

Chapter One



Executive Summary

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All my family started to flee to different places. One brother fled to neighboring Guinea...My brother who stayed in Bomi County saw people in my brother's house and told them to leave and they just shot him. I had nine siblings. One brother was a diplomat in Sierra Leone. Another brother lived in New York. Another brother fled to Guinea – I think he is still there. My oldest brother has not been heard from up to today. He just disappeared from the face of the earth. We believe he is most likely dead. One brother fled to Ghana. He is still there today. My sister came here too...I have two siblings still in Liberia.¹

The West African nation of Liberia is recovering from years of conflict characterized by egregious violations of human rights that dramatically increased the Liberian diaspora. From 1979 until 2003, the Liberian people survived a bloody coup d'état, years of military rule, and two violent civil wars. The atrocities were the result of complex historical and geopolitical factors. The slave trade, U.S. efforts to return slaves and free African Americans to Africa, the abuse of the indigenous population by a ruling oligarchy, the looting of the country's natural resources by its own corrupt government and by foreign interests, and the political ambitions of other African leaders all contributed to the conflict. Using inhuman tactics, key individuals and their supporters seized upon the chaos and strife in Liberia to gain power and to amass wealth. The international community, including the United States, failed to take effective action to limit the bloodshed.

Out of a pre-war population of three million, an estimated 250,000 people were killed, and as many as 1.5 million people were displaced. A mass exodus fleeing the fighting created Liberian diaspora communities in many countries around the world, including the United States. Tens of thousands of Liberians live in the United States (reportedly more than 30,000 in Minnesota alone), in the United Kingdom, and in refugee settlements in the West African sub-region.

The violence finally ended in 2003, but the peace remains fragile. The conflict's impact is evident in the streets of Monrovia, the homes of villagers in the Liberian countryside, and Liberian gathering places in London, Philadelphia, Staten Island, and elsewhere. Many Liberians were forced from their homes and deprived of their education and livelihood. They are suffering from physical and psychological trauma and are separated from their families by death or distance. Deeply felt conflicts continue to divide the Liberian people at home and abroad. Corruption, both real and perceived, continues to pervade the society. Liberia's infrastructure was destroyed and remains badly damaged; security is a very real concern. The many Liberians who lack the most basic means of subsistence seek food, work, health care, education, and a future. Increasingly, Liberians also are calling for justice. These demands are made to a government that struggles with few resources and an unstable security situation.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (TRC) was originally agreed upon in the



August 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement and was established by legislative act in 2005. The TRC was created to “promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation,” and at the same time make it possible to hold perpetrators accountable for the gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law that occurred in Liberia between January 1979 and October 2003.

While more than 30 countries have implemented some form of truth

commission process, the Liberian TRC is the first such body to involve diaspora² Liberians in every aspect of the truth seeking process. Diaspora Liberians provided advisory input on the operation of the project, participated in outreach, gave statements, and testified in public hearings held in the diaspora. This groundbreaking effort gave Liberians in the diaspora a voice in the truth-seeking, accountability, and reconciliation processes in Liberia.

At the request of the TRC, The Advocates for Human Rights (The Advocates) coordinated the work of the TRC in the diaspora. Since January 2007, The Advocates has documented statements from Liberians in the United States, the United Kingdom, and in the Buduburam Refugee Settlement in Ghana, West Africa. The TRC held public hearings in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA in June 2008 to gather public testimony from Liberians in the U.S. diaspora. This work could not have been undertaken without the more than \$10 million in in-kind contributions and *pro bono* hours donated over two years to the TRC Diaspora Project by individuals, partner law firms, and institutions around the United States and in the United Kingdom. This report presents an analysis of TRC statements and public hearing testimony as well as extensive background interviews and secondary source research by The Advocates and its *pro bono* partners.

BACKGROUND

Liberia is located on the Atlantic coast of West Africa and encompasses a territory of 43,000 square miles. The country shares borders with Sierra Leone to the northwest, Guinea to the northeast, and Côte d’Ivoire to the southeast. Liberia’s 15 counties generally correspond to territories historically claimed by particular Liberian indigenous ethnic groups. English is the official language of Liberia, although more than 20 indigenous languages and a form of English known as Liberian English are

also spoken.

Liberia was partly shaped by the transatlantic slave trade. In the early eighteenth century, a group of prominent white Americans developed a plan to return freed blacks to Africa. Beginning in 1822, free-born black Americans, freed slaves of African descent, and Africans freed from captured slave ships were settled by the American Colonization Society on lands that later became Liberia. This group of a few thousand settlers, never more than 5 percent of the Liberian population, became known as Americo-Liberians.

