



INDIANA UNIVERSITY
FOUNDATION

For All: The Indiana University Bicentennial Campaign Mahja Zeon

Video Transcript

<https://youtu.be/sHd-zsJyNV4>

[Music begins]

[Video: IU Banner appears top center]

[Words Appear: Indiana University Foundation]

Mahja Zeon: My name is Mahja Zeon.

[Video: Close-up headshot of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of a large window with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: I am a Liberian-American.

[Video: Longer view of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of two large windows with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: I was born May 8th, 1986.

[Video: Close-up headshot of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of a large window with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

In 1989, the Liberian Civil War began.

[Words Appear: Mahja's parents and her baby sister, a U.S. citizen, were granted asylum in America.]

[Words Appear: But Mahja and her older brother had to stay in Liberia.]

[Video: Longer view of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of two large windows with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: My Auntie Ruth and my brother and I, we were refugees.

[Video: Map of West Africa with line showing the route Mahja, her Auntie Ruth, and older brother traveled from Liberia to Ghana]

Mahja Zeon: We traveled through West Africa. We landed in a refugee camp in Ghana,

[Video: Longer view of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of two large windows with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: and that was where I learned my ABC's and 123's, from three to seven.

[Video: Close-up headshot of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of a large window with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: Those four years had an impact. Having to eat rations and not being able to go to school,

[Video: Longer view of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of two large windows with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: and so we made the best of things.

[Words Appear: In 1993, Mahja's parents were allowed to bring one child to join them in the U.S.]

[Words Appear: Ultimately, they made the heart-wrenching decision to send for Mahja's brother, John.]

[Video: Longer view of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of two large windows with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: It was the day before it was time for him to leave, we couldn't find him. Nowhere in the refugee camp was my brother. He was gone, and the lady who was bringing him was like, well, you're our option, and I got to come instead.

[Words appear: John later confirmed he had hidden that day, so that Mahja could take his place.]

[Video: Close-up headshot of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of a large window with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: I thank my brother for that sacrifice all the time.

[Words appear: John stayed in Liberia, where he still lives today.]

[Words appear: Meanwhile, Mahja grew up in America, and went on to attend Valdosta State University in Georgia.]

[Words appear: As an undergraduate, Mahja studied with Marc G. Pufong, an alumnus of the Maurer School of Law at IU Bloomington.]

[Video: Longer view of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of two large windows with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: He talked about Bloomington like it was a little piece of heaven on earth.

[Video: Exterior view of the Maurer School of Law on IU Bloomington campus to an interior view of the law library]

Mahja Zeon: The way he described the limestone and the law library and the how the snow falls on it.

[Video: Close-up headshot of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of two large window with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: He was really dramatic, too, and I was like, I want to go there.

[Video: Longer view of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of two large windows with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: I got to the law school, and it was evident from the beginning that we're creating global leaders and we want you to be one, too.

[Words appear: Mahja was awarded a Milton Stewart Fellowship, which supports legal internship opportunities around the globe.]

[Video: Longer view of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of two large windows with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: In one summer, I spent at least a month

[Video: Close-up of Mahja sitting at a conference table with an open book on the table near her and partial view of two people sitting on either side]

Mahja Zeon: working for the Constitutional Reform Committee in Liberia,

[Video: Longer view of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of two large windows with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: and then IU, with the fellowship, flew me to India. I stayed there and worked in India with two great law firms, learning about culture and diversity and property law of India and how the government works there, and that was all through IU. And then when I came back, my second and my third year, it was the same thing, how can you make a global impact? How can you make sure that you are a leader in the world?

[Video: Close-up headshot of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of a large window with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: And that's what they encouraged me to do all the time,

[Video: Mahja Zeon sitting at a conference room table with seven other people.]

Mahja Zeon: and then they sent me back to Liberia to actually work on a new draft of the Liberian constitution.

[Words appear: Mahja now works in the Marion County Prosecutor's Office in Indianapolis, prosecuting juvenile sex crimes and data violence cases.]

[Video: Longer view of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of two large windows with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: When I got the position, I was like, why? Why am I in this position? And then I thought about the war and what I went through and the things that I saw, and the fact that women, especially girl children, were raped and sexually assaulted and harassed in refugee camps. And they still are going through those turmoils right now as we speak. Who's going to speak up for them? And so, future aspirations? I don't know. I hope that one day I can be a prosecutor for the International Criminal Court.

[Video: Close-up headshot of Mahja Zeon sitting in front of a large window with muted view of a walled garden and a partial view of the one-story brick home next door on the other side of the wall in the background.]

Mahja Zeon: But, wherever God lands me, I know it's going to be because I went to IU Maurer School of Law.

[Video: IU logo and FOR All: The Indiana University Bicentennial Campaign logo appear]

[Music ends]

[End of transcript]