Okay.

21 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Thank you,
22 Mr. Blacktom, for coming. Reflecting, as my colleague
23 said, on the years gone by since the Rice Riots, can
24 you reflect for a minute and describe the series of
25 events? You said you were at the PAL headquarters --

1 THE WITNESS: Yes.

2 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: -- in 1997?

3 THE WITNESS: Yeah, that Saturday
4 morning, I was there.

5 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: And you
6 said the soldiers went and drove you from there?

7 THE WITNESS: Yeah. well, when we got
8 there, the office door were open already, and we said,
9 (unintelligible) as soon as I come here, I have to
10 leave, so people were scattered all around Monrovia.
11 And since I were on Gurley Street, I work my way up
12 there, and people was all over, so we decided to find
13 our way home. And they have soldiers all around with
14 their guns drawn, and nobody (unintelligible) you see
15 soldier with their gun drawn, I mean in those
16 situation, there's no law and order, so you have to
17 find a way out of the situation.

18 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: And did you
19 witness the shooting of anybody by any of the security
20 forces at that time?

21 THE WITNESS: No, no, I didn't witness.
22 I saw some people with -- I mean, they had -- their
23 hand are bloodied with gunshot, but to see this -- a
24 dead person, or a soldier walking up and down with
25 blood all over their hands and stuff, but I did not --

1 I didn't see any shooting.

2 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Do you hold
3 the opinion that your assembly -- was your assembly at
4 the PAL headquarters disrupted or --

5 THE WITNESS: Yeah, yeah, it was --

6 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: -- or just
7 told to -- or you were just told -- simply told to move
8 or you were forcibly taken from there?

9 THE WITNESS: It were, if weren't for
10 the fact that when we got there, they are already bust
11 the door open.

12 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Who had
13 bust the doors open?

14 THE WITNESS: The soldiers. They have
15 soldiers all around, and people were saying, "You gotta
16 go, you gotta go," and the soldiers are there. Why are
17 you standing around for? You're there for your sister;
18 you have to run for your life. So it was kind of, in a
19 way, disruptive because the demonstrations was started
20 from -- they had demonstrators coming from everywhere,
21 but we were started from part of this to go and march
22 towards the marchers, but we didn't have opportunity.
23 It was already disrupted.

24 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Now, you
25 left Liberia and came to the U.S., and you currently

1 serve as a community leader in the Chicago area?

2 THE WITNESS: Yes.

3 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: You
4 highlighted a number of problems. What would you say
5 the major problems confronting Liberian community in
6 the area, and to what extent, our young women,
7 particularly, what are the main challenges, the main
8 problems? You talk about the kids wearing their pants
9 hanging down to the ground, but do you see the same
10 kind of attitudes reflected in our young women? What
11 are the major kind of problems do they have? Are they
12 -- is there a problem of teenage pregnancy? Is it
13 common among them drug use and --

14 THE WITNESS: Oh, yes, it's very hard.
15 A week ago at the (unintelligible) Western University,
16 you see the girls there; you do not want them to be
17 your sister. They wear the very short, short skirt,
18 wearing long T-shirt up to their knees, only T-shirt.
19 There's no pants under it, okay? I mean people wear
20 long T-shirt, they wear the pants under it, but each --
21 they wear the long T-shirt was their only clothes, and,
22 I mean, sleeve-level clothes on somebody, and so
23 there's no difference between the boys and the girls,
24 but sometime you can talk to the boys before the fact
25 they will listen. But when the kids come over,

1 especially -- excuse me -- you try to talk to them and
2 say, "Oh, are you interested in that?" I mean, you try
3 to help them to better their self. They have
4 opportunity, for the fact that we have seen the first
5 woman president of Africa, and we saw the race in
6 America here, Clinton, the first female to go to that
7 extent. I mean, these are something they have to look
8 at and say, well, I can do it. I have the opportunity,
9 especially in America.

10 They beg go to school, huh? We tell them in
11 Africa we have problem going to school or getting in
12 school for here you have all opportunity. You come in
13 the country with green card. Why don't you take
14 advantage of it? If you have a green card, you can get
15 a student loan, and you do not pay student loan until
16 after graduation. After graduation you can -- after
17 forbearance, forbearance, forbearance, you can't have
18 the forbearance no more. Forbearance is a station of
19 loan payment. They are not taking advantage of that.
20 I mean, we are trying our best and talk to them.

21 When working people came to talk to us, said
22 you need to do this, you need to do that, but the kids
23 these day, they have the opportunity and they are not
24 taking advantage of that.

25 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: What kind

1 of family structures are these kids basically coming
2 from? Are they from single parent homes, broken homes,
3 and things like that, and lower income earning?

4 THE WITNESS: The fact that very few of
5 them came with a family, a mother and father. The rest
6 of them were scattered during the war. Most of them
7 lived in refugees' camp in Ivory Coast, Ghana and other
8 places, and some of them could not locate -- their
9 relatives might have got lucky to get on the program,
10 even though that kin were relative or do that kin with
11 co-signer or what they call it, and they are coming as
12 American citizen, you have the father, you would take
13 care of them.

