



OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENT BUILDING
OAU DRIVE, TOWER HILL
FREETOWN
Tel: 232-076-615187
E-mail: admin@parliament.gov.sl



PRESS RELEASE
14th July, 2015

PARLIAMENT DEBATES PAC'S REPORT ON THE MANAGEMENT OF EBOLA FUNDS

The Parliament of Sierra Leone, has on the 14th July, 2015 commenced and concluded debate on the report of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), on the Auditor General's report on the management of the ebola funds, May-October, 2014 which was laid on the Table of the House on Thursday, 4th June, 2015. The motion for the debate was moved and seconded by the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the PAC, Hon. Chernor R. M. Bah and Hon. Komba E. Koedoyoma respectively. After a protracted debate on the motion, it was carried by a collection of voices, with some dissenting ones.

In opening the debate on the PAC's report on the management of the ebola funds, Hon. Chernor R. M. Bah said that he was happy to see the excitement among MPs to engage in the debate, noting that he would respond to some of the issues that would be raised during the summation of the debate. Later in rounding the debate, Hon. Chernor R. M. Bah said that the work of PAC is a specialized one that could not be discussed ordinarily. He said that he had gained considerable trainings and experience with CPA, WAPAC, and other credible audit institutions in the world. He also said that the report acknowledged systemic failures, and referred to those who described the report's recommendations as "harsh" as expressing subjective opinions. He explained about the functions of the PAC as provided for in the rules of procedure of Parliament to conduct hearings on auditees based on queries raised by the Auditor General. He said that Ministers are not vote controllers, and that all audit exercises are transactional for the edification of others. He furthered that the Ministry of Transport and Aviation was not included in the report because it was centered on the Ministry of Health and Sanitation exclusively. He also said that irrespective of the nature of the loan which Mr. Charles Mambu took, the bottom line is that he is yet to repay the said loan in the AG's report. He also stated that the EOC was co-chaired by the then Minister of MOHS, WHO, and Professor Monty Jones at State House. He also said that the Case Management Team would indicate what they wanted, which was procured by the procurement office. He further said that the PAC has recommended that other competent bodies may look into the issues raised in the AG's report on the management of the ebola funds and take necessary actions. He restated that the PAC conducts its hearings based on the evidence adduced and makes appropriate recommendations, whilst noting that Parliament is guided by practices and conventions, noting the need for information sharing with MPs on the work of the PAC, cognizant of the 1991 Constitution and the Standing Orders of Parliament. He thanked the Leadership and the administration of Parliament for supporting the work of the PAC, and called on SLBC to relay the debate in its entirety for the judgment of the general public, whilst calling for the adoption of the PAC's report on the management of the ebola funds.

Hon. Sualiho M. Koroma who initiated the debate said that the country is currently under a State of Emergency because of ebola which was declared and ratified last year.

He noted that President Ernest Bai Koroma had called on all sectors to do all in their power to fight the phenomenal ebola warfare. He said that H.E being the Commander-in-Chief supported MPs with Le 62.9 Million to sensitize constituents to fight ebola. He thanked the people of Sierra Leone for their resilience in fighting ebola, noting that the figures have reduced considerably. He referenced the President of Liberia who thanked all those who supported the fight against ebola, and gave them 90 days grace period to clean their books. He also said that civil servants were under extreme pressure during the emergency to manage the ebola funds prudently. He described the recommendations contained in the PAC's report as "harsh" with the potential for putting the nation and civil servants at "risk", whilst calling in the PAC to take a second look at its recommendations. He also noted systemic failures on the management of the ebola funds. He also said that three officials from MOHS were to be punished, leaving State House and WHO who were also signatories and involved in the payment of hazard incentives and procurement. He also said there was political interference, as civil servants were receiving direct instructions from their political superiors to be carried out regardless of systems and processes. He also said that fraud and misappropriation were not directly found in the report, and called on MPs not to sit by and allow civil servants who have worked and sacrificed in this extreme emergency to be punished. He also spoke on the procurement anomalies of 30 used buses in different condations, the construction of 100 bed rooms at Kerry Town, and the purchase of some ambulances for which 50% payment had been made before involving the procurement committee, which was put aside for an ad hoc procurement committee.