While Liberia has often been hailed as one of the only African nations never to be colonized, the historical facts are more complex. Although Liberia was not colonized by a Western power, the Americo-Liberian-dominated government administered the country in ways reminiscent of colonial governments across the continent. The settlements of repatriated Africans were in fact governed by white American agents of the American Colonization Society for the first several years of their existence. Although the U.S. government funded much of the American Colonization Society efforts, it never sought to formally establish itself as a colonial power in Liberia. Liberia became a sovereign nation under Americo-Liberian rule in 1847. The indigenous inhabitants of the territory claimed for Liberia were largely antagonistic to the establishment of the Liberian nation. In fact, the American Colonization Society and later the fledgling Liberian government were at war with various indigenous tribes over territory and trade routes throughout the 1800s.

Liberia developed into a relatively stable oligarchy under (an almost exclusive) Americo-Liberian government through the 1800s and early 1900s. By the 1970s, however, tensions within Liberia were escalating. Riots broke out in 1979 in the capital city of Monrovia. In 1980, a military coup took place, resulting in the murder of the president, the summary execution of 13 government ministers, and the installation of Samuel Doe, an army master sergeant, as the new national leader. Doe ruled the country for the next decade. In 1985, Thomas Quiwonkpa led a group of fighters in a failed coup attempt against Doe, launching the country into further turmoil. In 1989, Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) invaded Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire, setting off two civil wars that raged until 2003, involving more than 10 rebel factions, and impacting the entire West African sub-region.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR CONFLICT

An important aspect of the TRC's mandate is the examination of the root causes of the conflict that engulfed Liberia. All individuals who agreed to be interviewed as part of the TRC process were asked their opinions about the roots of the conflict in Liberia. Several key themes emerged from the more than 1,500 statements documented in the United States, the United Kingdom, and in Ghana. Liberians identified the following as contributory elements in setting the stage for the conflict in Liberia as well

as exacerbating the conflict and leading to loss of life and the destruction of the Liberian nation:

- oppressive dominance of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy over the indigenous peoples of Liberia,
- greed and corruption at the international, national, corporate, and individual level,
- breakdown of the rule of law,
- interference of foreign governments in Liberian affairs,
- conflicts among indigenous groups, and
- failure of the United States to intervene to stop the fighting.

Americo-Liberian Dominance

As Liberia began to establish itself as a new nation, a small number of Americo-Liberian families and their patronage networks dominated all aspects of government, the security sector, commerce, and social advancement. Government in Liberia was the domain of the Americo-Liberian controlled True Whig Party. Although other political parties existed, opposition to True Whig Party dominance was systematically repressed. Control of the Liberian territory and the indigenous tribes that lived there was established by the Liberian Frontier Force, later named the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). Commerce with the outside world was centrally controlled by the Monrovia-based government to the detriment of those who lived outside the city. TRC statements reflect the opinion that this oligarchic governance structure led to an excessive concentration of power in the presidency, lack of education and other opportunities for those of non-Americo-Liberian origin, and impunity for corruption and systematic human rights abuses.

The administrations of Presidents William Tubman and William Tolbert sought to reach out to the indigenous tribes and increase their involvement in government and society. Their efforts, however, were perceived by many to be insufficient, and their administrations were perceived to be corrupt. In 1979, rumors and widespread belief that President Tolbert planned to raise the price of rice to economically benefit him and his family led to protests and demonstrations known as the Rice Riots. The Tolbert administration's brutal suppression of the Rice Riots and the administration's use of foreign troops further entrenched the socio-economic and ethnic divides in Liberian society and heightened popular grievances. Many who provided TRC statements perceived the Rice Riots to have been the beginning of Liberia's civil crisis.

Corruption

Liberia has significant natural resources, including timber, gold, diamonds, and rubber. Historically, the majority of Liberians have not benefited significantly from the exploitation of these natural resources.

The concentration of state power among a few influential families meant that the government served the financial interests of those families and their networks. Special deals were reached with a multitude of foreign business interests. Most notably, the 1925 lease of one million acres of land on highly favorable terms to the Firestone Rubber Company led to the creation of the world's largest rubber plantation. In the late 1920s the True Whig Party forcibly recruited workers for the Firestone plantation and other projects through its Labor Bureau and the Liberian Frontier Force, which meted out harsh punishments to indigenous leaders unable or unwilling to supply workers. A League of Nations investigation of the practices led to the resignation of one Liberian president. Labor practices at Firestone remain the subject of ongoing litigation in U.S. federal court.