14 When they come, after the month or two, they
15 are gone. Komozaba (ph), my youngest brother, he came
16 through the refugee's program and because I were here,
17 he didn't have to go live with anybody. So when he
18 came, I pick him up, and after the month, we found a
19 job for him because he had a work permit. He found a
20 job, he start finding friends, and one day at work, he
21 called and told me that the refugee people found a
22 place for him. I said, "Ah, you live with your
23 brother. Why should they find a place for you to go
24 and pay rent and share rent with somebody?" Later on I
25 learned that he was in New Jersey with some relative

1 that did not help him when he were in the African
2 country.

3 So, it is difficult. Our own relative, when
4 they come here, they are through with us. They just
5 want to come to America, and after a certain time, they
6 are through with you. Now, he's in New Jersey.
7 They're having problem. I mean, what can I do? He's a
8 full-grown man. He made -- he may adjust. He made a
9 bed, so he's lying in the bed. What else can you do,
10 you know? He's not a kid no more.

11 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Is this a
12 concern among the elders in the community and is it a
13 concerted approach by older Liberians, I mean such as
14 yourself and others, to come to grips with this kind of
15 problem?

16 THE WITNESS: Yeah. It is a concern,
17 older go talk to them, we talk to them -- we might be
18 about 10, 15 years older than them, but they still call
19 us Pa-Pei. I mean, we try to talk to the kids, the
20 older people, so now we have events that will invite
21 older people to come and talk to them. I mean, they do
22 not come deliver there about 1:00, 2:00 in the night.
23 By then, the older people are gone. When they come
24 1:00, 2:00, they stay till 7:00 in the morning, and at
25 that time, we have to go and prepare ourself for work.

1 It is very difficult talking to the kids,
2 but the only thing I think can be done is when they
3 come as a refugee, as soon they get here that you have
4 a plan for them already, have the institution to send
5 them to. As soon they get off that airplane, you pick
6 them up, put they in the car or whatever, and send them
7 to the institution for the -- to deprogram them, or
8 else if they are all there, they meet a lot of friends
9 telling them that you don't have to do this, you don't
10 have to listen to anybody. I mean, after a certain
11 time, I mean, they are not going to listen to you, but
12 either it -- just as soon they get here, that program
13 need to start, if there is a program.

14 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: You talk as
15 though you feel a sense of frustration. Do you feel
16 any sense of helplessness?

17 THE WITNESS: No. As a leader in the
18 community, they say, "What are you doing for us?" I
19 say, "What can we do for you? We give you advice; we
20 give you help." I mean, we have lot of immigration
21 forum, and you have 20 immigration lawyers, ten
22 Liberians show up, how do that look to you? You are
23 embarrassed. You brought the people to help them and
24 they do not show up. I mean, you cannot go to their
25 house and pick them up, you see? If you have 20

1 immigration lawyers, you want to see two or 300
2 Liberians there begging for help. These people are
3 given free legal services, and they are not taking it,
4 and we get frustrated, but what can we do? We gonna do
5 what we have to do and keep on talking to them, you
6 know? It is very difficult. What that got to do what
7 you doing for us? I say, "You need to come around."

8 When you see at a social event, then they
9 can they want to talk politic. We say no, you need to
10 come to the meeting and let us discuss this subject.
11 You see the mayor at a party, drinking; then you want
12 to talk politic? No, he's drunk already. Whatever he
13 say might not be no suitable to you. So when we
14 schedule a meeting, we want them to come and show up
15 and be part of it, learn from us. They don't want to
16 do that.

17 COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Thank you
18 very much.

19 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON:
20 Mr. Blacktom, thank you very much for coming again.
21 Back to the Rice Riot, if you don't mind. You
22 mentioned that you were at a meeting of the P-A-L, of
23 PAL, prior to the demonstration that day, the next day.
24 Were you a member of PAL? Were you a member of this
25 executive wing or were you just a passerby who was

1 curious?

2 THE WITNESS: When one the friend
3 invited me, I went one or two time, and at that time
4 were close to the demonstration, and they invited us to
5 it. I mean, they want a number. They didn't want two,
6 three people demonstrating. I say number is strange,
7 so if you see the immigration issue, when you look, you
8 see 50,000 Mexican. People want to see number, but
9 when they talk about Africa, you see five African, and
10 we all have the problem, but they do not want to show
11 up.

12 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: No, I
13 asked about the Rice Riot.

14 THE WITNESS: Yeah, that's what I'm
15 saying --

16 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: So you
17 were not a member of PAL; you just show up that day for
18 the demonstration?

19 THE WITNESS: I went to two meetings
20 before the demonstration, and then we were encouraged
21 to come and support PAL.

