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PRESS RELEASE
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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION DISTRIBUTES BOOKS TO SCHOOL GOING CHILDREN

The Parliamentary Committee on Education has returned from a two weeks post-ebola inspection tour of selected schools in the North, South and Eastern Regions, funded by UNICEF. The Committee, chaired by the Deputy Majority Leader, Hon. Leonard Fofanah, inspected book stores, uncovering cartoons of undistributed books which were later distributed to Classes 4, 5, 6 and JSS 1. These teaching and learning materials were found by MPs in the Kailahun District Education Primary School, Tonkolili District Girls Primary School, and Kabala Secondary School respectively.

The Committee also visited Government and assisted schools that were selected by the District Directors of Education in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). The Committee in the same vein had discussions with the authorities at the Njala University, UNIMAK, Eastern and Northern Polytechnics in the country.

The Chairman, said the purpose of the oversight was to determine the observation and implementation of the ebola prevention protocols; the utilization of school fee subsidies; the effects of ebola on the education of especially the girl-child; the use of water and sanitation facilities in schools; and to see whether the District Education Offices have the capacity to implement the policies and programmes of MEST.

The administration of UNIMAK eulogized the Parliament of Sierra Leone for amending the Legal Practitioners' Act, thereby allowing and giving greater leverage to others who had read and studied law in other institutions to practice, other than the University of Sierra Leone and other Commonwealth countries. They made reference to their recent success relating to the outcome of the Law School's Results where one of their students came first. They furthered that had it not been for Parliament, such a dream would not have come into fruition, and appealed for the Government Grants to be extended to them.

However, the authorities in both Eastern and Northern Polytechnics informed the Committee that they had already issued 21-days strike notice to the Tertiary Education Commission if their harmonized conditions of service are not approved.

The Committee was highly impressed with the adherence to the ebola prevention protocols such as regular hand-washing and temperature screening since the re-opening of schools. It also learnt that there is a surge in the enrollment of girls in certain schools as opposed to boys, after ebola. However, the Committee expressed concerns on overcrowding, and the urgent need to construct more buildings, and improve on water and sanitation facilities in schools.

The District Directors of Education told the Committee that thousands of teachers were trained to promote and implement the ebola prevention protocols in schools; and discussed the distribution of teaching and learning materials via NEC; noting that their offices have inadequate staff and logistics to implement the policies of MEST. They also observed that some of the teachers and schools are yet to be approved; that the school feeding programme is yet to

commence; and that the school fee subsidies for last year were paid directly into the various accounts of schools, as opposed to the days when they were paid into the accounts of the District Councils. They notified the Committee that over 1000 accelerated learning centres have been created for over 3000 pregnant-girls and lactating mothers in the three regions after the normal school hours on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. This, they described as “catch-up” learning in readiness to go back to the formal and regular school system.

The Committee has also instructed the District Director of Education and the Paramount Chief Bai Farma Yek of Kambia District; to shut down the JSS 1 Class of the RAS BONGO TETEH INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY; an unapproved pre-school that has not yet attained a primary school status; and inundated with unqualified teachers.