

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia



TRC Fast Track

December 18 - 31, 2006

Women's Voices in the TRC Process



Commissioner Syllah presenting at the first zonal workshop, St. Theresa Convent, Monrovia, December 11, 2006

The TRC Committee on Gender is holding four nationwide zonal workshops and town hall meetings for women in all the 15 counties. The series of workshops and town hall meetings began with zone one: Montserrado, Bomi, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount Counties. The workshop at the St. Teresa Convent in Monrovia brought together more than 50 participants who represent various women organizations. Zone two workshop was held in Gbarnga, Bong

County with women representatives of Nimba, Bong, Lofa and Margibi Counties. The third zonal workshop was held in Buchanan City on December 18; counties in that zone included River Cess, Sinoe and Grand Bassa.

The workshops are being facilitated by Commissioners of the TRC together with some experts from ICTJ, TRC partners on gender issues and the Ministry of Gender and Development. The experts and TRC facilitators made presentations on several issues within the confines of the TRC act,



Participant responds with enthusiasm at second zonal workshop, Gbarnga, December 14, 2006



Commissioner Washington inviting women's participation in the TRC process at Town Hall Meeting, Tubmanburg, December 13, 2006

beginning with an overview of the TRC mandate putting specific emphasis on gender components, historical analysis of the gender pattern of human rights violation in Liberia and international experiences on how gender and women's perspectives were built into the work of different TRCs. This was followed by participants' group discussions on the topic. How can women participate in the TRC process? This was one of the major questions discussed by participants at the zonal workshops for women. Some began by saying the TRC should work with women's organizations in all the counties, women should be empowered to create awareness among other women at the grass roots

level.

Another issue of great importance raised was the issue of security. The women pleaded that the TRC ensure women's protection. They also suggested that the TRC prepare spot messages in the local vernacu-



Participant raising a concern at Town Hall Meeting, Tubmanburg, December 13, 2006

lars and should establish TRC community women's groups. They asked the TRC to hold regular town hall meetings in the counties so as to keep the spirit of the commission alive throughout the entire country.

The workshop and town hall meetings are expected to be completed at the end of this week in Harper, Maryland County. The workshop is expected to bring together more than 40 women from Grand Kru, Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Maryland Counties. The town hall meetings were attended by about 60 to 120 women at each occasion.

The workshops and town hall meetings are made possible through funding from the women's network program of the Open Society Institute, an organization based in the U.S.A. The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) provides assistance



Karen Campbell-Nelson talks about the TRC in East Timor, Bensonville Town Hall Meeting, December 12, 2006

through its sponsorship of three gender experts who serve as major facilitators for the program.

The three experts are Valnora Edwin from Sierra Leone, Karen Campbell-Nelson from East Timor and Tonieh Wiles from Liberia.

TRC Expresses Concern about Gossip

TRC Chairman Jerome Verdier dismissed reports emanating from certain quarters that the Massa Washington referred to as the founder and director of a local Liberian NGO, is the same Massa Washington who currently serves as a member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, TRC. The former (NGO founder and director), Massa Kamara Washington, currently resides in the state of Minnesota, United States of America, while the latter, Massa Amelia Washington, currently resides in the Republic of Liberia where she serves as a Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC Chairman was reacting to reports about what is being described as a conflict of interest.

The Chairman has also described as outrageous, suggestions from some quarters that TRC Commissioners were earning fabulous salaries and benefits approximating or surpassing salaries paid to members of the international technical advisory committee (ITAC). He said the Act of Legislature creating the TRC clearly specifies that TRC Commissioners are to be paid salaries not less than that earned by Justices of the Supreme Court.

Despite this provision by the Act, income earned by TRC Commissioners is far less, in real terms, than that earned by Justices of the Supreme Court, it is \$ 3,300.- US after taxes without any benefits or perks. He stressed that the TRC has a limited life span of two years, unlike other institutions. And the TRC will stick to that statutory time frame. It is for this reason that framers of the Act sought to ensure through legislation that persons serving on the TRC will commit full-time to the work of the TRC. He expressed strong conviction that continuous progress in the work of the TRC in the coming year will serve to silence gossip peddlers and that all partners of the TRC will continue to give their full support.

Quote of the Week

"Women need to realize they are the TRC - they are part of the TRC process."

Esther Smith of River Cess at women's zonal workshop in Buchanan