With the concentration of power and lack of economic opportunity, corruption and abuse of power spread to virtually all sectors of Liberian government. Corruption became endemic across ministries, the security forces, civil service, and the judiciary.

Liberians have had little faith in judicial institutions to protect their interests or fundamental rights. Inadequate compensation for judicial officers and the influence of Liberian patrimonial governance structures subjected the judiciary to political, social, familial, and financial pressures. In addition, corruption and abuse of power in the security forces went unchecked by the judiciary and the state, leading to further deterioration of the rule of law. The breakdown in the rule of law and a history of pervasive illicit enrichment frustrated those seeking true democratic change in Liberia and led some to advocate the use of force to attain change. These entrenched aspects of life in Liberia exacerbated behavior during the civil conflict. Vigilantism became widespread, with multiple statement givers reporting that combatants used their newfound power to seek revenge for past losses. Wartime looting



and theft of property from those perceived as having benefited from the system of illicit enrichment were also commonly reported to the TRC.

The Role of the United States

The United States played an important role in Liberia's founding and the development of its governing structures. Many of the patterns of governance that became established in Liberia, including over-centralization of power, were imported by members of the American Colonization Society. American Colonization Society members initially governed the colonies that later became Liberia, and they modeled government institutions on those of the United States. The authoritarian and paternalistic management style of the American Colonization Society played a role in establishing the systems from which the conflicts arose. The United States also played a role in exacerbating the conflict itself, most notably through its silence and inaction. The U.S. government failed to act at critical times throughout the conflict. During the height of the civil war, the United States stood by and watched, limiting its efforts to the evacuation of Americans. Many Liberian statement givers expressed the view that the United States had a special duty to assist a nation it founded and that the United States' failure to do so led to thousands of deaths. The former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, who was in Liberia in 1991, testified before the TRC that he believed U.S. intervention could have potentially reduced the violence and saved the country's infrastructure, but that plans to intervene were never implemented.

Other International Actors

Statement givers identified other international actors who contributed to Liberia's chaos. The politics of the Cold War and long-standing relations among African nations also served to exacerbate and probably to lengthen the conflict in Liberia.

Libya, in particular, was an important source of arms, training, and money throughout the conflict period. Muammar al Qadhafi of Libya reportedly hoped to unite African nations in an alliance against the United States. Libya was one of the first nations to establish ties to the Doe regime, and Libyans invested money in Liberia during the early 1980s. When Doe developed strong relations with the United States and Israel, Qadhafi recruited Liberian dissidents and trained them in Libyan camps. Most notable among the trainees was Charles Taylor. Qadhafi's support of, and ongoing relations with, Taylor continued after Taylor came to power. Libya served as a major source of weapons for the war.

Taylor also received important support from the governments of Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, which served as places of refuge for the fighters and provided training and other means of support. Other sub-regional actors, including Guinea and Sierra Leone, contributed support to various fighting

factions as they emerged to contest Taylor's regime. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), led by Nigeria, became involved in the Liberian conflict as peacekeepers. The ECOWAS peacekeeping force, known as ECOMOG, was a lifeline for many Liberians, but at times contributed to human rights abuses rather than preventing them.

Tribalism

Statement givers identified the growing prominence of tribalism as a factor that became entrenched during the years of Samuel Doe's rule in Liberia. The Americo-Liberian oligarchy had established its dominance in Liberia by marginalizing all indigenous groups and establishing patrimonial networks based on fidelity to the True Whig Party, an ostensibly non-tribal entity but an effectively Americo-Liberian institution. In attempting to establish his own system of patrimony distinct from the traditional Americo-Liberian system, Doe relied on family and tribal affiliation to ensure loyalty. Statement givers perceived Doe to have favored his own small tribe, the Krahn, as well as the Mandingo. During Liberia's two civil wars, fighting factions established themselves along tribal lines, and because language and dress were often easy indicators, tribe became an easy – but far from accurate – method for identifying perceived enemies. Overcoming tribalism was an oft repeated refrain amongst statement givers, who identified it as one of the continuing problems in the Liberian homeland and diaspora.

A HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS: LIBERIA 1979-2003

Starting with the government response to the Rice Riots of 1979 and continuing through the Doe administration (1980-1989), the First Liberian Civil War (1989-1997), and the administration of Charles Taylor and the Second Liberian Civil War (1997-2003), severe human rights and humanitarian abuses were pervasive in Liberia.

