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4 TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

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6 DIASPORA PROJECT

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

13 **TESTIMONY OF**

14 **TELEE BROWN**

15 TRC Commissioners:

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

24 Hearing Officer: Pastor John P. Teayah

25 Court Reporter: Jean M. Whalen, RDR, CRR  
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## TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA

1 (The following proceedings were had and made of  
2 record, commencing at approximately 2:55 p.m.):

3 (Witness Telee Brown sworn)

4 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Mr. Witness, good  
5 afternoon and welcome.

6 THE WITNESS: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman.

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: I want to tell you  
8 thanks, and this goes to your community as well in Staten  
9 Island, for agreeing to share perspectives, experience, and  
10 perhaps ideas on the forward-looking processes for the  
11 restoration and assisting of the current peace in our  
12 country. We invite you to make your presentation; and, if  
13 you have the time, there will be the opportunity for question  
14 and answer.

15 But before that, I will introduce the  
16 Commissioners, following which you will say something briefly  
17 about yourself, and then we proceed.

18 Commissioner Sheikh Kafumba Konneh, Commissioner  
19 Pearl Brown Bull, Commissioner Gerald Coleman, Dede Dolopei,  
20 Massa A. Washington, John Stewart, Oumu Syllah.

21 Mr. (unintelligible), can you kindly repeat your  
22 name?

23 THE WITNESS: My name is Telee Brown.

24 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Where do you reside?

25 THE WITNESS: I reside on Staten Island. It's in

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1 New York.

2 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: What's your connection  
3 with the community?

4 THE WITNESS: I'm the vice president and the  
5 liaison of the committee to the Truth and Reconciliation  
6 Commission.

7 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: When did you migrate to  
8 the U.S.?

9 THE WITNESS: The year 2000.

10 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: 2000?

11 THE WITNESS: Yes.

12 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Besides working for the  
13 committee, do you do anything else?

14 THE WITNESS: Yeah. I work to sustain my family,  
15 because, you know, the committees are voluntary, so I work to  
16 sustain my family.

17 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay. You have an  
18 occupation, I assume?

19 THE WITNESS: Say it?

20 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Occupation?

21 THE WITNESS: I'm a social worker with the City of  
22 New York.

23 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Social worker. Okay.  
24 Thank you very much.

25 You may now proceed.

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**TELEE BROWN,**

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

**TESTIMONY OF TELEE BROWN**

THE WITNESS: We on Staten Island  
(unintelligible). We on Staten Island, like Liberians  
everywhere, have remained engaged and have, over the period,  
been very much interested in the process, and should I say  
every process that concerns Liberia. And that is why my  
community thought it wise to ensure that we be represented  
here, and we bring you profound greetings from the rest of  
the leadership and members of the community. We want to, in  
a special way, say thank you to the Truth and Reconciliation  
Commission, its partners, and thousands of volunteers  
everywhere working to give a voice to the voiceless, those  
who were silenced for various reasons.

There are over 5,000 Liberians on Staten Island.  
I am especially humbled to be part of this trend-setting  
process.

We are aware that, in fact, the activities of the  
TRC have received some challenges on Staten Island when we  
agreed to make sure that we go about an outreach process to  
encourage people to come up and give their statements. There  
were people who came out to outrightly reject the process for  
various reasons. Some let us know that it was just one of

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1 those talk shop. In fact, one of them clearly said that from  
2 his information, the TRC was more of a toothless  
3 (unintelligible). She also let me know that there was -- in  
4 fact, there is a great number of people who embrace the  
5 process and have ever since been giving their statements,  
6 been coming forth to say what they experienced or to even say  
7 what their family experienced and what happened in their  
8 towns and villages.

9           During this time, we have used a lot of approaches  
10 to encourage people to come out and give their statements to  
11 say what they know happened, that the community is --  
12 individuals, they have their own things going on. People on  
13 Staten Island work. In fact, today the county of Richmond,  
14 which is Staten Island, happens to be the fastest growing  
15 county in the state of New York, and in part attributed to  
16 the large immigrant population that found ourselves there.  
17 And we are involved with various facets of jobs. We work at  
18 every level. There are even amongst us stay-home poppas and  
19 moms. So it is a very busy community. People there are very  
20 productive.

21           But in the midst of all of that, there are  
22 challenges. There are challenges among our youth. There are  
23 challenges with services for our seniors. And, as a  
24 community, we continue to do our part to ensure that life on  
25 Staten Island is worth living.

