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## PRESS RELEASE

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### PAC RETURNS FROM ACCOUNTABILITY CONFERENCE

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) chaired by the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Chernor R.M Bah has returned from its accountability conference organized for school and chiefdom authorities in the North, East, and Southern Regions of the country.

According to the Chairman of PAC, this is the pilot phase of the accountability conference bordering on transparency in the generation and prudent use of public funds by school and chiefdom authorities. This he said was coordinated by current Paramount Chief Members of Parliament for Bombali, Kenema, and Bo Districts, with a sample of ten (10) chiefdoms per District. Unlike the school authorities, he furthered, this is the first time the PAC is interfacing with chiefdom authorities who had for quite a long time not been accounting for fines, mining royalties, and other sources of revenue for the development of each of the 149 chiefdoms in Sierra Leone. He assured the participants of a friendly dialogue to enhance fruitful deliberations on some of the queries that had been raised by Audit Service Sierra Leone (ASSL) on the use of public funds by MDAs over the years.

At the conference, Hon. Komba Kodoeyoma, the Deputy Chairman of PAC, encouraged participants to open and maintain accountable documents such as receipt books; pro-forma invoices; payment vouchers; deposit books; cash analysis books; bank statements; financial statements; reconciliation statements; cheque books; fixed asset registers; and other documentary evidence of payments. He also called on school authorities to recruit and pay qualified accountants to serve as Bursars for accountable and responsible management of the finances of the schools. He furthered that the concerns raised on teachers' recruitment and conditions of service would be addressed by the Teaching Service Commission. He also encouraged school authorities to device innovative ways and means of

addressing school fees arrears without affecting the education of the pupils and students.

Hon. Helen Kuyembah succeeded in educating the school and chiefdom authorities about the laid down procurement rules and regulations in the country, noting competitive bidding; advertisement; quotations; quality output with registered vendors who pay Goods and Services Tax (GST) and withholding tax as long as the amount involved is more than Le 500,000.00.

Hon. Hassan Sheriff, who doubles as Chairman for the Finance Committee in Parliament said that unlike local court Chairmen and Clerks, Paramount Chiefs and the Chiefdom Police are now receiving salaries from the Government of Sierra Leone. He encouraged Court Clerks and Chairmen to exercise patience as the Chief Justice would soon start to pay salaries to those who will successfully go through the recruitment process. He called on them to be transparent and accountable by opening cash books and bank accounts to record all transactions. He further opined that institutions of Chieftaincy have not been transparent and accountable in the country for over a long period. He also told chiefdom authorities to prepare and submit their budgets to the District Councils for development.

Hon. Sulaiman Mulku Sisay reminded school authorities about provisions in the Education Act of 2004 relating to the composition of the Boards, whilst saying that proprietors are not the owners of the private schools. He also said that the Principals should be allowed to run the schools freely as they are the ones accountable to the Government.

Representatives of the Auditor General in the three regions told participants that these issues discussed are responsible for the development of the country, and that classes A, B, and C chiefdoms will be audited from time to time to enhance national development. They also explained about the audit process spanning from the engagement letter, the audit, the management response, the exit conference, quality control and the report writing before tabling in Parliament for the attention and action of the PAC. The Auditors emphasized that Sierra Leone will not develop until the taxes are collected and used prudently to achieve the intended purpose.

The Paramount Chiefs of the three Districts acknowledged that they had not been accountable for a long time, and encouraged their staff to build their capacity for the task ahead or risk losing their jobs. They also called on

them to implement what they had learnt during the conference, and pass the message to those who were not present.

Some of the questions and answers were hinged on teacher recruitment, retention and conditions of service, arrears, rotational teachers, act/policy which takes precedence over the other, salaries for court chairmen and clerks, withholding taxes and qualified vendors, capacity building and an enabling working environment for chieftdom authorities, illiterate court chairmen and clerks, printing of tax receipts, tax disclosure, rebate and evidence of work with tax funds among others.