Liberia is a signatory to key international instruments protecting fundamental human rights, including the African Convention on Human and Peoples' Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Geneva Conventions, and numerous other instruments that protect the rights of specific groups, such as women and children. During both the Doe and Taylor regimes, the government refused to take responsibility for the actions of its functionaries in carrying out abuses. Moreover, Doe, Taylor, and their close associates were directly implicated by statement givers in personally perpetrating human rights abuses. The perpetuation of human rights abuses with complete impunity was a defining feature of the TRC mandate period, and numerous statement givers narrated their futile attempts to obtain justice for abuses committed against them.

From the bloody coup that led to his assumption of power until his death, Samuel Doe was reportedly

responsible for massacres, disappearances, summary executions, imprisonments without trial, and systematic suppression of perceived opposition. Although Charles Taylor was initially welcomed by many Liberians as a liberator who would bring an end to the tyrannical rule of Samuel Doe, it soon became clear that the Taylor era would be as oppressive, if not worse, than anything experienced under Doe.

Taylor's NPFL forces invaded Liberia in December 1989, touching off a full-scale civil war. During the early 1990s, as Taylor's NPFL marched through the country and then laid siege to Monrovia, hundreds of thousands of Liberians fled in the face of abuses against the civilian population. Additional warring factions soon emerged, including the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO), the Liberia Peace Council (LPC), the Lofa Defense Force (LDF), the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), and Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). Each was itself responsible for human rights and humanitarian law violations.

During the Liberian civil wars, fighters committed wide-ranging violations of international humanitarian law. Statement givers reported massacres, rape as a weapon of war, torture, summary executions, collective punishments, violence to life, health, and mental well-being, as well as innumerable threats and outrages upon personal dignity. Fighting factions were implicated by statement givers in carrying out attacks on civilian populations and other non-combatants, such as medical personnel, humanitarian workers, and peacekeepers. Moreover, statement givers reported that fighting factions targeted refugee populations in cross-border raids. In many instances, statement givers who were victimized could not identify which faction was perpetrating the abuses because of the general chaos created, and the fact that fighters rarely wore identifiable uniforms.

One statement giver's account of violence is representative of the scope of the human rights abuses and level of brutality many Liberians suffered:

At the initial stages of the war, I moved to Ninth Street in Sinkor, Monrovia... The children were outside cleaning the yard. Suddenly they ran inside and said that they saw armed men coming. Moments later, Taylor's men busted in. One of them said, "This is the dog I'm looking for." He told us to come outside. Myself, my ten children, and my wife obeyed.

The NPFL [commander] knew me... He had run against me in an election... before the war. He said to me, "You cheated me during the election, but now I am in power. I will teach you a lesson you will never forget."

He told his NPFL boys to take my eldest daughter into the house. She was

thirteen years old. They dragged her inside and dragged me in after her. [The commander] raped my daughter in front of me. My father (my daughter's grandfather) was still in the house. He rushed at the NPFL men, trying to stop the rape. One of the men – I don't know his name – shot and killed my [father] right there.

[The commander] then brought me and my daughter back outside. He said, "I'm going to show you what I came here for." He beat the children with the butt of his gun. He made two of my sons, who were seventeen and twenty, drink dirty water with the urine of one of the NPFL men in it. When the twenty year old refused, he shot him in the foot. [The commander] stabbed my other son, who was eighteen, in the elbow with his bayonet.

He then began to beat my wife. He told her to lay on her back and stare at the sun. [The commander] said, "You will eat your husband's heart very soon." He took the daughter who had been raped. [The commander] held her and said, "I want you to know how you all will die." He ordered one of his men to cut off my daughter's head. She was beheaded in front of our eyes.

They dragged me over to lay beside her body. [The commander] said, "You will be the next one."

Then I heard heavy shooting. ECOMOG was coming. The NPFL scattered. Before [the commander] left, he made a remark. He said, "Anywhere in Liberia I meet you or your family, I will kill you."³

One of the most harmful aspects of the conflict was the recruitment and use of child soldiers, a tactic employed by Taylor's forces, but also used by other factions. Children, sometimes as young as six or seven, were taken from their families, given drugs and guns, and forced to kill. Psychological techniques used to ensure their loyalty and fanaticism, such as forcing them to rape or kill their own family members, had the additional effect of preventing their return home. Thousands of former child soldiers now live in Liberia as well as in neighboring countries and the diaspora. With little or no education, they have few useful skills and are dealing with the trauma of violence and war. Providing appropriate care and services to former child soldiers remains one of the most difficult challenges for Liberia.