22 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Okay.
23 It is being rumored that the late Baccus Matthews, the
24 head of PAL at the time, in preparing for the
25 demonstration also secretly armed some of his men, some

1 of the demonstrators, and had them out in the streets
2 that they demonstrating, and the intent was to provoke
3 the government by going into an exchange because he
4 knew that the government was back up against the wall.
5 Do you know anything about that?

6 THE WITNESS: I have no knowledge of
7 that.

8 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Since
9 you migrated to the United States in 1984, since the
10 Rice Riot at that time, have you met or seen anybody
11 who was part of the meetings or who was also a part of
12 that riot, and did you guys discuss the aftermath of
13 the riot and its effect on the country?

14 THE WITNESS: No, I haven't seen any
15 one of them.

16 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: You
17 just -- it's my last question to you, hope it's a
18 question, you stated to my colleague earlier that --
19 Commissioner Syllah, that at the time of the riot,
20 someone like you didn't know better, that you were
21 acting based upon information you received from the
22 planners of the riot?

23 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

24 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: That
25 rice was going to go up to \$30, and Mr. Matthews and

1 others had said go bring rice in for \$10, but from
2 where you are now, you couldn't have been part of such
3 a demonstration, looking back now. Is that a sign of
4 regret?

5 THE WITNESS: Yeah, well, it is sort
6 of a disappointment for the fact that we did not get
7 the correct information on there, saying okay, I can
8 sell rice for \$10 and not written on that, he couldn't
9 have done that, but during that time, we did not know
10 better what was going on.

11 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: So, in
12 other words, Mr. Matthews and his -- and his
13 organization misled the Liberian people?

14 THE WITNESS: Yeah, you can say so.

15 COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Okay.
16 Thank you.

17 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Thank
18 you for coming. I want to add to the question
19 surrounding the coup -- the Rice Riot. I would like to
20 know what was your age at that time.

21 THE WITNESS: That was in what, in '79?
22 I was born in 1960, 17 years old, and in Liberia,
23 17 years old, you are not mature like the 17-year old
24 in America this day. Most of the time, 17-years old in
25 high school.

1 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: You
2 mean 19 years? You were 19?

3 THE WITNESS: Okay, 19 years old, okay,
4 sorry about that --

5 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Yeah,
6 19 years old.

7 THE WITNESS: Okay. Yeah, okay.
8 During that time, so I'm 19 years old. I just got into
9 high school.

10 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: But
11 what was your educational level?

12 THE WITNESS: I was in high school.

13 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Which
14 grade?

15 THE WITNESS: I was in high school. It
16 would be ninth or tenth grade. I just graduated from,
17 I think, junior high.

18 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Okay.
19 Was it your first time that year at a meeting or had
20 you gone to --

21 THE WITNESS: I went to two meeting
22 prior to the demonstration.

23 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: You say
24 you were invited?

25 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

1 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: What
2 was your group?

3 THE WITNESS: Well, it just by a friend
4 from school and told me about what was going on about
5 PAL, in the progressive alliance, trying to make --
6 bring changes to the government. There were a lot of
7 corruption and the rival going on, so they wanted to
8 make sure that there were change. So, I were
9 interested in it, so I --

10 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Did you
11 see --

12 THE WITNESS: -- went to listen.

13 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Did you
14 see corruption going on?

15 THE WITNESS: In Liberia?

16 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Yes.

17 THE WITNESS: Yes.

18 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: You did
19 say there were a whole lot of corruption. Did you see
20 it? What kind of corruption you saw going on that you
21 wanted to correct? What was some of them?

22 THE WITNESS: Corruption, they were
23 taking things, I mean, giving relatives job, have them
24 on the payroll that did not work, and they had a lot of
25 student that they call the kid there that did not even

1 go to the offices after school but they were still on
2 the payroll, so you call that corruption: the person is
3 not performing that task, but they are getting paid for
4 it. People had to go to work. They go to work 8:00
5 and signed up, they leave and go home, it's corruption.
6 You have to -- and leaving eight-hour job and get paid.
7 Most of the time people don't go to work; they just
8 come and sign and leave and go to their private job.
9 That is corruption.

10 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: And so
11 you wanted to correct it?

12 THE WITNESS: Yeah. I'd rather be part
13 of that movement, and I recommend move by going there.

14 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Okay.
15 You said when you got to the office, you met the door
16 open?

17 THE WITNESS: Yeah, when we got to the
18 office, the door was broken.

19 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: And you
20 met soldiers there?

21 THE WITNESS: Yeah, they have soldiers
22 around, and we couldn't even reach through that door,
23 and so we're just running away. I say, "Oh, the door
24 is broken already." So they tried to scatter for their
25 life.

1 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: So you
2 went towards Broad Street?

3 THE WITNESS: Yes, I went down --

4 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Were
5 you running or did you walk to go down --

6 THE WITNESS: I walked there.

7 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Okay.
8 And then you say that when you got to Broad Street, or
9 somewhere around there, there was a store?

