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Momentum for Justice in Liberia

On Wednesday April 7, 2021, a Finnish court concluded the Gibril Massaquoi case hearings in Monrovia, Liberia, which began on February 23. 21 days of hearings, during which 55 witnesses were heard and interrogated by Finnish prosecutors and defense lawyers. Gibril Massaquoi, former RUF (Revolutionary United Front) spokesman and commander, has been charged with murders, aggravated rapes, aggravated war crime and aggravated crime against humanity, which he allegedly committed and incited during Liberia's Second Civil War.

The trial started in Finland on February 1, 2021. From April 28, hearings will also be held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and are expected to last a few weeks. The Court will then return to Finland to conclude the hearings and render a verdict.

The Liberian Minister of Justice, Hon Frank Musah Dean Jr, as well as the Head of Delegation of the European Union in Liberia, Laurent Delahousse, attended the hearings in Monrovia on April 5. The trial has been extensively covered by Liberian and international press present at the venue. Civitas Maxima, alongside several partners, has been providing a detailed legal monitoring of this landmark trial, available [here](#).

Civitas Maxima and the Global Justice and Research Project warmly congratulate the Liberian authorities for allowing and facilitating these weeks of hearings held in Monrovia. The collaboration provided by Liberia to national foreign authorities – notably since 2019, with a [mission](#) undertaken by French authorities with Liberian police in the provinces – has been remarkable, and this commitment to justice should be commended.

In parallel to the Gibril Massaquoi trial, on March 19-20 2021, commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), legislators, traditional Chiefs, youth leaders, political parties' representatives, members of the Liberia National Bar Association, Liberian civil society, academics and international stakeholders assembled in Monrovia to discuss ways to overcome the barriers to accountability for past crimes committed in Liberia during the two civil wars. The Conference was organized as a collaboration between the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom and the Global Justice and Research Project (GJRP) with the assistance of Civitas Maxima.

The conference was a follow up to a national consultation conducted by GJRP throughout February in five Liberian counties (Monrovia, Bomi, Lofa, Bong, and Grand Bassa). Each focus group consultation involved traditional community, youth and women leaders. The two-days gathering in Monrovia was an opportunity to define strategies and concrete actions to be taken to overcome the barriers to justice identified by the focus groups. During the event, participants expressed their strong support for the creation of an accountability mechanism in Liberia “*If the TRC report is not implemented to its fullest, reconciliation will continue to hang up in the air*” stated Dede Dolopei, TRC’s Vice Chairperson.

The Liberia National Bar Association also announced the finalization of an amended draft Act for the establishment of a War and Economic Crimes Court which should be presented to the legislators in due course. The event concluded with the adoption of a roadmap and a pledge of commitment.

The momentum for justice – both inside and outside Liberia – has never been stronger: a verdict is also expected soon in the historical trial of former ULIMO commander [Alieu Kosiah](#) in Switzerland, and a French court recently sent to trial [Kunti K.](#), also former ULIMO commander.

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