While men, women, and children all experienced the violence and trauma of the war, women and girls also were targets of gender-based violence. Already vulnerable due to a patriarchal culture and discrimination that existed before the conflict, women were subjected to widespread sexual abuse

during and after the fighting. Many of these acts were public and brutal.

THE DIASPORA EXPERIENCE

The Advocates' staff and volunteers met with hundreds of Liberians in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Buduburam Refugee Settlement in Ghana. Although not all diaspora Liberians who gave statements fled as a result of the conflict, the general impression is that there is not a single Liberian anywhere who has not been affected in some way by the Liberian conflict.

The Liberian diaspora before 1980 was composed mostly of students and individuals with diplomatic and business connections in the international community. The Liberian conflict fundamentally altered the nature of the Liberian diaspora, however, both by increasing the diaspora's size and by changing its composition to reflect the political, economic, and social divides in Liberia during the conflict. Liberians who were outside of Liberia at the time of the Doe coup, and later when the civil wars erupted through the 1990s, found themselves trapped with neither support nor the means to return home. Liberians describe their desperation in attempting to learn news of family members and events in Liberia. Many lost touch with their parents, children, spouses, and extended families for years, and many are still seeking to learn what happened to loved ones.

In the mid to late 1990s, as refugees began to be resettled from camps in the West African sub-region, the scale of the atrocities became clear to both Liberians and non-Liberians around the world. The pattern of abuses described in TRC statements reflects a well-known concept among refugee service providers – the “triple trauma” paradigm. First, Liberians in the diaspora were traumatized within Liberia to the extent that they decided to flee. Second, Liberians were traumatized during their flight through Liberia and in their attempts to cross international borders. Third, Liberians experienced trauma living as refugees.

Flight

TRC statements reflect that, at the beginning of the war in 1990, many Liberians hoped they could hide for a period of time until the conflict abated. Accordingly, many initially fled their homes in Monrovia to seek refuge in the rural areas. Others hid within Monrovia, moving from place to place to avoid being targeted. Statement givers consistently described a triggering event after which they decided they had to get out of the country. This trigger very often was the violent murder, torture, or abduction of family members by one of the fighting factions. Others described being threatened or coming home one day to find everyone gone or their homes destroyed. This level of violence and fear forced many Liberians to flee by any means necessary.

Those Liberians who fled by land described walking for weeks and sometimes months, often wounded

or guiding children and others who were unable to travel alone. Food, water, medical care, and safety were virtually impossible to find. Many died from starvation and otherwise minor ailments en route. Others were abducted or killed during encounters with fighting factions along the few open escape routes. Those Liberians who escaped by sea describe fighting their fellow Liberians, and sometimes international peacekeepers, for hours to enter the Freeport of Monrovia and to board any ship not already overrun with refugees.

Border crossing was another high-risk endeavor. Liberians tell of loved ones drowning in the Cavalla River between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire or traversing the seas in small fishing boats or dugout canoes to get to Sierra Leone. They describe being assaulted, jailed, and fined. They were subject to extortion at border checkpoints set up by Liberian fighters on one side of the border and then again at



checkpoints set up by authorities in neighboring countries. Those on large transport vessels coming out of the port often fared no better, as other African nations turned away several ships full of refugees, leaving them to languish at sea for days with little food, water, or medical care.

Refuge

Once in refugee camps, the trauma for many Liberians did not end. The plight of Liberians

in the West African subregion demonstrates the failures in the international refugee protection system. Hundreds of thousands of refugees arrived in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire, with some staying in formal camps and others integrating into the local population as best they could. As the war dragged on and spread to Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, huge intra-regional refugee flows were created. Many Liberians report having moved through more than one country, and sometimes as many as four or five, as they tried to escape cross-border raids or impending civil war in their country of refuge. Often, those in camps were targeted by host country nationals or by cross-border attacks from warring factions in Liberia.

Liberians who could do so fled to Ghana, which offered relative safety because of its stable political situation and because it does not share a border with Liberia. A refugee settlement was established at Buduburam, outside the Ghanaian capital of Accra. The Advocates interviewed Liberians in Buduburam during the spring and fall of 2007, at which point there were more than 35,000 Liberians

living in the settlement.

