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MINISTER OF TRANSPORT BRIEFS PARLIAMENT ON THE PROCUREMENT OF 100 BUSES

The Minister of Transport and Aviation (MTA), Mr. Balogun Koroma has briefed the Parliament of Sierra Leone on the 22nd July, on the transactions and purchasing of the One Hundred Buses by the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) to reduce the acute transportation shortage in the country. This happened because the Minister was summoned by Parliament through a motion that was moved by the Deputy Minority Leader, and seconded by the Majority Leader of the House, Hon. Ansumana Kaikai and Hon. Ibrahim Bundu respectively. This briefing in Parliament was streamed live by SLBC.

The Minister in his briefing said that because of the long queues for transportation and the suffering of the masses, President Koroma asked him to explore ways and to ameliorate the suffering of the people for transportation. He said among other things that he approached MoFED to provide funding to purchase new buses, but to no avail; sought external funding, and got Poly Technologies Group of China to offer a loan of \$12 Million to procure the One Hundred Buses for the people of Sierra Leone. He said that the 100 Buses were procured on a customized basis, noting the FBC terrain, designed and manufactured according to those specifications.

He made reference to what he describe as a fake letter in circulation, with the view of misleading the masses on the procurement of the 100 Buses. He furthered that procurement procedures were duly followed, with approval from NPPA, MoFED, and the Attorney General and Minister of Justice on sole sourcing. The loan was given by Chinese Company and the buses bought in China as a result of the conditions of the loan agreement. The \$12 Million he said, is an investment that will pay for itself over a period of 3-4 years, with a Project Steering Committee to ensure repayment on a special account to keep funds that will be accrued from the services of the buses. He also said that the procurement committee is headed by the Permanent Secretary of which the Minister is not a member. He spoke on advance payment guarantee, and one year warranty of the buses amongst others. He also said that the 20, 30, and 47 seater buses were brand new, and manufactured in 2014 and 2015 for tropical areas like Sierra Leone as required. He said that there was no shortfall of \$1.5 Million as rumored, whilst making reference to 6% interest advantage as opposed to 26% interest on the loan that was taken from Eco-Bank to procure 40 Buses. This is the first time the APC Government has purchased 100 New Buses for the people of Sierra Leone, he declared, remarking that "the people now have a choice, and that the long queues have disappeared".

The MPs on the opposition bench questioned the Minister on an array of issues, especially constitutional provisions for parliamentary approval for any loan agreement and subsequent implementation. Whether it is economically prudent to buy the buses from the loaner; timeline of the contract and the unit cost of the package; special designed buses for FBC; sole sourcing; if the buses are fit for purpose; advancement payment guarantee and the distribution of the buses; interim measure in case of breakdown amongst others, were issues raised.

In response,, the Minister said that the agreement is on its way to Parliament for ratification by MoFED. He attributed the delay to the ebola outbreak in the country, which Cabinet is currently pre-occupied with. He said that the buses are economically prudent because the investment would repay itself. He said that 40 buses were procured without any investment plan with 26% interest rate, but that the 100 Buses attracted only 6% interest. He also said that the debt management unit at MoFED is responsible for negotiation and repayment of the loan, and that they have created a special account for that purpose. He also said that his Ministry did not play

any role in the negotiation of the loan. He referenced a delegation headed by MoFED to China including him and his Permanent Secretary, Public Debt Management amongst others. He said that the loan should be repaid in two years according to technocrats. The bus that was unable to climb Savage Street was a result of manufacturer's fault. He also said that they got clearance from NPPA for sole sourcing which did not require competitive bidding. He said that the buses are fit for the purpose, and assured MPs that 12-months from now, the buses would still be running in the country, and also said that the buses would be distributed nationally.

The Minority Leader, Hon. Dr. Bernadette described the situation as democracy at work, where the actions of the GoSL are being questioned by the people. This she said is good for our political space and the democratization process in the country. She furthered that the MTA was summoned to Parliament by necessary provisions in the 1991 Constitution and the Standing Orders of Parliament to brief the House on the conduct of the loan relating to the 100 Buses. Speaking on queues at FBC and other places, she informed the House that MPs are accountable to the people during elections to renew their mandate, and that Ministers are only appointed when Parliament has been reconstituted after elections. She also said that it is economically cheaper to use GoSL buses now and in future to the provinces than your private vehicle. She also said that be it APC or SLPP, to address transportation is a continuous process. She therefore thanked the MTA for the buses and called for more, whilst noting the economic cost of transportation on pupils, students, workers, and farmers amongst others. She said that the MTA was before Parliament because of procedures and thereby enhancing the oversight work of the House. She blamed MoFED for bringing late to Parliament loans, grants, and agreements for ratification, and advised that Parliament be involved at the conceptual stage of the negotiations, and that MoFED be summoned to Parliament to offer explanation on such act. She ended by saying that the House be furnished with information on travelling to negotiate the loan, and the executive orders that were issued on the loan, whilst noting that fees on the buses were not charged on a partisan basis.

The Majority Leader, Hon. Ibrahim Bundu also made reference to obligatory constitutional provisions that warranted Parliament to do her work. This he said has nothing to do with the work of the ACC which was created by an Act of Parliament to combat graft for the development of the country. He also referenced the oath of MPs as contained in the Third Schedule of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, and observed that Parliament if failed to act, it would face the wrath of the electorate. He also underscored the functions of MPs, noting representation and proper conduct in and out of the House. He restated that Parliament is not doing the work of the ACC, but rather performing her constitutional obligations. He said that the GoSL is trying to rebuild the damage structures in the country, whilst noting the traffic lights that were in existence before the war. He said that the good roads are also part of the package, and alluded to one Munda who praised GoSL and snapped with one of the new buses in Blama. He also said that both Chairmen for Transport and Finance Committees in Parliament should go to work as observed by the Minority Leader. He urged Sierra Leoneans not to complain, but to rather compete and face challenges. He also said that circumstances and expediency alter cases, and noted that Parliament did not ratify any agreement for the Libyan Buses, whilst assuring the House that the loan relating to the purchase of the 100 Buses would be brought to Parliament for ratification. He called on MPs to educate the masses or be prepared to face their wrath at the polls.

The presiding Speaker, Hon. Chernor R.M Bah then advised the House and committed the motion to the Committees on Finance and Transport in Parliament for consideration; he adjourned Parliament "sine die".

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