

## Who am I?

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**"Arkiv är livet"**



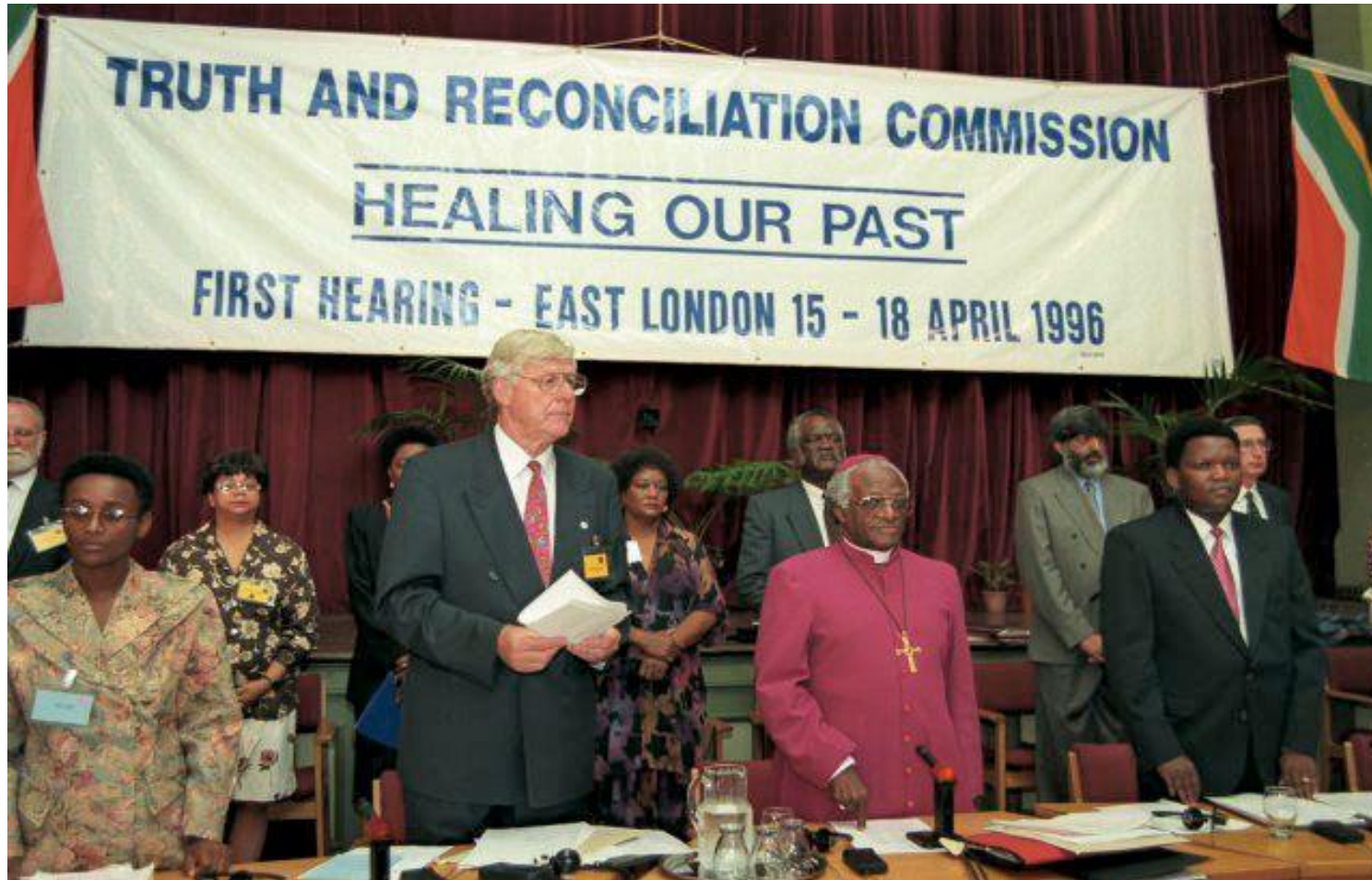
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## The Role of Archives

- Archives safeguard the rights of the people and hence create a firm foundation upon which a democratic society builds.
- This is because information is empowerment and that is why repressive governments misinform the electorate or withhold information from it.

## The Archives and Information Science perspective:

- Evidence-based approach to recorded knowledge;
- It is about organizational and personal processes and contexts through which records and knowledge are created;
- This perspective is quite different from other information professionals' perspectives (Gilliland-Swetland 2000).





# What Are TRCs?

- Temporary institutions.
- They investigate gross violations of human rights - uncover the truth to eliminate political speculations.
- Some of them use restorative justice which focuses on the rehabilitation of the perpetrators through reconciliation with the victims.

## Why TRCs?

- Provide a forum for both the Victims and Perpetrators;
- They are often intended to usher in a new democratic dispensation through the recommendations they make.

The narratives shared by the victims and perpetrators are meant to:

- create an understanding of the causes of conflict, counteract speculations and deniability, and facilitate reconciliation and healing.



## Why should we care about the TRC Archives?

It is believed, that human rights archives can help societies to deal with the painful past and build a peaceful future. However for this to happen, the archives need to be used in a manner that promotes meaningful dialogue and debate to promote the rights of the victims (Caswell 2014).