Liberians in Buduburam narrated the same horrific stories of war trauma as Liberians in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Liberia. The distinguishing feature was that many of these statement givers had been in Buduburam for up to 18 “wasted years.” During this time, Liberians in Buduburam have experienced the effects of “donor fatigue” many times over, as programs and non-governmental organizations have come and gone, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has changed, and Ghanaian policies have fluctuated. Although conditions in the settlement have certainly improved over the years – tents have disappeared and permanent structures have been erected, for example – the settlement still lacks many basic services almost two decades after the first refugees arrived. Running water remains unavailable 18 years after the camp was established. Instead, water is trucked in for purchase. Access to food remains a problem for thousands in the camp. There are two part-time doctors working in a single clinic that serves the entire population. Sanitation is a major challenge. Limited toilet facilities are available for a fee; many residents must use the open fields surrounding the camps as toilets. Many children are not attending school because their caregivers cannot afford to pay the fees. Security also remains a concern, and sexual assault is an acute problem.

Despite these problems, Liberians in the camp have been ingenious in meeting their own needs by starting businesses, schools, community-based organizations, and faith-based institutions. Generally, Liberians who are doing well receive remittance payments from relatives who have managed to resettle elsewhere. Although remittance support assists many, the population remains vulnerable. Education beyond the elementary level and employment opportunities are available only to the very few. Liberian professionals find themselves with little to do because they have been unable to obtain work in Ghana. Those young Liberians who are able to get vocational training or a Ghanaian degree find themselves in a similar situation. Many make ends meet by engaging in petty trading, braiding hair, or relying on the generosity of friends. Others, especially young women desperate to feed their families, turn to prostitution.

For Liberians still in Buduburam, life has become a waiting game. They wait to see if Liberia might be safe enough for a return; they wait for UNHCR or Ghana to decide they must leave; or most of all, they wait to leave the camp on a family reunification visa or through luck in one of the resettlement/visa lottery programs to the United States or the United Kingdom.

Resettlement

Of the more than 1,600 statements collected in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ghana, more than 230 statements came from Liberians who had settled in the United States or the United Kingdom. These statement givers’ experiences, coupling resettlement in a new country with retained ties to a homeland, depicted their lives in “a house with two rooms.”²⁴ Expectations for life in the west

are extremely high, but the realities of life do not always meet these expectations. TRC statement givers generally express gratitude for the opportunities, safety, and freedoms they find in their countries of resettlement. Statement givers also discussed the challenges they faced in adapting to new countries.



Some challenges may be found in any immigrant population, but Liberians noted that they faced unique challenges for a variety of reasons, including the legacy of war trauma. Initially, many Liberians described feeling isolated without the strong social support systems of Liberian communities. Liberians, particularly those in the United States, described difficulty adapting to different cultural expectations and laws regarding gender roles and raising children. Many Liberians with professional training are not able to work in their chosen profession in the United States – credentials from Liberia often are not

recognized, and work experience from outside the United States is not valued. In addition, Liberians report discrimination because of their accents and describe challenges related to racism.

The legacy of the Liberian conflict also weighs heavily on the resettled Liberian diaspora. Liberians describe immense pressure and often guilt about providing financial support to family and others back in Liberia or in refugee camps. The pressure to supply remittances impacts all aspects of life, causing many to limit their own opportunities or education so they can provide immediate support to those at home. Many Liberians in the diaspora still suffer from physical and mental health problems resulting from the conflict. Liberians report a general lack of recognition of these problems in the community – mental health issues, in particular, – and report that Liberians often do not seek out needed services.

The war has left deep-rooted resentments and divisions along ethnic and political lines in the resettled diaspora. Liberians exchange accusations of human rights violations and allow anger over real or perceived wartime abuses to inhibit effective community action. Meetings of tribal associations are said to be more popular and draw better attendance than meetings of pan-Liberian associations. Memories of the war are exacerbated for those individuals who see their perpetrators walking freely in their communities. Yet fear of retribution, either in the diaspora or against relatives back home, deters many people from making open accusations.

Twenty years of war have devastated Liberia. Even though important steps have been taken since 2003 to make improvements in governance, infrastructure, education, and health care, much remains to be done in all those sectors. Many people in Liberia lost everything they had – possessions, homes, families, security, and employment. Nevertheless many Liberians repeatedly told the TRC of their desire to return home and aid their country in its recovery.

OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM DIASPORA TRC STATEMENTS

Statement givers in the diaspora had strong opinions about the measures that should be put into place in Liberia to help the nation recover and move forward. While there was not clear agreement on every issue, major themes emerged.

