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Sunday, October 31, 2010

U.S. Symposium Calls for Implementation of Liberia's 'Truth' Recommendations

- FPA STAFF REPORT

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TRC Commissioner Massa Washington

SYMPOSIUM PLAY: TRC Commissioner Massa Washington, was one of three former members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission who participated in a two-day symposium on drawing attention and interest in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

New York -

More than one hundred and fifty Participants from Liberia, Europe and the United States of America attending a two-day Symposium on the Future of Liberia relative to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), are calling for the full implementation of all recommendations of the TRC to foster genuine peace and reconciliation in Liberia.

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TRC Commissioner John Stewart address symposium in New York.

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The Symposium held from the 29-30, October 2010, in New York, was organized by the African Refuge Inc, the International Trauma Studies Institute, The New Scholl University, The Institute for the Study of Human Rights, and Columbia University all of New York together with other Liberian and international civic organizations to address stalemate in the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Liberia. According to the organizers the event was intended to revive the interest of stakeholders including elected officials of the current government and the international Community in the implementation of the recommendations of the TRC. The discussions centered around three major issues of: Reform, Redress and Recovery.

Although officials of the current Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf government and the international community had enthusiastically endorsed and financed the establishment of the TRC, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and some perpetrators of gross human rights violations in her government are now adverse to the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report. Since the publication of the TRC's Final Report in December 2009, officials of the present government who played key political, financial and military roles in financing the war continue to argue against the implementation of the recommendations, particularly those related to accountability.

Pivotal steps, Dr. Seyon says



Dr. Patrick LN Seyon

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It is the overwhelming views of speakers including three of the TRC commissioners, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, statisticians, human rights advocates, academicians, and hosts of other Liberian activists including the President of the Association of Liberians residing in Europe that the TRC recommendations should be implemented as a step forward in the battle against the culture of impunity. A noted Liberian academic in attendance at the symposium, Dr. Patrick Seyon, former President of the University of Liberia, who served as a panelist on the Reform Panel declared his acceptance for the implementation of the TRC recommendations as

a pivotal step toward laying the foundation for genuine peace, stability and economic prosperity. Dr. Seyon is however calling for a national conference that he says should discuss the recommendations and come out with appropriate framework for their implementation.

Serving as Keynote Speaker at the event, the Chairman of the TRC, Counselor Jerome Verdier said he and his

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colleagues have a moral obligation to promote the implementation of the TRC recommendations, even though they would prefer for other Liberians to act as advocates. In encouraging the Liberian public to suppress their fear and support the TRC recommendations, he reminded the audience about the fear factor, this time in 1997 that encouraged Liberians to give the Liberian presidency to the warlord with the biggest gun, Charles Taylor in the name of peace and reconciliation. Following that let bygones be bygones trade off, Liberians gave the country to Taylor and experienced another brutal civil war few years later. Charles Taylor in exchange for peace. Counselor Verdier informed the audience that President Sirleaf government has created an environment that is hostile to the members of the TRC. For instance, the government has not paid them for the past eighteen months. Beyond their personal salaries, the government has not provided funds for the payments of services provided to the TRC by merchants. This hostile environment has encouraged warlords and former combatants to try and intimidate members of the TRC and their families.

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Abraham Massaley

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Mr. Abraham Massaley, a Liberian community and opinion leader residing in Philadelphia, informed the audience that President Sirleaf, seeking to fortify her defiance against the TRC recommendations, and acting contrary to the promotion of accountability, is now appointing notorious former warlords in the government as allies. Therefore, it is only the full implementation of the TRC recommendations that Liberia will promote a wholesome and functioning society in Liberia.

Decrying Ex-Warlords in government

Speaker Massaley reference was made concerning President Sirleaf recent appointment of John T. Richardson as Presidential chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Housing Authority. Richardson, notoriously known by Liberians as "General Octopus" due to his leadership role played in the orchestration of the infamous "Operation Octopus" of the NPFL of Charles Taylor that rained rockets on Monrovia and its environs causing countless of death and sufferings including the brutal slaying of five innocent American Catholic Nuns at the Convent in Gardnesville where they had been caring for poor Liberians. Reference was also made to the appointment of major warlord of the notorious ULIMO-K faction, Mr. Alahji G. V. Kromah whom President Sirleaf appointed this year as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Liberian Broadcasting System (the State own Radio Station). President Johnson-Sirleaf also Appointed to the Board of Directors of the Liberian Broadcasting System, Madame Weade Kobbah Wureh, former Executive, founding member, Secretary General and spokes person for the rebel Liberian Peace Council (LPC) of Dr. George Boley. The LPC rebel fighters are noted for roasting human beings alive. The recent appointment of notorious NPFL General Roland Duo as Special Project Coordinator of the National Security Agency (NSA) By President Sirleaf was also down cried. The name Roland Duo, is associated with several acts of gross human rights and humanitarian law violations including several massacres one of the most prominent being the Mahare Bridge massacre in Bomi County where young children and babies were thrown into the Mahare river after their family members were killed by men acting under the orders of Gen. Roland Duo.



TRC Chair Jerome Verdier addresses symposium.

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Sitting as panelist on both the Reform and Recovery panels, another Commissioner of the TRC, Ms. Massa Washington reminded the audience that Liberia risks reverting to violence if President Sirleaf encourages warlords to disregard the call for accountability in the TRC recommendations because she prefers to remain president rather than respecting the rule of law. Commissioner Washington said the President must stop providing cover for perpetrators of heinous crimes against the Liberian people by separating herself from perpetrators and allowing them to have their day in court. She said the law is about evidence and not every one who is indicted is

convicted. Let due process take place she said.

Ms. Washington also recited an array of international human rights law which she said Liberia as a signatory and member of is obliged to respect in regards to the TRC recommendations. She said the same international jurisdictions that applied to the setting up of the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals following World War 11, the War crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the War Crimes Court trying perpetrators of the Rwanda Genocide, and the Special Court for Sierra Leone have set precedent that should not exempt the situation of Liberia.

Following the Commissioners statements, which arose the audience to a standing ovation Mr. Massaley, added that the culture of impunity was across the region of West Africa including Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. It was about time that our international partners compel President Sirleaf through necessary measures including diplomacy to respect the rule of law, which would become a signal to perpetrators in the region that criminals will be held accountable, he stated.

Another Liberian activist introducing the issue of economic crimes into the discussion, J. Yanqui Zaza, a Liberian community Leader on Staten Island indicated that there was a link between the interest of profiteers and the lukewarm attitude by our international partners and President Sirleaf to delay the implementation of the TRC recommendations. Zaza said that profiteers, wishing to cash in on the presidency of Sirleaf, do not want a new president who might not be willing to give sweet heart deals in exchange of kickbacks. As evidenced by the Firestone sweet heart deals, profiteers see the presidency of President Sirleaf as an opportunity for owning lucrative mineral resources of Liberia, and will do everything to continue receiving sweet hearts deals.

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