



## We have better traditions than sassywood

*By T. Meshack Jolo,  
Inter-Religious Council  
of Liberia*

As we all know, sassywood is illegal under Article 21(h) of the Liberian Constitution. But how can we explain this to the people?

I advise that a group of elders is the best to look into a case. The people of wisdom will find out who to blame

by sitting on the case, hearing both parties, asking questions, giving parables, referring to their life experiences, and setting up a fact-finding committee. From there, they will resolve the matter.

In the sassywood way of resolving matters, a decision is rendered by one person only, not the wisdom of the majority.

One man just comes up to play magic and tell the whole group or town who is right and who is wrong without asking any questions at all.

Which way do you think will take Liberia forward?

Liberians, let us learn to resolve cases with words and in group.

## Mediation claims the attention of the people in Grand Kru County

*By Gabriel Nimely,  
Justice and Peace  
Commission*

Many years ago in Grand Kru County, people viewed the court as the only option for resolving conflicts. But according to them, taking someone to court is like selling them, and the one who bears a penalty at the end of the day will not forget easily.

From the awareness meetings the JPC has carried out in the county, many people are embracing the mediation process as another option for conflict resolution. In media-

tion, there will be no penalty or fine, although one party may pay the other to correct the wrong he or she has done. They themselves will come up with their own decision, and no court or mediator will impose a decision on them.

During the awareness, one man said that the process is fine because sometimes in the court the judges eat money and forget about the case. At the end the complainant is not satisfied while the defendant is still having you on mind for carrying him to court in the first place.

Not long ago in Grand Cess I mediated a case between two friends who had a confusion arising from ducks. One of them gave his friend a pair of ducks to raise. The friend was supposed to return the favor by giving back some of the baby ducks when they developed. But since 2006, he gave nothing. Together we sat and talked the case and at the end the two of them were able to come to an agreement.

According to my own experience the mediation process is very fine and will bring good results to the people of Grand Kru County.

# Trial by ordeal is not transparent

By Anthony Thomas  
JPC, Grand Gedeh

My own understanding of sassywood or trial by ordeal in Grand Gedeh County is that it is a common practice and this practice must be abolished.

Many people over the years have been victimized following the administration of sassywood or trial by ordeal. One experience that I observed in one of our villages is that poison was placed in the sassywood for this innocent lady to drink. She had been accused of witchcraft. When she drank the sassywood, she died on the spot.

Therefore the administration of the sassywood is not trans-

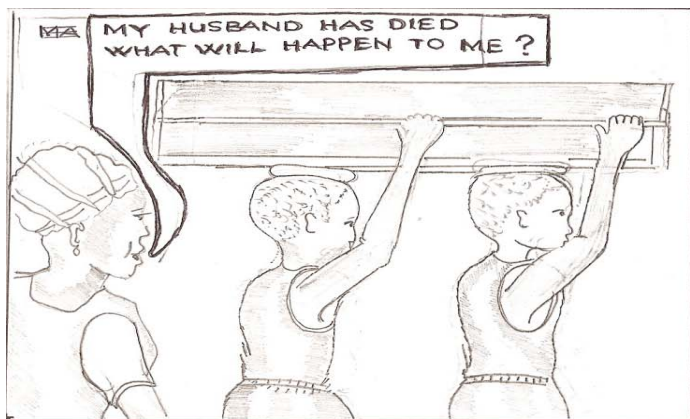
parent, but it is meant to take innocent lives away.

Furthermore, to stop this practice, government, especially the Ministry of Internal Affairs, is to put stop to the issuance of certificates to native doctors. Also, massive awareness needs to be done so as to alleviate the common practice of sassywood in Grand Gedeh County.



Anthony Thomas in Monrovia. Photo by Jeff Austin.

By doing this, the elders', chiefs' and villagers' minds will be transformed and we will live in peace.



BY: George G. MOORG

## An interview with Liberia's Solicitor General

*Taiwan S. Gongloe, solicitor general of Liberia, knows his country's justice system from both sides of a jail cell. As a student activist in the late 1970s, he was imprisoned and beaten for speaking out against the government of then-president William Tolbert, and later for speaking out against President Charles Taylor. A human rights lawyer—one of the first in Liberia—Gongloe remained in Liberia throughout the worst time. Although he lived briefly as an exile in the United States, his goal was always to return to his home country “to change Liberia for the better.”*

*The interview and photo are by The Carter Center's Connie Nelson.*

**The Record:** *How has your own experience shaped your commitment to Liberia?*

**Taiwan Gongloe:** I was in marches, I expressed discontent, I protested, I have been in jail. I was one of the worst critics of my government in the past. That is why I agreed to work in government today. To give some manifestation to my passion, to my views.