Statement givers in the diaspora identified a reexamination of the very foundations of Liberia’s national image as a critical piece of moving into the future. Many felt that the history of their own nation should be rewritten and that long-standing national symbols should be remade to create a new, more inclusive image for Liberia. Underpinning this theme was a sense of falsity within the current national narrative and symbols, as well as a desire to reflect the “truth” of Liberia’s national identity. Part of establishing the truth of Liberia’s national identity for some statement givers focused on national symbols, from the national seal to street signs and place names.

The role of ethnic identity and the relationships between tribes were mentioned by many Liberians as an important component of any recommendations that the TRC issues. Statement givers saw the issue of “tribe” as critical to building a united Liberia. Statement



givers had some very specific ideas about how to involve the tribes in reconciliation efforts, including forming intertribal reconciliation committees, using sports, culture, and food to bring people of different tribes together, engaging tribal elders, and ensuring that people are educated to communicate in a common language. To build a unified Liberia, the importance of religious tolerance also was raised by many statement givers, particularly Muslims. Developing wide ranging non-discrimination policies across government and the public sector also was an important theme.

Addressing the legacy of conflict through reparations was raised by many. Suggestions for reparations took many different forms. For many in the United States and the United Kingdom, the return of or compensation for lost property is an important component of reparation.⁵ Throughout the diaspora, but especially in Ghana, many wanted assistance with finding family members who had scattered and disappeared.⁶ Several statement givers recognized the need to assist children orphaned by the war.⁷ Most statement givers who made specific recommendations about orphans stressed the need for education and vocational training.⁸ Addressing the needs of victims of sexual violence was also an important theme. Statement givers focused on the need for accountability for crimes of sexual violence. The recommendations ranged from identifying or confronting their rapists⁹ to bringing perpetrators to justice.¹⁰ In addition to dealing with the consequences of sexual violence from the conflict, prevailing cultural, historical, political, legal, and economic forces render gender inequality an ongoing concern for many Liberian women who expressed their desire to see gender roles reevaluated.¹¹ Reasserting the role of elders in communities and ensuring their protection going forward was also an important recommendation.

Meeting the needs of war-affected persons such as refugees, internally displaced persons, and former child combatants was also an important component of reparations for many statement givers. Refugees remaining in the West African sub-region noted that their basic needs for food and water, safety and security, physical and mental health care, education, sanitation, and employment were not being met. Internally displaced people face many of the same challenges to basic health and safety in their daily lives. Improving communication to these groups from UNHCR, non-governmental organizations, and the government of Liberia was identified as a critical need. Primary among the suggestions for reparations, however, was support for war-affected persons. One top concern was ensuring that former combatants be rehabilitated. For example, one statement giver said that “I want the TRC people to help all the children that fought the war so that they can stop doing wicked things again.”¹² Many suggested increased vocational training and other educational programs directed specifically at these individuals.¹³ Another recommendation was to provide direct assistance to victims. “[T]he people of Liberia who were harmed throughout wartime need to be compensated and...the government of Liberia needs to look into how to accomplish this.”¹⁴

Changes to the system of Liberian government were a major theme amongst statement givers’ recommendations. As described earlier, corruption was seen by many as a major root cause of the Liberian civil crisis. Accordingly, many statement givers identified ending corruption as the first item on an important agenda of necessary governmental reform. Ending corruption was often linked with other important reforms, such as a fair pay scale for civil servants,¹⁵ reform of the national judiciary, and decentralization of power.¹⁶ The theme of equality and non-discrimination also ran through comments about governmental reform. Putting an end to nepotism was an important recommendation for many statement givers.¹⁷ Finally, many statement givers discussed reestablishing the rule of law,¹⁸ creating respect for human rights,¹⁹ and developing a true democracy in Liberia.²⁰ Several expatriate journalists discussed the importance of guaranteeing freedom of the press as a

check on the government and a support to democracy.²¹ Statement givers stressed the importance of the protection of a free and independent media to Liberia's future. Throughout Liberia's history, the Liberian government has exerted significant ownership over the media, and achieving a sustainable private media has been a struggle. Political influence and ties must be broken before the media can truly achieve independence.

