

PARADIGM REPORTERS PROVIDE PRO BONO SERVICES FOR HISTORIC HEARINGS REGARDING LIBERIANS IN DIASPORA - June 2008 – Paradigm court reporters Sherri Flagg, Liz Gangl, Mary Mitchell and Cindy Schultz, among a group of several others, provided pro bono court reporting services during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's public hearings held June 9-14, 2008, at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. The Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights was instrumental in facilitating the Commission's hearings and locating Liberians who have now resettled in the United States so that they could tell their stories. Witnesses testified about human rights abuses in Liberia that forced them to flee, their experiences in flight and in refugee camps, and the experience of resettlement in the United States.

The U.S. public hearings were designed to present the Experience of Liberians in Diaspora. Witnesses testified about human rights abuses in Liberia that forced them to flee, their experiences in flight and in refugee camps, and the experience of resettlement in the U.S. The U.S. hearings provided an important opportunity for Liberians in the Diaspora to present their experiences and recommendations directly to the TRC, which was mandated to make binding recommendations to the government of Liberia.

The verbatim reporting of these hearings were unlike any other typical court reporting experience. The reporters were challenged, first, by struggling to understand in realtime the syntax of the speakers; and secondly, because of the hundreds of hours involved to research spellings of names, geographical locations, and indigenous colloquialisms.

A few words regarding the experience were shared by the reporters:

Liz Gangl: *"It was an honor to play a small part in such an enormous project. I found it to be a very humbling experience."*

Cindy Schultz: *"The TRC testimony has been indelibly etched into my mind. From Ambassador Cohen's story of his involvement with Liberia, I understand more fully why the U.S. should get involved with other countries that are looking for freedom from tyrannical leadership. But what was most impressed upon my soul was despite the oppressive circumstances and the atrocities that the Liberian people endured, their powerful faith in God and love for others is enabling them to forgive and reconcile, in hopes of emerging as a stronger country as a result of their trials."*

Sherri Flagg: *"Exhausting and humbling."*

Mary Mitchell: *"I have heard difficult testimony over the course of my career, including horrendous details in rape and murder cases, but never before have I been moved to tears while reporting, as I was in these hearings. To have played a role by using my skill in order to facilitate universal access seems very small, indeed, but I am extremely proud to have been a part of it."*

*The term **diaspora** (in [Ancient Greek](#), **διασπορά** – "a scattering or sowing of seeds") refers to the forcing of any people or [ethnic](#) population to leave their traditional [homelands](#), the dispersal of such people, and the ensuing developments in their culture.