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# BET founder to build spa resort in war-torn Liberia

From **Stephanie Elam**, CNN  
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## STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Rewards of investing in war-torn country high, says Johnson
- Locals trained to work in 78-room spa hotel
- Johnson plans to continue investment with factory and housing in the country

(CNN) -- Billionaire businessman Bob Johnson has chosen Liberia for his latest venture, the country's first top class hotel.

Johnson, the founder of Black Entertainment Television, was the first African American to control a company on the New York Stock Exchange and the first black owner of a major U.S. professional sports team.

He told CNN why he chose a country blighted by a long-running civil war for his 78-room beach-side spa resort.

"When you go into a post-conflict country, you are going to have to be willing to take risks, but with risks there are also rewards," said Johnson.

"If I can get in first and make the right connections, you've got a good chance of not only making an investment that will return a very good reward."

Johnson, the founder and chairman of RLJ Companies, said he avoided the capital Monrovia because of its social problems, high numbers of people without proper housing and lack of reliable electricity. Instead, with the government's help, he chose a beach-side site from which he had to clear some residents.

He said: "We had to take this location which was raw dirt. We relocated some buildings and frankly some people that were there, but we relocated them to a nice place. In turn we gave many of those people jobs.

"We had to train people because hotel servicing is not a natural thing if you haven't gone to school or if you've been dodging bullets for 15 years of civil war."

Despite bringing some senior staff from the United States, Johnson said he had mainly used local staff for his senior management team.

"We brought the core leadership from the U.S, but they immediately went to training Liberians. In fact the one thing we're most proud of now, probably of the top six or eight people in the hotel, five of those are Liberians," he said.

Johnson plans to continue his investment in Liberia.

"We want to put a factory in Liberia and build housing in Liberia. They got to have workers and the workers have to have someplace to stay."

Liberia, Africa's oldest republic founded by freed American and Caribbean slaves, suffered a long-running civil war throughout the 1990s and was accused of supporting rebel fighters in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

Around 250,000 people were killed in Liberia's civil war, which left the country in economic ruin.

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