



University of
Nottingham
Human Rights Law Centre



SEWACCOL

Secretariat for the Establishment
of War Crimes Court in Liberia



Legislative Conference Brings Liberia Closer to the Establishment of a War Crimes Court

On 18-19 July 2019 various Liberian stakeholders and international experts assembled in Monrovia for a historic Legislative Conference on Accountability for Past Crimes in Liberia.

The Legislative Conference was organized as a collaboration between the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom, the Secretariat for the Establishment of a War Crimes Court in Liberia (SEWACCOL), the Global Justice and Research Project (GJRP) and Civitas Maxima, upon the request of several Committees of the Liberian House of Representatives: the House Committee on Claims and Petitions, the House Committee on Judiciary, the House Committee on Good Governance and Government Reform as well as the House Committee on Ways, Means and Finance Development and the House Committee on Peace and Reconciliation.

In spite of the Final Report of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) issued on 30 June 2009, which recommended criminal prosecutions and the establishment of a Specialized Tribunal, nobody was ever investigated, prosecuted and tried in Liberia for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the two violent civil wars (1989-1997, 1999-2003).

The idea of a Legislative Conference is an outcome of the National Justice Conference held in November 2018 and a follow-up to the UN Human Rights Committee Concluding Observations, which identified the need for Liberia to establish a process of accountability for war crimes and imposed the obligation on the government of Liberia to report to the Committee on this by July 2020.

Liberia is witnessing a real awakening when it comes to the call for accountability for war crimes. A strong bipartisan legislative group is currently working on a resolution to be submitted to members of both houses to rally support for this cause while the Liberian Bar Association has produced a first Draft Act to Establish an Extraordinary Tribunal for War and Economic Crimes for Liberia.

The conference spanned two days. The first day, July 18th, consisted of a technical working session on the Draft Act. First, Honorable Rustonlyn Suacoco Dennis, Chair of The House Committee on Claims and Petitions, presented the Resolution for the Establishment of a War and Economic Crimes Court. Afterwards, the Liberian Bar Association presented their Draft Act. Professor Olympia Bekou, Head of the International Criminal Justice Unit of the Human Rights Law Centre, University of Nottingham, gave expert advice on various aspects of the Act and the participants engaged in a constructive dialogue.

“It was an honor to work with the drafters and members of the House of Representatives. The Bar Association has worked very hard on the Draft Act and already made a lot of progress. Our hope is that the outcome of this collaboration will be a solid Act that will stand the test of time and allow for the establishment of a Court that fills Liberia’s impunity gap”, said Professor Bekou.



The second day of the conference featured remarks by distinguished members of the House of Representatives as well as by representatives of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Head of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) as well as the German Ambassador, the Liberian Bar Association, SEWACCOL and others. Speeches were followed by fruitful and informative discussions and all speakers stressed the importance of establishing an accountability mechanism to deal with past crimes.

Advice on international criminal law and information about lessons learned from other countries were provided during this second day by Professor Olympia Bekou in person, and by Ambassador David Scheffer remotely. David Scheffer was the first U.S. Ambassador at Large for War Crimes Issues and negotiated U.S. support for the establishment of international and hybrid criminal tribunals.

The conference marked the very first time since the publication of the TRC report that members of the 54th legislature met to discuss accountability for past crimes in Liberia and the practicalities of establishing a War Crimes Court.

SEWACCOL issued a strong official statement: "Since the release of the TRC Final Report ten years ago, the participation of members the Legislature in this conference represents the first decisive break with Liberia's political elite culture of amnesia when it comes to unspeakable violence. SEWACCOL calls on all Liberians to bring pressure to bear on their respective representatives to support the war crimes bill."

Honorable Dennis stated that the above-mentioned Committees will be working on the Draft Act and said, "If impunity will keep the whole nation in captivity, why don't we give way to retributive justice?"

About **CIVITAS MAXIMA**

Civitas Maxima (CM), based in Geneva, ensures the coordination of a network of international lawyers and investigators who work for the interests of those who have been victims of international crimes, particularly **war crimes** and **crimes against humanity**.

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About the **GJRP**

The **Global Justice and Research Project (GJRP)** is a Liberia-based non-profit, non-governmental organization that documents war crimes and, where possible, seeks justice for victims of these crimes, with the full consent of the victims.

For more information:

www.globaljustice-research.org