10 THE WITNESS: Gurley and Broad Street
11 towards Chase Manhattan Bank, (unintelligible) but one
12 of two stores, jewelry store, (unintelligible) to Chase
13 Manhattan Bank.

14 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: And you
15 met this door broken?

16 THE WITNESS: Yes, door broken, and
17 people were taking stuff, and I took a watch there.
18 The soldier asked for it; I give it to him. He told me
19 to go back and take one for myself. I took it and ran.

20 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Okay.
21 So my train of thought is this is someone who went to
22 be a part of correcting a system that he felt was bad.
23 The (unintelligible), they employ people in jobs that
24 were not coming to work and were being paid and
25 everything, but the first opportunity you had, you went

1 and took something. How can you reconcile that aspect
2 of what happened to the change that you wanted to
3 bring?

4 THE WITNESS: During that time, I
5 was not thinking right. I was not thinking right. I
6 did what I saw to had an opportunity. They were taking
7 stuff, so I took one. During that time I didn't know
8 better, I say, you know?

9 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: So we
10 can say that at that time if you had an opportunity to
11 succeed in bringing about a change and you were given a
12 position, if you saw an opportunity to take, you were
13 going to take it?

14 THE WITNESS: Can you repeat that? Can
15 you repeat that?

16 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: I was
17 saying that --

18 THE WITNESS: Okay.

19 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: -- you
20 say you were not thinking well --

21 THE WITNESS: Okay.

22 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: -- at
23 that time, and so at your age, you were advocating for
24 change --

25 THE WITNESS: Okay.

1 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: -- at
2 your age. Even though you were not thinking right, you
3 were advocating for change, and so if that change had
4 actually taken place and you had an opportunity to
5 occupy a position and the opportunity presents itself
6 that you will take something at that time, would you
7 have taken that thing?

8 THE WITNESS: At that time, 19 years
9 old, what type of position will you be given in
10 government at age 19? What type of position would we
11 be given? To be messenger? That's all, right, I mean?

12 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: You
13 said Baccus say he came to bring about change and
14 wanted them also to bring rice for \$10?

15 THE WITNESS: Yes.

16 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: We saw
17 after the riot, he was arrested, put into jail, and
18 then we had a coup, and after that coup, he occupy a
19 position, I don't remember which position, am I right?

20 THE WITNESS: Foreign minister, yeah,
21 foreign minister.

22 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: The
23 PAL, were you still in Liberia at that time?

24 THE WITNESS: Yeah, I was still in
25 Liberia until 1984.

1 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: So were
2 you still a part of the PPP?

3 THE WITNESS: No.

4 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: The
5 PAL, were you still part of it?

6 THE WITNESS: No, I have relocated to
7 Mount Barclay, so I didn't have opportunity to be
8 coming to attend meeting.

9 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: And at
10 that time, he had an opportunity now to bring the rice
11 to us at \$10; he never did. What were your truths at
12 that time because I know you were much older at that
13 time.

14 THE WITNESS: I guess to my
15 self-interest, I guess he wanted something for his
16 self, and when he got it, he didn't care for nobody
17 else. I guess they were in a position, and somebody
18 then did that for (unintelligible) in that position and
19 the uprising and things like that, cause most of the
20 time when people criticize government, government bring
21 them, in, and when they come in, they shut up.

22 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: I know.
23 With your experience now, will you advocate another way
24 of resolving issues, especially the (unintelligible)
25 three that I need? When you see president having too

1 much power, nepotism, and then this class thing, what
2 can you recommend as the best way to resolve this kind
3 of issues when you see instead of going towards that
4 path?

5 THE WITNESS: I think we have to take
6 the process. I mean, go through the senate or
7 legislation, those that operate the system, and let
8 them know that. I mean, you cannot allow president to
9 have so much power, cause if they have that power, it's
10 very difficult to take power away from the hungry lion.
11 See, you have to minimize the power. I mean, the
12 constitution does not give them all the power, but the
13 people give them the power because, again, they are
14 afraid to say something to the president. But, I mean,
15 you have to -- I mean, people come in and say all of
16 this stuff. When they go back to Liberia, they sweep
17 it under the rug. They say this is what the people
18 were doing.

19 You know, you do not have to do that. You
20 can work with people to say listen, this is killing the
21 government. Mr. President, you cannot do this,
22 Mr. President. I mean, even happen here where
23 President Clinton, I know he had advisor in the office
24 that tell him, Mr. President, you cannot have the girls
25 be coming into the office, but he did not listen to

1 them. When people have power, they do not listen to
2 nobody. At the end, I mean, they mostly want to stay
3 in office until they are killed because what they doing
4 over there, they do not want it to be exposed. I
5 guess -- I think that is one of the reason why they do
6 not want to leave power.

7 VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Okay.
8 Thank you so much.

9 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Thank you
10 for your presentation. Your discussions with my
11 colleagues and your presentation has brought to mind a
12 very critical issue that, as a nation, we need to deal
13 with, so I will give you again two scenarios and let
14 you tell me something, what you think about that.

