

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing
on

LIBERIA: NEXT STEPS TOWARDS ACCOUNTABILITY FOR WAR & ECONOMIC
CRIMES

June 13, 2024 – 10:30 a.m.
2360 Rayburn House Office Building

STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Submitted by:

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

I have proudly served as co-chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission since its founding in 2008. Out of many dozens of hearings, this one bears the unfortunate distinction of being the first in which witnesses vilified human rights defenders and attacked an entire human rights movement.

This hearing was expected to focus on obtaining justice for the Liberian people. Liberia's civil wars left 250,000 people dead. Over a million were displaced. Many more were injured, sexually assaulted, or otherwise victimized. It is the legal mandate and moral obligation of this Commission to shed light on these abuses and examine the role of Congress in holding perpetrators accountable for them.

Instead, four witnesses used their testimonies to repeat unsubstantiated, damaging allegations against human rights defenders, advocacy organizations, and U.S. Government officials, including allegations that previously had been refuted. The individuals under attack—all of whom have committed their lives to seeking justice for victims of atrocities—were not present to defend themselves.

I therefore considered it necessary as co-chair of this Commission to hold open the record of the hearing until August 31, 2024, to provide those accused an opportunity to respond to the allegations against them. The following documents correct the record on this matter:

- A summary penalty order issued by a Swiss court finding Dr. Alan White guilty of defamation against Alain Werner, the director of Civitas Maxima;

- an affidavit by Civitas Maxima refuting, point-by-point, allegations made during the hearing;
- questions for the record I asked of Alvin Smith and Dr. Alan White that each declined to answer;
- a statement by Beth Van Schaack, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice, U.S. Department of State;
- a cease-and-desist letter sent to the American Enterprise Institute on behalf of Civitas Maxima;
- an October 2021 press release from the U.S. Embassy in Liberia titled “Ambassador McCarthy Commends Hassan Bility, Global Justice Research Project;”
- an August 2022 press release titled “U.S. Federal Court Awards Damages to Liberian Victims of Lutheran Church Massacre,” about a Pennsylvania court’s historic damages award to four survivors of one of the worst episodes of Liberia’s civil wars. The survivors were represented by the Center for Justice and Accountability with support from the Global Justice and Research Project; and
- two articles from Human Rights Watch refuting claims of impropriety vis-a-vis Rwanda and Saudi Arabia.

To all those who were harmed by the false narratives peddled in this hearing, I apologize. It is my sincere hope that, in light of the steps taken to correct the record and repair that harm, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission may remain a trusted venue for human rights defenders to appear without fear of stigmatization.