



The Carter Center Record

Community-level solutions to avoid mob violence

Amos Payne, Jr., Sinoe County, Catholic Justice and Peace Commission

One of the major tools that we, the Community Legal Advisors of the JPC, use to solve individual problems is small-scale mediation. We do this to bring peaceful coexistence into communities. But we also try to find ways to address community-level problems when the need arises.

In recent days, we faced a community-level problem involving four boys accused of witchcraft by a community in downtown Greenville, Sinoe County. Actually what brought up this problem was a lady who had a dream and saw these four boys planning to take her life.

The news circulated in the community, which was concerned about the case. The boys were interrogated and threatened with harm if they refused to confess.

During this process, the Liberia National Police and UNMIL intervened to rescue the children from being victims of mob violence.

Even after the safety of the children was assured, JPC and the other actors felt a need to address this problem with the community.

We convened a community meeting the day following the children's rescue to discuss mob violence and witchcraft. Afterward, the LNP turned the boys

over to their parents, through the community chairman.

We continue to conduct follow-up in the community to know about the well-being of the children and also to discuss ways of solving problems like these if they arise again. Anytime we go in the community, we make a note of our findings in the file we keep on this case.

Therefore, community dialogue and education is another way of handling problems, especially among those who are not aware of the law or are planning to effect an action on their own that may lead to serious conflict.

Involving local leaders in community awareness

McArthur A. Walker and Zarwayonnoh Carr, Inter-Religious Council of Liberia, Grand Gedeh County

Earlier this year, the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia conducted awareness on the rule of law in two towns in Konobo District, Grand Gedeh County.

As is our usual custom when we arrive in a community, we intro-

duced ourselves to the chiefs and his people and told them the reasons for which we were in the community.

The chief and his people accepted the message of our educators, but later, as our educators were having a discussion with the community in the palava hut in the center of



A woman in Tchien District, Grand Gedeh County, poses a question to the IRCL

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An interview with Liberia's Minister of Justice Philip A.Z. Banks

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

The Record: *What do you see as Liberia's greatest challenge?*

Philip Banks: From my own vantage point, I think our major challenge is prosecutorial; it is one of the biggest problems that we have. In October, we had an 'expression of concern' by inmates at the prison. They felt that matters were not being handled as speedily as they should be, and this has caused a tremendous growth in the prison population. And of course, the consequence is additional expense for the government: more people to feed, you have to start looking at the congestion, thinking about expanding the facilities; so yes, prosecution is the key area that we're looking at. It's a major challenge for us.

TR: *What is your hope for Liberia?*

PB: Frankly, I would like to see Liberia at the apex of the continent, on top. I believe very strongly and very sincerely that in spite of what we've been through—the devastation and degradation and all of the other negatives that we can think of—we still have the propensity to rise highly and rigorously. With the commitment that we've seen of this government I think we will achieve a lot. I can see that if things continue to develop as they are, we will certainly surpass a lot of the other countries in Africa. So we just have to keep making the effort, and with the level of support that we're getting we think that we certainly will get there. Normally, it is difficult to get me to put my all in hope, but this is one period when I have a lot of hope for this country. I think we will get there. Yes, I think we will very shortly—in the next few

years—and I'm speaking candidly, we will be the envy of a lot of our sister countries on the continent.

TR: *How important is the new Sexual and Gender Based Violence Unit, with staff support from The Carter Center, for the work of the Ministry of Justice?*



PB: We think it is very important because we've seen an increase in gender violence in the country. It is probably even more important now that there is an attempt to give some statistics---something which we didn't have before. So it may not be that it wasn't there, but they were not being recorded before. Now they're being recorded, so we know the extent to which that is affecting the society and the extent to which a group—a great deal of our female citizens—are being subjected to those acts. So, with that knowledge and with the concern that we have, we believe very, very strongly that there is a need to have that gender unit in the Ministry to expedite the prosecution of persons involved and to send a message out there—perhaps one of deterrence—that we will be prosecuting and we will be prosecuting expeditiously, so that people will not believe that they can

go ahead and commit those kinds of offenses and rely on the past inability of the Ministry or the courts to deal with those issues.

TR: *How do new Liberian laws benefit women?*

The new laws are providing for them much better protection than they ever had. In the past, the question of gender violence was almost a taboo. People didn't talk much about it, and if it occurred, it was a secret. The female didn't want to reveal it because of various consequences, the parents might be persuaded to accept some kind of remuneration, and so they were disposed to not disclose these things. But we think that the new educational thrust of having people fully informed of it, and not to look down on such situations, will be highly beneficial. We are happy that these kinds of exposures are occurring. It encourages females who have been violated to come forth more readily than has happened in the past.