15 On one end is the failure of the revolution.
16 The revolutionaries got together thinking that the
17 previous corruption of government and power was the
18 problem and they wanted to change leadership, but when
19 they sat in the seat, they realized it wasn't the
20 people, it was the seat. Power corrupts. Absolute
21 power corrupts absolutely, so they began acting the
22 same way. And then those who left Liberia, the
23 diaspora experience, many Liberians are here now in a
24 country where they don't have to accuse themselves of
25 power problem, but is there opportunity for those

1 Liberians here? That's one part of my question. And
2 if there is, why do we find this high crime rate
3 amongst the youth, the lack of sincerity and interest
4 amongst Liberians who are living here in the diaspora,
5 about their own nation, the issue of tribal diversity?

6 It has been told to us that if you call a
7 meeting for Liberia, very few will come, but if you
8 call a meeting for Bassa or Kpelle, many will come.
9 And the lack of family values. So, I know it's a heavy
10 load I'm putting on you, but as your -- from your
11 position as a leader, where do we go forward? Forget
12 the past. We all made the mistakes now, but what's
13 next? Where's the hope.

14 THE WITNESS: I mean, there is hope.
15 We address the issue all the time, but, I mean, when it
16 come to national government, they take it for granted,
17 but when it come to tribal group, I mean, they are not
18 proprietary. I mean, they are only proprietary to
19 local or tribal -- or tribal government. I mean, take,
20 for example, I have a lot of Krahn friends, but when we
21 call meeting, we have very few that have been -- the
22 ex-leader of the community, they're the ones that show
23 up, but when you go to the Krahn committee meeting, you
24 see two, 300 of our people.

25 Recently we have the Mandingo group formed

1 an organization in the city of Illinois, and before
2 then we knew one Mandingo man that used to attend all
3 of our meetings, so when I was called to make a
4 statement, I say where -- I asked for all the Mandingo
5 in Chicago to put their hand up, they are over 50. I
6 said, "Why? We only know Mohammed to be the only
7 Mandingo man in Chicago. Where are you people coming
8 from? You need to be part of the system."

9 We need to work together because when
10 something happen to the Mandingo group, they say where
11 is the Liberian people? But the fact that we know only
12 one Mandingo man, but truly, but now they are willing
13 to come around. The leader is willing to talk to them.
14 I think we start with the leader, the leader of the
15 ethnic group, cause if he go and talk to a person and
16 say, listen, you are part of the Liberian community,
17 you need to help work together, but you cannot bypass
18 the leader. You have to go through the leader in order
19 for you to get the people to help.

20 COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Thank you
21 for that one (unintelligible).

22 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL:
23 Mr. Witness, thank you for coming to tell your story to
24 the TROC. The TROC Act says that the Commission should
25 provide an environment, a forum where victims and

1 alleged perpetrators can come together to give a clear
2 picture of what happened in the past in order that we
3 will see whether it was a systematic pattern of
4 violations or whether they were isolated. Today you
5 have given us, as an eye witness, truth session in
6 telling the truth. You did not have to come, but your
7 coming here today really, after 29 years, the late
8 Dr. Edward Casali (ph), who was then in Tolbert's
9 government, I think as a cabinet minister, who went to
10 jail, even to Belle Yalla, and became chairman of the
11 constitutional advisory assembly for the 1986
12 constitution, frequently used to say that in the
13 fullness of time, things will solve itself up.

14 You have come today after 29 years and have
15 said that you were a participant, and at least you
16 acknowledged the past. That's very commendable. You
17 were able to say you were there, and you show a clear
18 picture that there were lots of sympathizers that were
19 PAL, but you, like other sympathizers, invited you to
20 come, and you went there. You also show us that there
21 was soldiers around, lots of people were around, and
22 your age group, your age, 19 years, and there were many
23 like you even lower or higher.

24 One thing that -- two things I got out of
25 this, that at looting that went on, you said so there

1 were people who were in the crowd, who even were
2 participants who did the looting, and no one condemning
3 you because this what we supposed to do, get a clear
4 picture of what happened to now confront our difficult
5 past to see how we can go forward. You showed that a
6 participant took something, and even the soldiers took
7 something, so now we get a clear picture to know who
8 did the looting. It were done on both sides.

9 You find yourself, after 29 years, almost in
10 the position of the leader, leadership you talk here.
11 You lament of your frustration as a leader who want
12 many changes, who want many things to come together for
13 the good of your country, your fellow man, but you find
14 it difficult are the people you really want to help,
15 and who you have the leadership for, not contributing
16 the way you want to and not participating the way you
17 want to. So, you have given us a clear picture of what
18 happened 29 years ago with your age group and what
19 happened now that you -- I think how old, almost --
20 your age now, 40 years or 30? It just --

21 THE WITNESS: Forty-eight.

22 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: If you
23 50, you look still good.