## Why should we care about the TRC Archives?

- To avoid amnesia, the past must be documented.
- They are basis for reparations to the victims.
- Important for the pursuit of international justice.

## Tools to Protect the TRC Archives

Measures such as the Orentlicher Principles adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Commission are meant to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights and include the collection, preservation and access to the records.

According to international law, governments have an obligation to bring perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity to justice.

## Tools to Protect the TRC Archives

- Article 26 of the African Charter also encourages governments to carry out an official inquiry into human rights abuses and to establish national institutions to protect human rights.
- The Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights Through Action to Combat Impunity, include the principle to preserve archives for the purpose of collective memory and accountability on human rights violations.

# The Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission



# Liberia



## Facts about Liberia

Liberia is in West Africa with a population of 5.18 million people. It is one of poorest countries in the world and its economy is extremely underdeveloped, largely due to the First Civil War in 1989-96 which destroyed its economy, especially the infrastructure in and around Monrovia.



## Facts about Liberia

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was president when the TRC was established and served as the 24th President of Liberia from 2006 to 2018. Sirleaf was the first elected female head of state in Africa.

## The Liberian TRC

- The Liberian TRC was mandated to document the atrocities committed against the Liberian people between 1979-2003 and was launched on June 22, 2006. It finished its work in 2008.
- It was to enable victims and perpetrators of war atrocities to speak out and gain closure on bitter memories, provide a forum to discuss what went wrong, and promote reconciliation.

## Why TRCs?

- Collective Accountability – involves acknowledging a shared responsibility for acts that may have been carried out by others.
- Truth-telling provides opportunities to heal, restore human dignity, demonstrate censure for horrific acts, encourages democracy and promotes reconciliation.
- Transitional governments should opt for full accountability to deter the repetition of violations. Accountability is a prerequisite for democratic transition.

## The LiberianTRC Archives

The Liberian TRC collected over 22,000 written statements, several dozen personal interviews, and more than five hundred live public testimonies of witnesses, including both perpetrators of atrocities and direct victims.

The TRC entrusted all of this information to the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta.

It was the first time in history a TRC had handed over its entire documentation to be kept in a foreign country.

## The Human Rights Commission

The Independent Human Rights Commission that was established to continue with its work and to carry out the implementation of its recommendations did not have access to the archives.

## Why is the Documentation Important?

Understanding the past is expected to help post-conflict societies to avoid making the same mistakes and to build a society that rests on democratic values and respect for human rights.

The Liberian TRC therefore created an officially recognized archive of abuses committed during the civil war.

# Information Management Infrastructure

- There was no information management infrastructure in place to facilitate the management of the documentation – no records managers or archivists but database managers - there was no legal framework to promote information access. The FOI was only enacted in 2010.



## What are the Challenges? Cont'd

Obstacles such as; lack of political will to make information accessible to the people, widespread poverty, illiteracy, lack of information management skills, lack of ICT, electricity, lack of the involvement of archivists and information institutions hindered the democratization of documentation.

# Contraversies about the TRC Archive

- The uniqueness of the Liberian TRC is that we rewarded the alleged perpetrators.
- The public thinks it was a waste of time because the identified perpetrators did not get any punishment.

## People's thoughts about the TRC

- Reparations have not been honoured.
- The TRC final report was not embraced by all Liberians and this gave rise to controversies such as the treatment of the then president.
- 10000 pages of the TRC report were assembled but the UNDP committed to only 1500 pages and so the rest is still unpublished!

## What happened to the TRC Archives?

- The Chairman of the TRC made the decision to exile the entire documentation to save it from destruction. He is also in exile.
- There is no political will to push the TRC process forward and the funding makes it difficult to repatriate the documentation.

## **What Ought to be done with the TRC Archives**

To address impunity and restore respect for human rights, investments must be made in the effective dissemination and use of the TRC report and its archives.

Schools ought to include the TRC findings in the curriculum, and universities should introduce courses focused on post-conflict trauma, peacebuilding, and democratic consolidation.

## What Ought to be done with the TRC Archives

Democracy building in postwar contexts requires giving citizens a voice in matters that would enable development and social cohesion to be realized, and to have such a voice, they must be informed.

## In conclusion

- The management of TRC archives is still a challenge worth discussing since they continue to be implemented on the African continent as transitional justice models.
- Information management and post-war reconstruction is a relevant area to peace research that has been largely neglected in Africa but remains very important to the production of knowledge on post-conflict transition on the continent.



## **In conclusion cont'd..**

The international community, who are the moral guarantors of these processes together with post-conflict nations, should learn from past TRC processes and put in place a mini-TRC institution to pursue the follow-up process of dissemination, use and management of the TRC archives.

## Recommendations

- Governments should promote the use of the documentation as per the objectives of the TRCs.
- The TRC archives are owned by the citizens and should therefore be made accessible to them.
- Governments should put information management infrastructures in place to promote access to the documentation and to address the challenges of long-term preservation.
- To promote an understanding of the conflict, TRC documentation should be used as an educational tool by schools and tertiary institutions.



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Questions are welcome! Thank You for  
listening