

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing, and  
Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing  
on  
Establishing a War Crimes & Economic Crimes Court for Liberia

June 21, 2021- 12:30 p.m.  
Virtual, via WebEx

**STATEMENT OF JEROME J VERDIER, SR  
CONSELLOR -AT- LAW  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE GROUP (IJG) AND  
CHAIRMAN OF THE ERSTWHILE TRC OF LIBERIA**

**TESTIMONY**

THE CHAIRMAN AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE TOM LANTOS HUMAN  
RIGHTS COMMISSION, UNITED STATES CONGRESSIONAL HEARING

GREETINGS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

**Introduction**

We recognize the good work and esteem of the Thomas Lantos Human Rights Commission and wish to thank you for endeavoring to hold this hearing on the Establishment of The War and Economic Crimes Court for Liberia and thank you very much for inviting us to testify.

Liberia is at a moment critical in time; victims are passing away without the hope of justice in sight. Also passing on are perpetrators of war crimes as memories fade, unpreserved evidence getting lost, and hopes are waning with the likely potential that people are more inclined to taking the law into their own hands.

The greatest threat being the likely hood of a return to violent conflict, an even more entrenched corruption and the persistent commission of crimes against humanity which are prevalent in today's Liberia along with corruption which is spiraling out of control, evidently because impunity is the order of the day in Liberia.

We appear before you today with reflections of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (TRC) which recommended the establishment of the War & Economic Crimes Court (WECC) for Liberia. The Commission concluded that motivations for the war was not a desire to change society, but rather a quenchable thirst for power, greed and supremacy on the battle front which saw the number of fighting forces increased from two to a dozen different warring factions before the war was concluded.

The war in Liberia became profitable (just as holding public office in Liberia) and this induced the widespread violation of serious crimes against the civilian population to benefit from the spoils of war, superiority on the battle front and gain promotion and favors from the heads of the warring factions.

In the contest for supremacy on the battle front, factions were rewarded with often described "lucrative" offices in Government, and without any form of accountability, their portfolio in government became an avenue for looting the public coffers and rampant corruption. All factions committed War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity including serious violations of International Human Rights and Humanitarian Laws and egregious violations of domestic criminal laws in Liberia.

All warring factions (THE NPFL, INFPL, ULIMO K & J, AFL, LPC, MODEL, LDF, LURD, ATU) committed these very horrific crimes whether the recruitment of child soldiers, massacres, sexual violence, pillaging, destruction of private properties, mass displacement, torching of villages and towns, etc. **THE COMMISSION OF THESE CRIMES WAS SYSTEMATIC AND DELIBERATE!**

The war was characterized by injustices and serious human rights violations, pillaging and plunder of natural and public resources and the commission of serious crimes.

## **US Congress**

True to the traditional relationship between the US and Liberia, Congress Resolution H. RES. 1055 reaffirmed the strong ties between the two countries and called for the full implementation of the TRC Report, especially the Establishment of the War and Economic Crimes Court. This singular act has been a rallying point for advocates and was an impetus that led to the House of Representatives in Liberia gathering a majority block signature to a resolution calling on the Government of President George Weah to implement the TRC Report as recommended by H.RES. 1055 and we are hopeful that a companion concurrence of the Honorable US Senate can be had soon.

## **Why a War & Economic Crimes Court**

**Justice is important!** While it is true that the court is not a panacea to all the social – economic and political and governance problems of Liberia, the court **1)** will mark the beginning of breaking the back of impunity in Liberia, which is now well entrenched in the political culture of Liberia **2)** a fair and credible process will help to reinstall and strengthen the rule of law in Liberia **3)** fulfil Liberia’s international obligation to institute justice and punish crimes **4)** victims and families and communities of victims will receive a measure of relief, healing and recovery when people are held accountable or brought to justice **4)** acknowledging the state of victimhood in the country and acknowledging the rights of victims to redress **5)** contribute to durable peace and social healing generally **6)** support and strengthen the capacity of local judicial actors and national judicial institutions

## **Why is Implementation delayed**

Amongst the greatest reasons these recommendations are delayed are **1)** the lack of political will to make hard decisions for the good of the people and society **2)** Fear and Interest – some people genuinely believe implementing the recommendation will spark conflict or war, while there are others like those in authorities who have vested interest in impunity and crimes or are connected to or linked to the war as perpetrators of war and economic crimes **3)** lack of political leadership to address the issues of impunity and corruption in Liberia.

## **What must be done**

- a)** Increased pressure on the Government of Liberia for the full Implementation of the TRC Report, especially the Establishment of the War and Economic Crimes court
- b)** A concurrence of the US Senate with the Resolution of Congress and bring increased political pressure on the government to take actions and act most appropriately.
- c)** Consistent civic engagement of civil society actors with the “Moral guarantors of the Peace Process” in Liberia - US, UN, ECOWAS, AU, EU to get involved or reengaged with the peace process which is still in transition and the reactivation of the International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL).

## **Closing**

### **This quote from the UN sums it all up:**

As highlighted in a seminal 2004 [UN report](#) on the rule of law and transitional justice:

“[E]xperience in the past decade has demonstrated clearly that the consolidation of peace and the immediate post-conflict period, as well as the maintenance of peace in the long term, cannot be achieved unless the population is confident that redress for grievances can be obtained through legitimate structures for the peaceful settlement of disputes and the fair administration of justice.”