

# **TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA**

**MONROVIA, LIBERIA**

## **STATEMENT**

**BY**

**Jerome J Verdier, Sr (Cllr)**

**CHAIRMAN**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCHING**

**OF THE**

**TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMISSION (TRC)**

**AT THE**

**CENTENNIAL MEMORIAL PAVILION**

**ASHMUN STREET, MONROVIA, LIBERIA**

**22 JUNE 2006**

## **Greetings**

**Her Excellency, Mrs. Ellen Johnson –Sirleaf**  
President of the Republic of Liberia

**His Excellency, Mr Joseph Boakai**  
Vice President of the Republic of Liberia

**Hon Edwin M Snowe**  
Speaker & Members of the Honourable House of Representatives

**Hon Isaac Nyannebo**  
President Pro-Tempore & Members of The Honourable House of Senate

**His Honor Cllr Johnny N Lewis**  
Chief Justice and Members of the Honourable Supreme Court of Liberia

**His Excellency Ambassador Alan Doss**  
Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations And Head of The UN Mission In Liberia (UNMIL) or His Designee

**His Excellency Ambassador**  
Special Representative African Union

**His Excellency Ambassador Ansumana Cesay**  
ECOWAS

**His Excellency Ambassador Donald Booth**  
United States of America

**The Doyen & Members of the Diplomatic Corps**

**Prelates and members of the Inter-religious Council,**

**Members of the Liberian Cabinet,**

**Members of the Donor Community and Partners in progress,**

**Elders and Traditional Leaders,**

**Members of Civil Society here present, the Youth and children of Liberia**

**Gallant Women of Liberia**

**Fellow Ex-combatants**

**Well wishers, friends, fellow citizens and residents,**

**My fellow commissioners, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:**

## **Tribute**

I humbly beg your indulgence and request that we all kindly stand for a moment of silence to the ever green memory of all our fallen compatriots, foreign residents and service personnel men who lost their lives or were killed in our over 25 years of turbulent history including the 14 years of civil crisis. May their blood fertilize the seeds of peace and reconciliation and their souls rest in peace.

I thank you ladies and gentlemen for your indulgence.

## **Statement**

I give the ultimate praise and gratitude for this day, this occasion, this nation, and the current peace, to the Almighty God who has preserved this nation and brought us thus far as a nation and people.

History is known for recording events of the past and the people who make it, for good or for bad, by shaping those events. History also serves as a guide to avoid the repetition of mistakes and wrongs of previous generations. When we ignore the imperatives of the past; when we ignore the lessons of the past, when we ignore historical realities as essential elements for timely actions and judgment, we are bound to repeat history with the same ills of the same society, and even more suffering on the same people.

Liberia is no exception. It bears testimony to the repeated cycle of violence and inhumane treatment, by the same mind set of personalities, against the same victims in the “love of liberty”, in the name of “redemption”, in the name of “liberation” and in the name of “maintaining law and order”.

Madam President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

After over one and a half centuries of national existence, we are today launching the The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to commission the truth of our past and establish a firm basis for reconciliation, lasting peace and development in Liberia. Why my people why?

It is common knowledge that our beloved people are restlessly wandering all over the world, seeking greener pastures and refuge in foreign lands against their will. It is our hope that a more secured environment can be eventually created in Liberia for their safe return.

It is also common knowledge that even we who remained in Liberia are even more profoundly impacted by deeply rooted historical realities ignored by us as a of people in constant search for peace, equal rights, equal economic opportunities and better standards of living.

May I endure the liberty of drawing your attention to some of the realities of our past which have shaped our present, and which, if ignored, will continue to shape our future. These realities have today led to the establishment and empowerment of the TRC with a statutory mandate that will, in no case, be compromised. They include:

- 1.** The Prejudice of Class or Status which influences the belief that belonging to either the native or the Congo stock of Liberian entitles or limits you to rights and privileges superior or inferior to those of other Liberians depending on the circumstances or state of our national life;
- 2.** Nepotism and the tendencies to regroup as a tribe to dominate other tribes at the detriment of their social, religious, economic and civil liberties. No sooner are we given opportunity or placed in a position of power or privilege, than we surround ourselves with our kinsmen and women, friends, cronies and relatives to the exclusion of better qualified and more deserving Liberians in utter debasement of the merit principles- a

practice which also undermines loyalty to state institutions and fosters myopia and patron-client relationships.

