



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Establishing a War Crimes and Economic Crimes Court for Liberia

Monday, June 21, 2021

12:00 noon – 2:00 p.m.

Virtual via Cisco WebEx

As prepared for delivery

Good afternoon. I join Co-Chair Smith in welcoming the witnesses and the public to today's hearing on accountability for war crimes and human rights violations committed during Liberia's two civil wars.

In November 2018, the House of Representatives passed House Resolution 1055 to encourage the government and people of Liberia to fully implement the recommendations issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008. I was proud to cosponsor that resolution.

Unfortunately, two and a half years later, there has not been much progress – especially when it comes to establishing the extraordinary criminal tribunal that the TRC specifically called for.

This is the case even though a 2019 resolution introduced by Liberian legislators calling for the establishment of the court seemed to have broad support, including from President George Weah.

We are here today to reaffirm our support for accountability for the war crimes and grave human rights abuses committed during the civil wars.

Those grave abuses included rampant sexual and gender-based violence, and pervasive abuses against children who were forcibly recruited as fighters as a matter of deliberate policy.

Some non-punitive transitional justice measures have been implemented, such as the “Palava Hut” community dialogue initiative also recommended by the TRC.

Some prosecutions have taken place outside of Liberia, like that of Charles “Chuckie” Taylor who was sentenced to 97 years in prison by a U.S. District Court for torture.

But the problem is that many people the TRC said should be prosecuted have not been. And some of those people hold high-level government positions.

I hope we will hear specific recommendations from the witnesses today as to measures Congress and the U.S. government can take to support broad-based demands for accountability in Liberia.

The goal here is not vengeance. Accountability is not about vengeance. It is about fulfilling the rights of victims, and specifically their right to justice.

Without justice, it is very hard to get to reconciliation.

Without reconciliation, it will continue to be hard for Liberia to move forward.

Thank you, and I yield back.