Statement givers from Rhode Island to London to Ghana were in agreement that rebuilding both physical and human capital must be a top priority in Liberia. Those items that topped the priority list included roads (specifically those between the rural areas and Monrovia),²² the health system (specifically more facilities equally distributed through the counties),²³ and the education system (specifically free education)²⁴ Electricity was also mentioned consistently, although somewhat less often than the other three.²⁵ Finally, sanitation, including clean drinking water and available toilets, was also mentioned by statement givers, as was rebuilding the agricultural sector.²⁶ Statement givers highlighted the close links between education, infrastructure, and development in their recommendations. One statement giver remarked that "if you increase human capital in Liberia by improving the minds of the people there, infrastructure and all else will come as a result."²⁷

Statement givers were clear in their desire for an end to impunity for human rights and humanitarian violations that took place in Liberia. No consensus emerged, however, on what type of punitive measures should be put into place. Statement givers' opinions covered the full range, from apologies to lustration to a war crimes court. Statement givers were, nevertheless, acutely aware of the complexities of trying to apply these measures on a large scale. Many in the diaspora, especially those in the United States, feel that effective prosecutions are a critical anti-impunity measure.²⁸ Opinions about who should be prosecuted and under whose authority varied. Other statement givers told the TRC they had concerns that prosecutions were impractical and would "open old wounds."²⁹ This view was more prevalent in Ghana than in the United States or the United Kingdom. For example, one statement giver in Ghana noted that there "can't be prosecutions because everyone participated."³⁰ Regardless of the statement giver's opinion on prosecutions, one consistent theme was that perpetrators should tell the truth of what they did, apologize, and ask for forgiveness.³¹

Whether through prosecution, reparation, or apology and forgiveness, Liberians across the diaspora recognized the need for reconciliation and healing the wounds of the Liberian nation. Based on the emergent themes in TRC statements from the diaspora, The Advocates has compiled a comprehensive list of recommendations based on international human rights standards. The Advocates envisions that these will provide a foundation from which the TRC can draw insight for its own recommendations to the government of Liberia.

Notes

- 1 TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 493.
- 2 Liberians use the term “diaspora” to describe those living outside of Liberia who still consider themselves to be Liberians.
- 3 TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 366.
- 4 Stephen C. Lubkemann, *Remittance Relief and Not-Just-for-Profit Entrepreneurship: The Case of Liberia, in Diasporas & Development: Exploring the Potential* 45-66 (Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff ed. 2008).
- 5 TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 16, 1598.
- 6 *E.g.*, TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 1419.
- 7 *See, e.g.*, TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 396, 618.
- 8 TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 138, 411, 1556, 396.
- 9 TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 1412; TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 980.
- 10 TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 921; TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 1680.
- 11 *See* U.N. Country Team, Common Country Assessment for Liberia: Consolidating Peace and National Recovery for Sustainable Development, at 19 (June 2006), <http://www.lr.undp.org/CCA%2028%20July%20FINAL%20FULL%20SMALL.pdf>.
- 12 TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 1294.
- 13 TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 40, 64, 222, 230, 440, 1017, 1302, 1452, 1461, 1467, 1482, 1529.
- 14 TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 1559; *see also* TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 166, 1098.
- 15 *See, e.g.*, TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 118, 435.
- 16 TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 119.
- 17 *E.g.*, TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 23, 180, 520, 1473.
- 18 *E.g.*, TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 119, 199, 284, 369, 60, 509, 747, 823, 983, 1352, 1556, 1604, 1685.
- 19 *E.g.*, TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 86, 119, 1461, 1647, 1743
- 20 *E.g.*, TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 1646.
- 21 *See generally, e.g.*, TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 902, 904.
- 22 *E.g.*, TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 44, 47, 123, 208, 209, 215, 217, 386, 389, 404, 588, 741,781, 834, 1366, 1369, 1435, 1476, 1702, 1028, 1137.
- 23 TRC Diaspora Statement Recs.123, 781, 1028, 119.
- 24 TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 44, 123, 1028, 119.
- 25 TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 32, 221, 363, 404, 415, 505, 544, 588, 594, 741, 784, 909, 1028, 1135, 1137, 1293, 1303, 1341, 1346, 1366, 1478, 1510, 1530, 1736.
- 26 TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 263, 541,733, 781, 813, 909, 1039, 1081, 1135, 1137, 1268, 1346, 1510.
- 27 TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 448.
- 28 *E.g.*, TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 63, 106, 114, 117, 228, 393, 790, 781, 798, 865, 908, 1297, 1403, 1436, 1479, 1555, 1598, 1681.
- 29 TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 1218; *see also* TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 1535, 329, 356, 403, 474.
- 30 TRC Diaspora Statement Rec. 259.
- 31 TRC Diaspora Statement Recs. 16, 25, 41, 322, 327, 527, 919, 995, 1116, 1172, 1203, 1241, 1287, 1514, 1525, 1551.