24 THE WITNESS: I shouldn't have to tell
25 my age.

1 COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: No, we
2 crowd, we crowd is same age almost, still just all a
3 little bit, but you've shown that you're at the age now
4 where some of those people were who had the same vision
5 for Liberia, like you have now, and the difficulty and
6 challenges that you had to encounter. Those were
7 lesson, things done then and now these are lesson that
8 we can learn from there.

9 Thanks for participating in history then and
10 in participating in history now. We can learn from
11 both times and know that Liberia is for all of us, and
12 no matter what stage we are, we, too, can contribute.
13 You may not have contributed, participated in the war,
14 but we all suffer from the war, but we all have the
15 opportunity now to participate in the peace process and
16 for lasting peace and development for this country.
17 Thank you very much and continue to do just your best.
18 Thank you.

19 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

20 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
21 Mr. Witness, thank you very much for your testimony.
22 Do I understand you to have said that you attended two
23 meetings of PAL --

24 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

25 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

1 -- was it prior to the demonstration --

2 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

3 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

4 -- or after the demonstration?

5 THE WITNESS: To the demonstration.

6 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

7 And who addressed you people in the two meetings?

8 THE WITNESS: Baccus Matthews, he was
9 the chief.

10 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: He
11 himself was the one who talked to you?

12 THE WITNESS: No, Baccus Matthews.

13 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

14 What was the content of his message?

15 THE WITNESS: They were planning for
16 the demonstration, but the issue that's going in the
17 country, and they were to demonstrate to let their
18 voices be heard and let whatever ill that is going in
19 the country to be known to the government.

20 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

21 Now, what are some of the (unintelligible) that you
22 talk about?

23 THE WITNESS: I mean, corruption,
24 nepotism, and all of that. I mean, the price of
25 commodity. I mean, the -- when we heard that they were

1 going to increase the price of rice and the people were
2 devastated, you know, so those were issue that he had
3 to confront, saying I can lower the price of rice. Why
4 you want to increase the price of rice?

5 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
6 You said when you went on Broad Street, you saw a store
7 broken into?

8 THE WITNESS: Yes.

9 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
10 And people were looting?

11 THE WITNESS: Yes.

12 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
13 And you went there, you took your share
14 (unintelligible)?

15 THE WITNESS: Yeah, uh-huh.

16 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
17 And a soldier took from you?

18 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

19 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
20 And he told you go and get your own?

21 THE WITNESS: Right, and take mine,
22 uh-huh.

23 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: So
24 you did it?

25 THE WITNESS: Yes, I did.

1 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

2 But within these stores where the looting were going
3 on, did you see any soldiers in the -- looting
4 buildings?

5 THE WITNESS: They use their gun to
6 break the windows and stuff, and they stood there.

7 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
8 Were you physically present?

9 THE WITNESS: Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: So
11 you saw soldier breaking into --

12 THE WITNESS: Yes, I saw soldiers
13 shooting the window glasses, soldier, and people just
14 ran in there.

15 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
16 Was it part of the discussion of the planned meeting?

17 THE WITNESS: No.

18 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
19 What motivate it, the lootings, when it was not part of
20 your plan?

21 THE WITNESS: You know, when there's no
22 law and order, people do what they want to do, anywhere
23 in the world. If there's no law and order, people
24 shoot people, people kill people, and there's no
25 government to arrest them. Because there's during that

1 demonstration there were no law and order, people did
2 what they want to do, even after the coup.

3 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
4 Violating the law is one thing and the absence of law
5 and order is another thing. Before the demonstration
6 there were court system, there were police, there was
7 army. You understand that?

8 THE WITNESS: I understand that.

9 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
10 Okay, so there were law and order, but when you people
11 decided to approach your rights violently, you
12 understand?

13 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

14 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
15 Government is not automatic, it's not God, that when it
16 said be, it becomes, so you -- were you told that if
17 you are not permitted to demonstrate, you should take
18 the law into your own hand?

19 THE WITNESS: No.

20 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
21 Under whose command now you get on the street and start
22 busting people stores?

23 THE WITNESS: I did not say that I went
24 busting store. I said after we left PAL headquarter
25 and running around, we saw stores busting open. No, I

1 did not say that I was given the permission to go in
2 there. I did not say that.

3 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

4 Yeah, but you did not bust store?

5 THE WITNESS: Okay.

6 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

7 Somebody bust store?

8 THE WITNESS: Okay.

9 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

10 And you know, even though you said you were small at
11 the time --

12 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

13 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

14 -- you know properties' right. You know the shame that
15 you wore that day is for you.

16 THE WITNESS: Okay.

17 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: If

18 somebody come and force out of you, you would believe
19 that your right has been denied.

20 THE WITNESS: Okay.

21 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

22 You know that that store does not belong to government.

23 THE WITNESS: Okay.

24 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

25 It's a private property, and you saw people engaged in

1 violation of law, and you got in there.

