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PRESS RELEASE

PAC COMMENCES PUBLIC HEARING ON COVID-19 AUDIT

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC), chaired by the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas has commenced public hearings on the COVID-19 Audit carried out by Audit Service Sierra Leone.

Whilst addressing auditees and invitees to its public hearings on the COVID-19 Audit, he commended the attendance of Auditor General and ACC Commissioner in person. Referring to public bashings that Parliament is complacent in handling Reports from the Auditor General, Hon. Thomas said that Parliament could not prosecute; the very reason for creating the ACC, a specialized body to investigate and prosecute corrupt practices. Therefore, Parliament is working with the ACC to curb the malaise of corruption in Sierra Leone.

In similar vein, Parliament had established Audit Service Sierra Leone to look into the accounts of Sierra Leone to ensure probity during the course of expending public funds in light of adhering to laws guiding public financial management.

He also said that citizens have inalienable rights and that they are presumed innocent until proven otherwise. The reason why auditees have been summoned to provide explanations in the presence of the Auditor General and the ACC Commissioner before orders are issued by the PAC in respect of audit queries. He also warned against volunteerism.

He also said actions taken by ACC in respect of the audit would not preclude Parliament from recommending further sanctions like prosecution, dismissal or suspension without salaries. Following today's deliberations, he said the Government has been making frantic efforts to fight corruption and that the Government has not been found wanting for corruption; save for individual conduct in respect of following procurement procedures and overpricing by vendors regarding the purchasing costs for vehicles and motorbikes.

On the issue of legality, the representative from the Office of the Attorney-General and Ministry of Justice said she could not comment because she had no idea about the issues raised therein. For the query relating to the absence of a Response Plan, NACOVERC responded that they had a National Preparedness Plan and that expenditures were approved by the Presidential Taskforce. It was finally settled that given the Le 3 Billion query on value for money, it took NACOVERC a long time to put a Response Plan together and it is now available to combat the impacts of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone.

Questioning the costs of 30 vehicles and 100 motorbikes, the Auditors observed that based on research, a vehicle could have been bought for a little over Le 300 million instead of over Le 400 million; and Le 12 million instead Le 21 million per motorbike, citing value for money. Arguing that the vehicles were brand new based on receipt by NACOVERC from Ministry of Transport and Aviation, the Auditors insisted that two of the vehicles were old given 12,000 and 50,000 kilometers of usage.

Following the Auditors insistence that two of the vehicles were old, the PAC has ordered that the vehicles in question be brought to Parliament next Tuesday for an independent expert opinion to ascertain the fact of new or old before a decision is reached by the Committee for consideration in Plenary.

The Chief Executive of NPPA, Brima Swarray said on oath that the vehicles were purchased within the price norm.

Speaking on profiteering, the PAC observed that Sierra Leone is less litigious because people do not go to court for profiteering.

For the query relating to MOHS for unsubstantiated purchase of items including iPad, it was revealed that the transaction was authorized by the Permanent Secretary and that the sum total had been refunded due to directives by the ACC.

The ACC Commissioner had intimated the Committee that investigation into the issue surrounding old or new vehicles is at an advanced stage; and he and his Team were commended by the PAC and that they are in vogue in the fight against corruption; save for making reference to the substance of Audit Reports.

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