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Press Statement

The All People's Congress is disturbed by a letter issued by the Attorney General and Minister of Justice and addressed to the Auditor General, the contents therein stating outright refusal to allow the audit of CoVID-19 funds expended by government since the beginning of our country's response to the pandemic. We view the reason advanced for such refusal, viz the existence of a State of Public Emergency that conferred on the President extraordinary powers as Chairman of the National COVID-19 Emergency Response Centre (NaCOVERC) to do whatever he deems expedient to prevent or control the pandemic as an uncanny pretext to veil corruption.

To start with, no law insulates the President or government officials from financial audits of their activities as public officials even if such activities were carried out in calamitous circumstances. The purport of a State of Emergency and the special powers conferred on the President is to enable the seamless performance of specific processes without the usual bureaucracies that occasion them. It is not a blank cheque for non-accountability. We are minded to lay this distinction bare to further highlight travesties that have characterized the operations of this government since its inception in 2018. Moreover, Sierra Leone has over the years since the end of the war acquired the reputation of operating



sound state institutions that have great democratic compass. Such a blatant resistance to financial audit is therefore anathema to the good governance credentials that have made us the envy of many nations in the world.

At this point we may wish to oblige this government with an exemplary anecdote of Ernest Bai Koroma's presidency. Under the scourge of a ravaging Ebola pandemic a State of Emergency was invoked that gave President Koroma the same powers conferred on the current President. As Chairman of the National Ebola Response Centre (NERC), the former Head of State, imbued with high sense of duty to his countrymen allowed a real-time audit of funds used to fight the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD). Audit Service Sierra Leone enjoyed absolute independence and had complete freedom to look into every aspect of Ebola financing. Their findings were held sacrosanct by government and in record time parliament acted on the contents of the report. President Koroma further expressed his support for the probe and reminded all of his earlier warning to public officials.

Interestingly, despite such demonstration of financial propriety by Ernest Koroma, the 2012 Presidential candidate of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) Rtd. Brigadier Maada Bio, now the incumbent President, felt the urge to write an open letter to him requesting further audit on the management of Ebola funds. Ironically SLPP supporters took the umbrage to stage protests at home and abroad in a bid to begrudge President Koroma's efforts in ensuring transparency and accountability in public service. It therefore eludes reasoning that President Julius Maada Bio and his SLPP government should now have the audacity to publicly dismiss an audit into funds used and entrusted to them for the good of all Sierra Leoneans.

We need not over-state that in the abundance of legislations that provide for accountability of public servants, there is none to the contrary that precludes any official or MDA, including one Chaired by the President from accounting for



Funds entrusted to them. The Public Financial Management ACT, 2016; Public Procurement Act, 2016; Fiscal Management and Control Act, 2017 et al which provide for special circumstances for procurement or fiscal administration do not expressly or implicitly denounce auditing of public funds. Furthermore, there is no regulation before the parliament endorsing the Attorney General's flagrant refusal of audit of COVID-19 funds.

Conclusively, the Attorney General's letter is only an action replay of this Government's blatant attempt to table before Parliament an Instrument providing for non-accountable imprest of President Bio's numerous travels and, from the onset, the futile push to introduce a regulation that expressly kicks against accountability of COVID-19 funds. Therefore there is a pattern of abuse of due process that is glaringly obvious to even the most inattentive Sierra Leonean.

Once again, by this Press Statement we hope democratic institutions of the state, non-state actors, members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corp, our development partners, the international community and Sierra Leoneans at home and abroad are alive to yet another sad rejoinder to the spate of financial impropriety, abuse of due processes and the speedy erosion of the country's democratic credentials since President Maada Bio assumed power in 2018. In denouncing a President and Government that have shown visible signs of not respecting the people they govern, we the All Peoples Congress will remain steadfast in our fight against corruption.

Signed:  

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Amb Dr Alhaji Osman Foday Yansaneh
National Secretary General - APC.

