



**THE CENTER FOR JUSTICE & ACCOUNTABILITY**  
**Bringing Human Rights Abusers To Justice.**

**LAWSUIT FILED AGAINST SUSPECTED PHILADELPHIA-BASED  
COMMANDER OF LIBERIAN MASSACRE**

*28 years after 600 people were killed while under Red Cross protection, survivors of the infamous "Lutheran Church Massacre" seek justice in a Philadelphia court*

PHILADELPHIA, Pennsylvania, February 12, 2018 - [The Center for Justice and Accountability \(CJA\)](#) today filed a [civil suit](#) in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania against Philadelphia resident [Moses Thomas](#). A former Colonel in the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), Thomas is suspected of instigating the infamous [Lutheran Church Massacre](#), which is widely considered one of the most violent events in Liberia's 14 years of armed conflict.

On July 29, 1990, Thomas is alleged to have directed the AFL's elite Special Anti-Terrorist Unit (SATU) to attack Monrovia's St. Peter's Lutheran Church, a Red Cross humanitarian aid shelter where approximately 2,000 unarmed men, women, and children had sought refuge from escalating violence. Over the course of the night, 600 people - primarily members of the Mano and Gio tribes, which were thought to be sympathetic to opposition forces - were killed with guns and machetes.

"Our clients managed to survive the Lutheran Church Massacre by hiding under the bodies of friends and family executed by the government forces. What they endured is beyond comprehension and this suit presents their first opportunity to see some form of justice carried out," said CJA Senior Staff Attorney, Nushin Sarkarati.

The attack was widely condemned by foreign governments and human rights organizations, and in 2009, Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended the creation of an Extraordinary Criminal Tribunal to investigate and prosecute alleged perpetrators of civil war era violence for atrocity crimes, including the Lutheran Church Massacre. Nine years later Liberians are still waiting to see whether an in-country court will be established. No one has yet been held to account for the killings.

"Liberia has been left in a fog of fear and impunity for too long, and can only be truly at peace when it has come to terms with its past. If the survivors of this horrific event are able to see justice, Liberians will have reason to believe that accountability is possible through a fair and just process," said Hassan Bility, director of the Monrovia-based [Global Justice and Research Project \(GJRP\)](#), a non-governmental organization dedicated to the documentation of Liberian war related crimes, and the pursuit of justice for victims.

"The Liberian State is under moral and legal obligations to criminally prosecute those who committed torture and horrific crimes during the Liberian civil wars so that future generations can say 'our forefathers stood where duty required them to stand,'" Bility added.

GJRP and its Geneva-based sister organization, [Civitas Maxima](#), investigated the case in partnership with CJA. Their substantial documentation work has led to the investigation and arrest of alleged Liberian war criminals throughout Europe and the United States (see further information below).

"Liberia's civil wars included some of the most serious violations of national and international law perpetrated by all sides of the conflict," said Sarkarati. "Cases like these should be tried in the countries where the crimes were committed. Because that is not yet possible in Liberia, the victims have to push to try perpetrators in the courts of the countries where they have chosen to hide."

"Our clients have waited a long time to see their day in court, and we hope this case will provide them with a measure of justice," added Kathy Roberts, CJA Senior Legal Advisor. "This case is only a step toward achieving accountability for victims and survivors of atrocities committed during Liberia's civil wars. No one who commits acts of this nature should ever feel they are beyond the reach of justice."

## Legal Background

CJA filed the case under the [Alien Tort Statute](#) and [Torture Victim Protection Act](#), two federal statutes that permit civil suits in U.S. courts to remedy a limited set of human rights violations. In relation to the Lutheran Church Massacre and the harm to the four victims, the complaint alleges that Thomas is liable for extrajudicial killing, torture, war crimes (including the war crime of targeting a building designated for religious and humanitarian purposes) and crimes against humanity for mass execution and persecution of civilians based on their tribal affiliation.

## Cases Against Perpetrators Residing Outside of Liberia

The case against Moses Thomas follows the successful 2009 U.S. prosecution of [Charles "Chucky" Taylor](#), Charles Taylor's son, for torture; and the successful 2017 "[Jungle Jabbah](#)" case in Philadelphia. It is part of a larger movement of Liberian victims pushing for access to justice on a global scale. Expected cases in 2018 include the trial of former National Patriotic Front (NPFL) Defense Minister [Tom Woewiyu](#) in the U.S. for immigration fraud related to human rights abuses in Liberia; NPFL Commander [Martina Johnson](#) in Belgium for atrocity crimes in Liberia; United Liberation Movement (ULIMO) Commander [Alieu Kosiah](#) in Switzerland for crimes against humanity and torture; and [Agnes Reeves Taylor](#) in the United Kingdom for her alleged role in NPFL abuses in Liberia.

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## About the Center for Justice and Accountability

The [Center for Justice and Accountability](#) (CJA) is a San Francisco-based human rights organization dedicated to deterring torture and other severe human rights abuses around the world and advancing the rights of survivors to seek truth, justice and redress. CJA uses litigation to hold perpetrators individually accountable for human rights abuses, develop human rights law, and advance the rule of law in countries transitioning from periods of abuse.

## About the Global Justice and Research Project

Established in 2012, the [Global Justice and Research Project \(GJRP\)](#) is a Liberia-based non-profit, non-governmental organization that documents war related crimes in Liberia and, where possible, seeks justice for victims of said crimes, with the full consent of the victims. The GJRP works in partnership with [Civitas Maxima](#), a Geneva-based non-profit, non-governmental organization, which ensures the coordination of a network of international lawyers and investigators who work for the interests of those who have been victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

## About Debevoise & Plimpton LLP

[Debevoise & Plimpton LLP](#) is a premier law firm with market-leading practices, a global perspective and strong New York roots. Debevoise delivers effective solutions to its clients' most important legal challenges, applying clear commercial judgment and a distinctively collaborative approach. Debevoise's globally recognized team of International Dispute Resolution lawyers has extensive experience advising and litigating in relation to all aspects of public international law.

## About Blank Rome LLP

[Blank Rome LLP](#) is an Am Law 100 firm with 13 offices and more than 600 attorneys and principals who provide comprehensive legal and advocacy services to clients operating in the United States and around the world. Blank Rome's professionals have built a reputation for their leading knowledge and experience across a spectrum of industries, and are recognized for their commitment to pro bono work in their communities. For more information, please visit [blankrome.com](http://blankrome.com).

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Follow updates on the Liberian Quest for Justice Campaign, maintained by Civitas Maxima and the Global Justice and Research Project (GJRP), on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) [#Quest4Liberia](#), [#EndImpunity](#)

For more information about CJA's work in Liberia visit [cja.org/where-we-work/liberia](http://cja.org/where-we-work/liberia)  
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