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PRESS RELEASE

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PARLIAMENT INTERFACES WITH MINISTRY, DEPARTMENTS & AGENCIES

The Parliamentary Committee on Information and Communications, chaired by Hon. Benneh Bangura has embarked on oversight visits to the Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) and its departments and agencies to understand their successes and challenges; and to chart the way forward.

In his opening remarks the Chairman said that the purpose of the oversight was to fulfill constitutional obligations contained in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone to oversee, inquire, and investigate the activities of Ministries, Departments and Agencies as assigned; and proffer solutions and recommendations in respect of the issues discussed which have the potentials to result in legislation. He also spoke about the bi-partisan nature of Committees in Parliament; and praised MIC for being a major revenue generating Ministry that is cooperative and friendly with Parliament. He said among other things that there are challenges in departments and agencies like ABC Secretariat, SLBC, Government Printing and the Post Office. He thanked the Minister of Information and Communications for his intervention that resulted in the payment of salaries for staff at SLBC; whilst the Chairman informed the meeting of his efforts in securing Le 300 Million from other sources to settle salaries for staff at the Post Office. He ended by underscoring the roles of MPs in terms of legislation, oversight, and representation; and said that the report of the visit would be tabled in Parliament.

In his response, the Minister Hon. Alpha Khan, described the meeting as a “watershed day” which they have been looking forward to. He said, that MIC had been conceptually misunderstood, whilst noting the importance of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as a tool for growth and development. He said that most people see the Ministry as a consumptive one just to convey information; but confidently informed Members that MIC and its agencies, contribute more than 30% of the country’s revenue that is being generated by NRA. For the 2015 budget, he said they asked for Le 8 (Eight) Billion, but only received Le 800 Million. With regards to Post Office and SLBC, he said that plans are underway to use non-traditional methods like new media to run the Post Office which has outstanding issues with depositors’ funds; and said SLBC was created as an independent broadcaster not to over-burden government; but to be innovative and properly run. “Sierra Leone is doing better

than other countries in the sub-region including Ivory Coast in respect of the fibre optic"; he said whilst highlighting the advantage of owning the internet bandwidth which private service providers get for \$88 and charge \$1000; and that MIC is strategizing to change the existing situation.

The two separate meetings at MIC and SLBC discussed a range of issues relating to re-branding the image of ABC's Secretariat and budgetary allocations; security against cyber theft in respect of SALCAB; 2010 ICT Policy; controls over internet service providers; presentation on the status of the fibre optic; how fibre might be affected in case of expanding the dual carriageway to four lane; SLBC's assets and to possibly add new ones; to pay attention to their transmission pole at Kissy to improve the signal in Wellington; the digitization of SLBC and recovery of its funds owed by MDAs; and SLBC being run on self-generated income; news ranking and the timing of the teaching programmes on radio and TV since the re-opening of schools.

The Committee praised SLBC for positively and sustainably educating the people of Sierra Leone about the outbreak of the ebola virus disease in the country; and commended its broadcast teaching and learning programmes facilitated by MEST when school children were out of schools.

The Committee continues its engagement of other departments and agencies in Freetown.