TR: *How has the involvement of The Carter Center, and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, impacted Liberia?*

PB: I was part of the interim government in the early '90s, when President Carter made a good number of his visits, and many times I had the opportunity to meet with him when he visited. We appreciated the attention that he gave at the time. And certainly, the involvement of The Carter Center in some of the activities that we are undertaking is highly appreciated. Those are the kinds of things that encourage us in our own pursuits. I am one who has had the position that if you want for other people to be encouraged to help you, you have to take some of the initiative yourself.

Access to Justice in a Transitional Period: Lessons Learned

Sean MacLeay,
The Carter Center

On June 20th, The Ministry of Justice, UNMIL Legal and Judicial System Support Division, and The Carter Center gathered with members of civil society and the NGO community to discuss several issues relating to the rule of law in Liberia.

Participants learned about the various models of legal aid provided by different organizations across the country, including The Carter Center's own Community Legal Advisor program in the southeast.

Participants also discussed models of comparative legal reform, with Justice Bawa Akamba of the Supreme Court of Ghana outlining Ghana's experiences harmonizing customary and statutory legal systems.



Tom Crick, assistant director and senior political analyst of The Carter Center's Conflict Resolution Program; Kamudoni Nyasulu, deputy director of UNMIL LJSSD, Cllr. Annie Swen, assistant Minister of Justice, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, deputy special representative of the secretary-general for rule of law at UNMIL, And Justice Bawa Akamba.

The workshop was timely and helped to inform attendees about various justice initiatives, with the

aim to promote greater collaboration on reform efforts moving forward.

...involving local leaders in community awareness in Grand Gedeh

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town, one of the elders decided to disrupt the process. He claimed he had not been recognized by the educators.

The educators tried to calm the situation by apologizing and asking the town chief to introduce the towns' elders, but the man picked up his chair and walked out of the forum.

Soon thereafter, commotion broke out, and the villagers started to scatter. The chief announced that

the country devil was outside, so our educators fled with him to an unfinished building. They waited there for about two hours and then slipped out of town to escape.

The IRCL always takes care to meet with local authorities before carrying out its awareness. Before this incident in Konobo, we had introduced our program to the county superintendent and the district superintendent of Konobo.

Still, though, we sometimes encounter resistance like this. So we took the case back to the district

superintendent – along with representatives of UNMIL, LNP, and the county superintendent's office.

The district superintendent went back to the town to discuss with the elders of that community. They agreed that they were eager to receive the message on the rule of law and later drafted a letter inviting us back into their town to continue the education.

Now we are waiting for the road to dry and we look forward to continuing the awareness in Konobo District.

THE
CARTER CENTER



Waging Peace. Fighting Disease. Building Hope.

**STRENGTHENING THE RULE OF LAW IN
POST-CONFLICT LIBERIA**

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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 staff and its partner organizations wage peace, fight disease, and build hope by engaging with those at the highest levels of government and working side by side with people at the grassroots. A not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization, the Center's work is supported by donations from individuals, foundations, corporations, and countries.

The Carter Center works in Liberia in partnership with the Liberian Justice Ministry and is currently supported by Irish Aid.



Carter Center Liberia welcomes new project manager to Liberia

John Hummel

"How do you like it?"

Everywhere I go Liberians ask me how I like their country. I tell them and I tell you that I love it. Traditional leaders, shopkeepers, government officials, children playing football – all Liberians have welcomed me and made me feel at home.

I began my new career with The Carter Center by boarding a plane in the United States to fly to a country where I had never been. I was filled with excitement but also apprehension.

"Would the people be friendly?" "Would I like the food?" "Was it safe?" My concerns have been laid to rest.

As I begin my second month on the job my thoughts are now about how I can help The Carter Center continue to help Liberia. This is best accomplished by implementing programs that allow Liberians to

develop solutions that work best for Liberia. Sure I have ideas about what is best for Liberia – but I won't be here forever and neither will The Carter Center. The Carter Center's role must be that of facilitator, organizer, convener, and trainer.

By fulfilling these roles we help to create an atmosphere that empowers Liberians to take control of their future. When The Carter Center, UNMIL, and all the other NGOs are gone, Liberians will remain. They will live with what is created now. If Liberians create the solutions now, they will respect them later – and

respect for law helps to assure peace.

Thank you for welcoming me to Liberia. I look forward to meeting you as The Carter Center travels around the country doing our small part to assist Liberians to create a justice system that works best for Liberia.

John Hummel with Mama Tormah of Traditional Women United for Peace, a Carter Center partner. Photo by Pewee Flomoku.