2 THE WITNESS: Okay.

3 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

4 So, what is the different between you and the person
5 who bust the door and you who went in and took, give
6 some to the soldier and then got your own again? What
7 is the difference?

8 THE WITNESS: I was told -- I mean,
9 there was looting all over. I mean, nobody was
10 thinking should I do this, should I not do this? I
11 mean, it happened and it's over.

12 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: It
13 happened; it's over?

14 THE WITNESS: It's over.

15 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

16 And now that it is over --

17 THE WITNESS: Okay.

18 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

19 -- and you have discovered that you were misled --

20 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

21 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

22 -- what have you have to do to repair the wrong that
23 was done at that time?

24 THE WITNESS: If I was in the country
25 now, I mean, I would try to advise the government on

1 whatever I see wrong that is going on. If there's
2 crime against humanity, I mean, I will speak about it.
3 I mean, that's why we are here, to give recommendation
4 so that you can take it to the government, you know.

5 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: In
6 your statement you said you did this act because you
7 were so young an age; you did not know better at the
8 time. Now that you have known better --

9 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

10 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
11 -- what advice can you give to our children because
12 what you are saying here will be heard in Liberia?
13 What is your advice?

14 THE WITNESS: We advise kids to do what
15 is right, do not follow the wrong crowd, do what you
16 think is good for you, prepare yourself for the future,
17 do not follow people if you do not know where they are
18 going or what they intend to do because we have
19 instances that -- I mean, kids like Robin and Ryan,
20 they called a friend, they had a plan already, and they
21 called their friend and they got into the car, and
22 look, where you commit a crime, you cannot tell the
23 police officer you do not know about it. So long you
24 were in that car there, you are part of it. So, we
25 tell kids that: do not follow your friend if you do not

1 know what they plan to do or what they are doing
2 because when you are caught, you cannot say you are not
3 part of it, we tell them all the time, and we see all
4 the time. So, that's the advice that we have to the
5 kids: try and be yourself, do not be somebody, do not
6 follow other people.

7 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:
8 What about political activists, what advice have you
9 got for them?

10 THE WITNESS: Tell the issue, know what
11 is where to find a peaceful solution. You know, they
12 have stated a way of resolving conflict, follow it step
13 by step until you cannot take anymore, but you have to
14 follow those stages. You can't just go -- after the
15 first attempt, you start to fight. You have to, you
16 know, follow stages and get other people involved. If
17 somebody is not listening to you, they may be able to
18 listen to somebody else, or you can also go through
19 somebody that you think they're going to listen to.

20 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KARUMBA KONNEH:
21 Thank you very much for your statement. It was short
22 but very precise, concise, and exposed some of the
23 denials that have been clear out throughout since 1979.
24 Now you, as an active participant, you are not only eye
25 witness but as an accomplice. After your testimony

1 tend to suggest that those who denied, they were just
2 going in barefoot. Thank you very much.

3 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Mr. Witness,
4 I want to thank you very much for being forthright in
5 your testimony.

6 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: And your
8 recommendations and perspective of what transpired in
9 1979. You may think what you have said here today has
10 had minimal contribution, but for us at the TROC who
11 are conducting inquiry into events into time past, we
12 appreciate it because each testimony tends to
13 corroborate of filling the gap that we have in the
14 process. I want to ask very pointed questions, and
15 even if you respond pointedly, I will appreciate it.
16 Realistically speaking, was there a demonstration on
17 April 14, 1979?

18 THE WITNESS: That demonstration
19 started, but when we got there, it was dispersed
20 already. People did not have a chance to do what they
21 planned to do because when we got to the PAL
22 headquarters, people was all over, so I don't know how
23 you call it -- how you call that -- people were all
24 over the city, Camp Johnson Road, Broad Street, and all
25 of that. They have soldier and police officer trying

1 to stop the demonstration, but it was not fully carried
2 out. It's started, but it was not -- it was
3 interrupted, I would call it that.

4 CHAIRPERSON JEROME VERDIER: You want
5 to say it was aborted?

6 THE WITNESS: Yeah, in a way, in a
7 negative way, for the fact that it turned to violence.

8 CHAIRPERSON JEROME VERDIER: So were
9 people assembling for a demonstration and they didn't
10 have the opportunity to assemble and demonstrate as to
11 their plan?

12 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON JEROME VERDIER: Because
14 before they had assembled, the students and police were
15 already in the streets --

16 THE WITNESS: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON JEROME VERDIER: -- and
18 prevented the assembly?

19 You made mention of looting at a store. Was
20 there massive looting?

21 THE WITNESS: Yeah, there were massive
22 looting all over the country.

23 CHAIRPERSON JEROME VERDIER: All
24 around?

25 THE WITNESS: All around.

1 CHAIRPERSON JEROME VERDIER: Do you
2 think that was part of the plan of the demonstrators --

3 THE WITNESS: No.

4 CHAIRPERSON JEROME VERDIER: -- or the
5 dispersement of something in light of the looting?

6 THE WITNESS: It was not a plan, but
7 people saw an opportunity to do whatever they could do
8 at that time, but it was never the plan.