**3.** The culture of impunity makes individuals who abuse the rights of others feel invincible and unaccountable for the wrongs committed against the state and the very people they profess to protect and lead.

**4.** The scourge of illiteracy and ignorance which has deprived the nation of proper leadership has produced a cycle of violence and civil strife which have successively undermined the growth and development of the nation.

**5.** Leadership without compassion has existed without a national vision in Liberia leading to the perishing of so many of our brothers and sisters without any just cause and therefore, in vain. The same people crying against abuses, exploitations and oppression in the past, soon become new leaders, new abusers, new exploiters and new oppressors. They put on new clothing, but repeat the mistakes of the past and perpetuate the evils of the past and very often with greater intensity and horrifying impunity.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is for these reasons that in view of the foregoing, the TRC has been charged with the responsibility of investigating the root causes of the conflict in Liberia, amplifying historical truths and thereby undermining falsehoods that have overtime assume the status of historical truths.

The TRC is also to establish an independent and accurate record of rights violations and abuses occasioned by the conflict and set the basis for justice and reconciliation that will foster national repentance, strike the delicate balance between accountability and forgiveness in order to heal the land and unite the people of Liberia.

We are very mindful of the enormous confidence reposed in us by the people of Liberia and the international community. We are also very mindful of the juridical standards which must guide our work and shape its outcome. We will be faithful to our mandate and discharge our duties and functions to the best of our ability.

The TRC process will be open, transparent and accountable to all, including Liberians abroad. We pledge that the TRC will be no respecter of persons and all will be treated equally without regard to status, privilege or power. Naturally, preferences based on ethnicity, religion, and other irrelevant considerations will have no place in the work of the TRC. Notwithstanding, we

will amplify the voices and issues of women and children; the youth and elderly and give equal voice to survivors and alleged perpetrators.

As we, this day, commence the work of the TRC, we call on all Liberians and non Liberians to give meaning to the work of the TRC and submit memoranda and petitions on:

- a. the root causes of the conflict;
- b. historical issues, myth or reality, in need of public discourse and clarifications;
- c. human rights abuses and violations of international human rights and humanitarian laws, committed between 1979 and August 2003;
- d. economic crimes and other cases of corruption; and
- e. Recommendations on issues and approaches to reconciliation and how the Liberia can transcend its bitter past and build a future of sustained peace, unity and development under the rule of law.

Madam President, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The TRC continues to work relentlessly in readiness for the task entrusted to it. We continue to enjoy the support of our Government, and most importantly of the Liberian people, hundreds of whom have applied to assist us in our work, especially as statement takers, investigators and researchers. We extend gratitude to the Government and people of Liberia for the confidence reposed in us and the support which is significantly complimented by the enormous goodwill and generous contribution and support of all sorts, technical, financial, logistical, security, etc, from friendly governments and the international donor community.

May I seize this opportunity also to assure the thousands of victims, both home and abroad, that the TRC will afford them the opportunity to file complaints, petitions or statements about human rights violations they or their loved ones suffered during our 14 years orgy of violence and mayhem. We shall do justice to all claims.

Fellow Liberians, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

There will be no witch hunting but a scrupulous process of investigation will be undertaken to unravel and document the truth in vigorous pursuit of our mandate and goals. We will incorporate the wisdom of our traditional and religious leaders into our work as we search for

lasting peace and genuine reconciliation. We will foster partnership with civil society groups involved in the promotion and protection of human rights , advocacy and human rights groups as well as community based organisations that share our goals and meet our very high standards.

We will take advantage of the wisdom of our traditional and religious leaders and explore all means to incorporate them into the processes of the TRC. We call for national repentance in pursuit of genuine reconciliation and national unity so that the expectant world and Liberians the world over can embrace a fruitful process that will not plaster the wounds but genuinely heal the nation and make it whole again. We remain confident that the guidance and wisdom of the Almighty will abide with us in this great national service.

**MAY GOD ALMIGHTY BLESS LIBERIA AND GRANT HER PEACE AND JUSTICE!  
THANK YOU.**