I always say that I have a responsibility to make Liberia right. I don't say that ‘others’ have, I don't say ‘we’ have. I say ‘I’ have. I always ask what I am doing to fix this situation, to change this situation.

When I have a decision to make, I always ask myself, “How would I have thought about it three years ago, before I became solicitor general?” and that is the right decision.

I am a victim of arrogance in

government, I am a victim of abuse of power, and I want to make sure it doesn't happen while I am here.



**TR:** *Since the 2005 elections, what are the areas of greatest growth and greatest challenge for Liberia?*

**TG:** There's the feeling of relief. I recently asked some businessmen, “How do you see the situation?” and they told me, “Thank you. Thank the government that there is no harassment; no one is coming into our stores and into our offices and asking us to give them money. Nobody is unfairly overcharging us taxes. Business is a little bit slow, but we feel better...that we are not being harassed.”

Our tragedy was a result of human rights abuse. It was a life of hopelessness and despair. Now, the biggest thing is that people have a sense of hope.

**TR:** *How is the justice system changing?*

**TG:** We are prosecuting, we are declaring some cases dismissed be-

cause there is not much evidence, because we try to tell the prosecutors who work under us that the role of a prosecutor is not to convict, but to see that justice is done.

In the outlying regions, people will be found guilty very swiftly. But here, in the Supreme Court, in the coolness of neutrality, we can look at the law and evidence. So, I am saving this government money by not wasting time trying a case. That is a new phenomenon and people will find it shocking, but that is justice.

I appeared before the Supreme Justice (recently) and declined to argue a case, because even though the applicant was convicted of murder in the lower court, I reviewed his file and I saw no evidence for us to sustain this conviction. One of the justices asked me, “But somebody was killed. We have to find the killer.” And I said, “Yes, but we cannot do more wrong by trying to force the ... conviction of another Liberian.”

**TR:** *What role is The Carter Center playing in helping transform Liberia?*

**TG:** The Carter Center is making a difference in the lives of average Liberians by helping to educate them on various aspects of the rule of law; they are simplifying some of the difficult concepts in the law, and [using] the local vernacular to explain some principles of criminal law to local people.

The Carter Center is also helping with the training of our prosecutors—a key factor in building a culture of peace in this country. If a culture of respect for the rights of the individual, respect for what our lawmakers have said is the law is entrenched, then that is how we will build a culture of peace.



The Carter Center, founded in 1982 in Atlanta, U.S.A., by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, is committed to advancing human rights and alleviating human suffering.

The Center's 160 employees have waged peace, fought disease, and built hope in more than 70 countries worldwide by engaging with those at the highest levels of government and working side by side with people at the grassroots. .

The Carter Center works in Liberia in partnership with the Liberian Justice Ministry and is currently supported by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and by Irish Aid.

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## A pioneer in reconciliation online

*By John Etherton, Georgia Tech* offer functionality never before seen on a truth commission website, including :

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia has been blessed with a number of national and international partners who have joined in its efforts to promote healing and put the country's years of conflict behind it.

Among these, The Carter Center's support has been instrumental to the TRC's outreach efforts in Maryland County as well as the work of the subcommittee on traditional and religious leaders. The Center has also assisted with statement taking in the United States, as the TRC has been the first of any truth and reconciliation commission to include the diaspora in its mandate. Another Atlanta native, Georgia Tech, has also partnered with the TRC to help the TRC reach the diaspora.

Working alongside Carter Center staff, and with the help of Liberians in Atlanta and Liberia, Georgia Tech has collaborated with the TRC to design and host its website as part of its ongoing research into technology and reconciliation.

The website takes advantage of the latest internet technologies to

offer functionality never before seen on a truth commission website, including :

**Videos** from the TRC, including videos from the TRC's hearings across Liberia.

**Photos** of the TRC's activities. Users of the website are encouraged to upload their own photos of Liberia's conflict and reconciliation process.

**Online statement taking.** A first for any truth commission, users can either request someone to take their statement or give their statement online in the privacy of their own home. To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of these statements, the latest encryption technologies have been used to secure the statements.

**Discussion forums** for people to come together and share their experiences in the hopes of finding common ground.

**Up to date press releases** of the



Filming the TRC hearings in Harper, Maryland County, for upload to the web site. Photo by Jeff Austin.

TRC's activities. This includes daily coverage of the TRC's public hearings as they tour Liberia.

It is our hope that Liberians and other interested persons will visit the website, learn about the TRC, and take an active role in the reconciliation and healing of Liberia. We also encourage people to offer their feedback through the site's feedback link so we can improve it. The website can be found at [www.trcofliberia.org](http://www.trcofliberia.org).