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1           During our outreach process, we have had forums.  
2 We have also gone door to door to make sure that people come  
3 out and give their statement. There were even recreational  
4 activities that we attended just to encourage people, because  
5 we believe strongly that somebody has to be the one to tell  
6 the story, somebody has to be the one to say what happened in  
7 Liberia over the period have been set aside for the Truth and  
8 Reconciliation Commission to gather statements. And during  
9 this period, people have given a lot of statements, some  
10 very, very compelling, and some have just been  
11 recommendations.

12           We some times ago met at a forum where we tried to  
13 analyze -- I mean intellectualize and, I'll say perhaps, just  
14 exchange views to understand what may have caused the civil  
15 war, and there were views from every side; people who, in  
16 fact, clearly came out to say that the process of war in  
17 Liberia was a necessary evil waiting to happen. And the  
18 profundity of views, some say all went to the various  
19 happenings over the period that have not been addressed.  
20 They were entrenched, societal ills. And we tried to align  
21 some of these causes gathered from these discussions to  
22 include inadequate distribution of national goods and  
23 services.

24           People believe that one of the key reasons for the  
25 war in Liberia was that the national pie was not being

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1 distributed equally, so they thought that necessitated the  
2 war. And there were others who thought that there was this  
3 massive illiteracy or inadequate skills for people to be able  
4 to win bread for their families, so those are some of the  
5 reasons that others propounded.

6           And some were of the view that, yes, the first two  
7 are truth, but even more true is the excessive force used by  
8 regimes of the past to suppress people who came up with  
9 opposing views. They believe that leaderships of most of the  
10 country's history have not really been such that we helped to  
11 make Liberia what it should be, and there was a lady who said  
12 that all that what has happened in Liberia was only because  
13 of the lack of moral rectitude. She said that people just  
14 lost their sense of right and wrong, saying yes, there were  
15 influences that came from every circle people to perpetrate  
16 violence; but again, there were others who had the  
17 opportunity not to but still deliberately chose to pursue  
18 war, carrying about devastation and every form of  
19 unimaginable atrocities.

20           So it was a very open debate we discussed, and we  
21 were able through the exchange to pick up and outline some  
22 recommendations.

23           And a key among the recommendations is justice,  
24 people believe, that for us to be able to embrace our future.  
25 And those years, we are all ashamed of the past, considering

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1 what happened. There are even others who are ashamed to be  
2 called Liberians when considering all of what has happened.

3           There are some communities and some areas on  
4 Staten Island you go, when you hear some of what's happened  
5 amongst our people, some feel ashamed. By my idea, there are  
6 still some good things happening on Staten Island. There are  
7 some of our children who are going to the best of schools.  
8 Some go to Harvard. Just think of the best of the schools.  
9 So, yes, in the midst of ugliness there are some good things  
10 happen on Staten Island.

11           So mostly recommendations were, one, justice;  
12 accountability, that government should be accountable; that  
13 people should be tolerant; and that people should just begin  
14 to show love, because love, they believe, transcends every  
15 boundary. Love even goes beyond reconciliation, and it is  
16 the best that everyone can use to compromise despite whatever  
17 the challenges may be.

18           We had other form of interactions that time would  
19 not allow me to elaborate on at this time, but we will be  
20 giving you a written copy of the summary we just gave, and we  
21 will end at this point.

22           (Applause)

23           CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you, Mr. Witness.  
24 The Commission has been implored and encouraged not to ask  
25 you questions because you have a flight, and you are five



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1 minutes late already. So, with the permission of the full  
2 panel of the Commission, we want to say thanks for coming,  
3 and kindly sign your presentation presented. If we have  
4 follow-up issues, we could communicate with you by telephone  
5 or otherwise. But you have our thanks and appreciation, and  
6 please extend that to the community of Staten Island, the  
7 Commission learned about the good works that was going on  
8 there, and we certainly appreciate that you are, indeed, part  
9 of this process.

10 So thank you. Except you want to say something at  
11 your own detriment, you can leave.

12 THE WITNESS: With the flight, I'm already four  
13 minutes late, I think.

14 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay.

15 THE WITNESS: I mean, I appreciate your indulgence  
16 to run out.

17 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay.

18 THE WITNESS: Thanks very much again for the  
19 opportunity to be part of this history-making process.

20 CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much.

21 (Applause)

22 (Witness excused)

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I Jean M. Whalen a Registered Diplomate Reporter, do hereby certify that the foregoing pages of typewritten material constitute an accurate verbatim stenographic record taken by me of the proceedings aforementioned before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, on the 14th day of June, 2008, at the time and place specified.

DATED: July 21, 2008.

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