

**The Advocates for Human Rights' work with the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): Statement of Appreciation for the Diaspora Service Award Honor conferred Upon The Advocates by the Liberian Historical Educational and Development Association (LIHEDE) During its Fifth Jubilee Celebration, Greensboro, North Carolina, USA**

**August 21-22, 2009**

**Statement by Robin Phillips, Executive Director, The Advocates for Human Rights**

On behalf of our staff, Board of Directors, and the hundreds of volunteers from across the US and UK who participated in the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Diaspora Project, I send you my sincere greetings and appreciation. As you celebrate LIHEDE's Fifth Jubilee marked by important work for Liberia, I hereby extend The Advocates' gratitude for the Diaspora Service Award recognition of The Advocates' work with the Liberian TRC. Allow me further to extend to LIHEDE our heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of your Fifth Jubilee.

While we sincerely regret that a lack of resources has prevented us from sending a representative to directly participate in your weekend-long dialogue, we share your work and your enthusiasm for a new Liberia for all of the Liberian people. As you mark this important milestone with a gathering of so many Liberian dignitaries and professionals, please allow me to express how appreciative we are for your thoughtfulness and recognition of The Advocates' contributions to the peace, justice and reconciliation processes in Liberia. It has been a privilege for us to contribute to efforts to create a new Liberian society where a pluralistic culture of respect for the rule of law and human rights would be the rule rather than the exception.

The Advocates for Human Rights (formerly Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights) was founded in 1983 by a group of lawyers who recognized the community's unique

spirit of social justice as an opportunity to promote and protect human rights here at home and worldwide. The mission of the Advocates is to implement international human rights standards to promote civil society and reinforce the rule of law. We are a non-profit, volunteer-based organization that investigates and exposes human rights violations; represents immigrants and refugees in our community who are victims of human rights abuses; trains and assists groups that protect human rights; and works through education and advocacy to engage the public, policy-makers and children about human rights and cultural understanding.

We are proud of our partnership with the Liberian TRC. As you may know, while other truth commissions have made efforts to reach out to their diaspora populations, the Liberian TRC Diaspora Project is the first to systematically engage its diaspora communities. At the request of the TRC of Liberia, The Advocates for Human Rights coordinated the work of the TRC in the diaspora. Between January 2007 and August 2008, The Advocates interviewed and took statements from Liberians across the United States, the United Kingdom, and in the Buduburam Refugee Settlement in Ghana, West Africa. Moreover, the TRC held a full week of public hearings in St. Paul, Minnesota in June 2008 to take public testimony from Liberians in the U.S. diaspora. We hope that one of the contributions of the TRC Diaspora Project was to create an unprecedented awareness of the experience of the Liberian nation diaspora.

The Advocates presented the final report on the Diaspora Experience to the TRC of Liberia during the National Conference on the Way Forward held in Virginia, Liberia in June 2009. The report, entitled *A House with Two Rooms*, is based on an analysis of more than 1600 statements, fact-finding interviews, and witness testimony at public hearings held in the U.S. The report documents the experience of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law that forced Liberians to leave the country; it also tells the story of the “triple trauma” experienced by members of the diaspora during their flight through Liberia and across international borders, while living in refugee camps in West Africa, and in resettlement in the U.S. and U.K. In addition, the report summarizes the views of Liberians in the diaspora on the root causes of the conflict and

their recommendations for systemic reform and reconciliation. We have included the Executive Summary and Priority Recommendations in the materials for the Jubilee, but the full report is available on our website [www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org](http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org). It will also be published in book form in the very near future.

The work of the TRC Diaspora Project would not have been possible without the efforts of more than 800 volunteers and dozens of institutional and organizational partners. The Advocates' TRC Diaspora Project did not receive funding from the TRC or the Government of Liberia to carry out this work, but rather leveraged the contribution of over 10 million dollars in pro bono services to TRC. We would particularly like to acknowledge the contributions of so many individuals and community organizations in the diaspora. They provided exceptional service to their community and share the honor of this award.

The mandate of the TRC of Liberia has ended and the "Consolidated Final Report" is generating much needed debate and conversations about the way forward for Liberia. The first steps have been taken on the long and difficult road to peace, justice and reconciliation. Ultimately, the Liberian people, both in Liberia and in the diaspora, must hold the government and public officials accountable for ensuring that the rule of law in Liberia and the human rights of all Liberians are respected. The Advocates for Human Rights looks forward to continuing to partner with LIHEDE the Liberian diaspora in efforts to rebuild Liberia.

I thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin Phillips". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robin" and last name "Phillips" clearly distinguishable.

Robin Phillips

Executive Director