For Hon. Alhaji Seray Dumbuya, the debate marks a good day for the growth and promotion of parliamentary democracy. He said that those named in the report bear the greatest responsibility to exonerate themselves. He also said that President Koroma has promised transparency and accountability in the management of the ebola funds, noting his last address to Parliament where he said that those who want to make wealth out of the ebola funds corruptly would be named and punished; whilst saying that the recommendations contained in the PAC's report should be upheld.

Hon. Umar Paran Tarawally thanked the PAC for preparing such a report on the management of the ebola funds. He said that for any report to be acclaimed as credible, it must be accurate, precise and logical, have the, wherein the findings should be part of the general observations. He also affirmed high level of political interference and duress for certain transactions relating to the management of the ebola funds. He said that professionals evaded established procedures because of superior orders. He said that it is clear in his mind that the permanent secretary (PS) and the Finance Director are professionals who know their meets and bounds. He also said that the established procurement committee was put aside for an ad hoc, one which made the established one redundant. He argued that the procurement officer (PO) should not be punished because "a" beats 'b' in the absence of 'c', therefore 'c' should not be punished". He referenced President Koroma's address where he said that such persons will be punished and not some persons, whilst making a case of selective justice. He also spoke on how procurement procedures were flouted to purchase the 30 used vehicles, and referred to the loan taken by Mr. Charles Mambu who he said had done so much to fight against the ebola virus in the country.

In his submission, Hon. Alhassan Kamara, hailed the Public Accounts Committee for a job well done, and noted that the Committee was able to recover over one billion Leones from withholding taxes from contractors. Hon. Kamara also supported the recommendations of the PAC, calling for tougher laws against corrupt officials.

In his contribution, Hon. Foday Rado Yokie, applauded the Members of the PAC for presenting a well defined report to Parliament, wherein he acknowledged that since 2007, in his estimation this is the first report of the PAC that has ever been debated. He welcomed the PAC's recommendations, but said that the "net should be widened to catch more fish".

In her contribution, Hon. Isata Kabia also commended the work of the Public Accounts Committee which she described as "a good work done". She stressed the need for Parliament to work as a team in dealing with matters of importance, and praised the PAC report for bringing out the systemic failures of the activities of MDAs in the country. Hon. Kabia also supported the view that corrupt officials should be brought to book.

Hon. Frank Kposowa welcomed the interventions made by the Public Accounts Committee in probing into the activities of the Auditor General's Report on the management of the ebola funds, and observed that the recommendations of the PAC were not enough and urged that other officials be included and also punished.

Hon. Hassan B. Sheriff in his contribution supported all the recommendations of the PAC, and expressed disappointment over the way and manner in which certain MPs have opposed its recommendations. He informed the House that the officials named in the Auditor General's report were directly involved in the management of the ebola funds.

The Acting Minority Leader, Hon. Ansumana J. Kaikai, thanked the PAC for doing a good job. He also said that the misuse of public funds and property are prevalent in the country. He said that if the procurement system had not been put aside, all would have worked very well in terms of value for money. He furthered that in as much as the PAC had done a good job, its recommendations should be adopted with some amendments. He cautioned that they should be guided by the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone and the Standing Orders of the House, noting Section 93 subsections 3 & 6 relating to their functions and powers in Parliament.

The Majority Leader, Hon. Ibrahim R. Bundu in his reaction to the debate, blamed SLBC for not covering it live, and predicated his contribution on the premise that as a nation we do not celebrate the things that bring us together, but rather we celebrate the things that divide us as a people; whilst referencing the heated public discourse that ensued when the AG's report on the management of the ebola funds was tabled in Parliament. He noted that the Special Court of Sierra Leone was created for those who bore the greatest responsibility during the war, whilst giving justification for the probing of vote controllers. He made reference to the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone and the Standing Orders of Parliament, saying that the PAC has the mandate to examine the AG's reports and make appropriate follow-ups and recommendations, whilst defeating the idea of Parliament doing the work of the ACC. He also said that the recommendations of the PAC do not bar other institutions from initiating proceedings against defaulters. He furthered that the PAC has recommended, but has not taken a decision ; a matter that is left for the public to decide. He said that Parliament is supreme among the three arms of government, whilst calling on the House to endorse the recommendations contained in the PAC's report on the management of the ebola funds.