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# Survivors of Liberia church massacre sue alleged perpetrator in US court

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by Tate Brown

[JURIST] Four survivors of a church massacre that occurred during the Liberian civil war filed a civil suit [complaint, PDF] in US court Monday against the commander of the armed forces allegedly responsible for the massacre.

The suit, brought in the US District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania [official website], alleges that Moses Thomas commanded forces at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Monrovia as a colonel in the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). The survivors claim that, "over the course of several hours," soldiers under Thomas' command "indiscriminately shot or hacked to death approximately 600 sleeping civilian men, women, and children taking refuge there." The plaintiffs said that they survived the massacre by hiding under piles of dead bodies and "witnessed the slaughter of hundreds of civilians, including their own family members." The massacre, known as the Lutheran Church Massacre, occurred on July 29, 1990, and was the single worst atrocity of Liberia's First Civil War.



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The lawsuit was filed under laws that allow foreign victims of war crimes to sue in U.S. courts, including the Torture Victim Protection Act [text, PDF] and the Alien Tort Statute [text]. All four plaintiffs are residents of Liberia, while Thomas fled Liberia for Philadelphia in 2002 allegedly "under a program meant to assist the victims of the very war crimes he perpetrated." The plaintiffs may recover monetary damages if successful, although no criminal penalty is at issue in this case.

Thomas has not formally answered the charges, but he has spoken to the BBC [report], calling the allegations "nonsense."

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