

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- 12:00 p.m.  
Virtual, via WebEx

STATEMENT YAHSYNDI MARTIN-KPEYEI  
HUMAN RIGHT ADVOCATE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE  
CO-CHAIR BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE GROUP (IJG)

**TESTIMONY**

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

GREETINGS, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN:

Thank you for this opportunity to hear our story, the story of Liberia's women and children. We are forever grateful to the Thomas Lantos Human Rights Commission.

Let me also thank the United States government, which gave some of us a second chance.

**Introduction**

My name is Yahsyndi Martin- Kpeyei. I am here on behalf of the Movement for Justice. Our organization advocates for women and children, groups that were adversely impacted by the Liberian civil war.

We appear before you today to reflect on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (TRC) and to reflect on the war that robbed me of my childhood: the results for which we continue to struggle. The work from the TRC recommended the establishment of the War & Economic Crimes Court (WECC) for Liberia and created the road map to the future of my birth nation.

In December 1990, my mother gathered my siblings and me together and warned us that there were rebels in the country: they were reportedly coming for the president (President Samuel K Doe ). We had gone through horrible experiences during the years of Doe: the streets were turned into killing fields with bodies being discovered as days turned into weeks. As the war engulfed Liberia, children were taken from their parents, drugged, and conscripted for killing purposes. Women and girls were conscripted or abducted and became properties of fighters on both sides of the conflicts. At times, we heard cries of many pleading for their lives: sometimes, I still hear some of those voices. On July 31, 1990, I remembered when a doctor from the ELWA Hospital (in Monrovia) brought to the Graystone compound (an annex of the US Embassy near Monrovia and our place of refuge) a young man who had survived the Lutheran Church Massacre in Sinkor, Monrovia. The survivor, “Jimmy,” had a severe wound that exposed his internal organs; when Jimmy was discovered, he had been butchered without and left for dead.

After months in the Graystone compound, my mother decided it was time for us to leave and seek refuge in Sierra Leone. As we trek out of the compound and Monrovia, the scenes were unbelievable: a river filled with young and old bloated bodies, male and female. We encountered soldiers of the rebel groups: children with bloodthirsty eyes with no human feeling (the scenes in the movie Blood Diamond provide mild depictions of my experience). Next, we trekked out to Brewerville, where we were caught in the middle of a skirmish between two rebel groups. After

the fight had subsided, all houses were checked, and those that sought refuge from the fight were lined up to be killed. I witnessed an incident where a woman was ordered to be raped by her son. Afterward, she was killed. Then the commanders turn for the next group, but through some miraculous intervention, the commander, Colonel Varney of the INPFL, called off the execution of those that had been caught and lined up: including my family and me.

This experience shaped my fight for justice. This experience framed my advocacy for women and children. This experience occurred in the first phase of the civil conflict.

We believe hopelessness is the enemy of justice. Unfortunately, our people are increasingly loosing hope for some form of justice. Some of our people are slowly departing this world without realizing justice for their loved ones. In 2020, Tori Ward, an advocate for justice, who lost her father (Dr. Victor Ward), departed this world without seeing justice that she yearned for her loss. Equally, the perpetrators of war crimes are also passing or getting old, and their memories are fading.

As a survivor of the Liberian civil war, I experienced the result of human shortcoming: the wickedness and depravity that people would willingly go in the name of power. I witnessed the unimaginable: the extent to which people exact pain, cruelty, and human suffering on vulnerable populations for temporary pleasure and greed. Those experiences scarred my memory; although those scars are not visible, there psychological effects will be long-lasting.

We can surmise the war was not for the redemption of our people based on All the warring factions (THE ULIMO K & J, AFL, LPC, MODEL, LDF, LURD, ATU) that came after the death of the President and the crimes they committed for fourteen years.

We believe Liberia is at a very critical moment in time. Almost eighteen years since the cessation of civil conflicts, you are our last hope based our relationship and as leader of the free world .most survivors have reach points (boiling points) It is just a matter of time and not when. People will start taking the law into their own hands. WE speak not only for justice that is long over, but to protect the future from what the women and children of Liberia endured and contain to endure

I appear today on behalf of the Movement for Justice and the women and children to support the process leading to establishing the War and Economic Crime Court (WECC) in Liberia. We seek justice for the victims of the Liberian civil conflict. We seek justice for those who have departed this world seeking justice for their loved ones in Liberia.

### **Conclusion**

We want to close with this quote from the UN Special Representative to Liberia (Jacque Klein) in an interview with World Chronicle in 2004: “The poor of Liberia were forgotten for so long.” Members of the Commission, you can help us remember the poor of Liberia...Support the Establishment of the War and Economic Crime Court in Liberia to bring accountability: this would provide remembrance for the forgotten. Thank you.