9 CHAIRPERSON JEROME VERDIER: Was the
10 opportunity real or they took advantage of the
11 situation and find other ways --

12 THE WITNESS: Opportunity, and they
13 took advantage of the situation.

14 CHAIRPERSON JEROME VERDIER: That there
15 was chaos from the dispersement?

16 THE WITNESS: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON JEROME VERDIER: Was there
18 shooting?

19 THE WITNESS: Yeah. We heard a
20 shooting. We heard shots in the air.

21 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Were there
22 casualties?

23 THE WITNESS: Yes, I saw it. I did not
24 see the dead person, but I saw people being injured on
25 the arm, on the leg, and all of that.

1 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: So one
2 person?

3 THE WITNESS: I did not witness no
4 death.

5 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You saw one
6 person injured, two persons, three persons?

7 THE WITNESS: Yes, a lot. Between my
8 attendance in the -- at the university, you had people
9 running all over, you know, bleeding all over.

10 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: So a lot of
11 people were injured?

12 THE WITNESS: Yes.

13 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Besides
14 Baccus Matthew, do you know the names of any of the
15 organizers, others who addressed the rally or the
16 meetings, prior to April 14, 1979?

17 THE WITNESS: Yeah, we have Garven
18 Tomaha (ph). My cousin there, I forget his last name,
19 he was arrested with Baccus Matthew then. Anthony
20 Kesselly, Fonda Uli (ph), and all of that, Larry Togba,
21 and all of them, they were all part of PAL.

22 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Did you say
23 Marcus?

24 THE WITNESS: Baccus, I forget his last
25 name. He wouldn't have told (unintelligible) when the

1 -- Doe arrested those guys, he would follow that. Doe
2 put out Doe pardon. He was part -- I forgot his whole
3 name, but Larry Togba and Anthony Kesselly, they were
4 all Pa-Pa (ph); they PAL.

5 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. Thank
6 you.

7 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KARUMBA KONNEH:
8 Mr. Witness, please make this thing clear in when the
9 chairman was asking you assembling at the PAL office
10 was one thing, and the demonstration, according to your
11 own statement, were carried out all over in the --

12 THE WITNESS: In the city.

13 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

14 -- Monrovia --

15 THE WITNESS: Uh-huh.

16 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

17 -- so are you saying that because those people who were
18 supposed to assemble at PAL headquarters did not get
19 the chance to assemble, therefore the demonstration was
20 aborted?

21 THE WITNESS: I mean --

22 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

23 Because the demonstration were going on all over
24 anyways?

25 THE WITNESS: It was all over, it was

1 all over, but I mean, we had intentions of starting at
2 the PAL headquarters, but before we got there, people
3 have already left, and it was all over. The
4 demonstration was all over, but --

5 COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH:

6 So, the question of aborting the demonstration is not
7 real?

8 THE WITNESS: No, no, no, no. I mean,
9 the demonstrations still went on because it was all
10 over the city.

11 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Mr. Witness,
12 we want to thank you very much for coming and taking
13 your time to address the Commission. Is there anything
14 else you'd like to say, briefly, that you didn't have
15 the chance to say during the course of our interaction?

16 THE WITNESS: Sir, I think I said
17 almost everything. I mean, one of the strong
18 recommendation is the child soldier come in, they --
19 when they took those guns from them, I mean, their
20 frame of mind is of violence or taking things by force,
21 so they need assistance to detraumatize them. I mean,
22 make them to be a normal person. I mean, somebody has
23 psychological problem and do -- they just come in in a
24 country, we have a problem dealing with them. So, this
25 should be some of the issues. Taking the gun from

1 them, it is not over. They are losing their mind. The
2 drugs that they put in their system, they come and they
3 follow or get into drug and follow the system in order
4 to be -- to be normal in society, or else one of these
5 days when they -- when they want something, they're
6 going to get it the hard way. So, if you restricting
7 the mind and get the evil and the drugs away out of the
8 mind, they will know how to go about doing what is
9 right.

10 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you
11 very much. And you have our permission to leave now.

12 THE WITNESS: Okay. Thank you very
13 much.

14 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Ladies and
15 gentleman, we beg to bring to this session to a close.
16 There is another witness but who prefers to be heard
17 in-camera, so we'll retire behind closed doors for a
18 continuation of this session. Following that, we'll
19 resume tomorrow at 9:00 a.m. Thank you very much. As
20 always, we appreciate your support and patience. Good
21 night.

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Holly Nordahl, a Registered Reporter, do certify that the foregoing pages of typewritten material constitute an accurate verbatim stenographic record taken by me of the proceedings aforementioned before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, on the 11th day of June 2008, at the time and place specified.

DATED: July 30, 2008.

/s/ _____

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