



GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE
Ministry of Finance

PRESS RELEASE

COMMITMENT TO GOOD FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE

In view of recent social and print media allegations of illegal disbursements to the Office of the First Lady and the Office of the Chief Minister of the presidency of Government, the Ministry of Finance wishes to make the following clarifications:

1. Public Disbursements to the Office of First Lady

This is not the first time resources have been disbursed from the Consolidated Revenue Fund to the Office of the First Lady, through the Office of the Secretary to the President. All allocations of resources from the Consolidated Revenue Fund to the Office of the First Lady are normally used for office set-up, foreign travel, and sensitisation campaigns (for example, the *Hands Off Our Girls* campaign by the current First Lady, and the *National Girls Camp Programme* of the previous First Lady).

1a. Why an Account was Set Up

An account was opened for the Office of the First Lady at the Bank of Sierra Leone to strengthen transparency and accountability in the use of public funds. The objective is to ensure full disclosure of all transfer of resources to the Office of the First Lady (through the Office of the Secretary to the President).

The opening of the account was authorised by the Ministry of Finance through the Accountant General's Department, to facilitate the tracking of expenditure and for audit assessments. This is the normal practice for the opening of all bank accounts by the Accountant General's Department. Details of bank accounts are usually provided to the Auditor General to facilitate audit exercises.

With the opening of the bank account, the Office of the First Lady has been the subject of annual audits by the Auditor General. For instance, the audit of the account of the Office of the First Lady for FY2019 was reported in Section 5.50.3 of the 2019 Auditor General's Report (Ref.: 2019 Auditor General's Report: "*Cashbook not Maintained by the Office of the First Lady for 2018 & 2019*", page 434)".

1b. Authority of the Ministry of Finance to Release Funds from the Consolidated Revenue Fund

Given the prevalence of sexual violence against girls and women, His Excellency, the President, declared a Public State of Emergency against rape and sexual and gender based violence in 2019. That public pronouncement was duly ratified by the Parliament of Sierra Leone in 2019.

With the ratification by the Parliament of Sierra Leone, His Excellency the President directed that nationwide programmes and activities be designed and implemented to strengthen advocacy, and increase public sensitisation on sexual and gender based violence against women and girls. The initiative was led by the Office of the First Lady. The funds for the implementation of the programmes were accessed through the Office of the Secretary to the President, after seeking approval from the Minister of Finance, as authorised by Section 39 of the Public Financial Management Act 2016, which provides as follows:

39. (1) The State budget may include an unallocated head of expenditures to set aside the Consolidated Fund to meet an unspecified need or purpose: Provided that the amount of the unallocated head of expenditures may not exceed one per cent of the non-EIR presented in the main Estimates of the financial year.

39. (2) The Minister may, on his initiative or the request of the head of a budgetary agency, issue a warrant authorizing expenditures to be charged against the unallocated head of expenditures mentioned in subsection (1), when the expenditures are necessary for public interest.

39. (3) A request under subsection (2) shall be made in such form and manner as may be specified by the Minister.

The total amount disbursed to the Office of the First Lady was within the statutory limit provided under the law and was therefore a legitimate expenditure incurred for the purpose of enforcing and implementing programmes solely for public good (i.e. sexual and gender based violence against women and girls) as directed by the President and authorised by Parliament of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

2. Office of the Honourable Chief Minister

The Office of the Chief Minister is an oversight supervisory Ministry responsible for monitoring the operational performance of all Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDA). The Ministry comprises Directorates, Divisions and Sub-units, including: the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI), Office of Presidential Infrastructure Initiatives (OPII), Directorate of Performance Management & Service Delivery (DPMSD), and Directorate of Human Capital Development (HCD). It is therefore important to clarify that the Office of the Chief Minister is **not** a single unit as claimed in social media publication.

2a. Legitimacy of the Expenditure

All funds allocated to the Office of the Chief Minister have gone through the Ministry of Finance's normal budgetary scrutiny processes and ratified by Parliament in the Appropriation

Act for the year to which it relates. All funds were allocated to the respective Directorates, Divisions and Sub-units under the Office of the Chief Minister.

The allocations and expenditures under the Office of the Chief Minister are executed based on policies and procedures clearly established by the Public Financial Management Act (2016) and its attendant Regulations, credibly accounted for, and verified through the normal internal and external audit undertaken by the Auditor General. In addition, all procurement activities undertaken by the Office of the Chief Minister were implemented in accordance with the Public Procurement Act (2016) and attendant Regulations (2020). This was repeatedly confirmed on different platforms by the Chief Executive Officer of the National Public Procurement Authority (NPPA) which is the competent authority on procurement issues.

3. Conclusion

His Excellency, the President remains fully committed to the fight against corruption. The Anti-Corruption Commission continues to work independently. The ACC has strengthened inter-agency cooperation at the local and national level to prevent, detect, and punish all corrupt practices in Sierra Leone. The work of Audit Service Sierra Leone remains independent and Government is actively working on implementing the recommendations in the annual audit reports.

Moreover, Government has also streamlined public expenditure and revenue mobilization procedures through the implementation of more transparent and auditable processes. Government also remains committed to providing access to requests for information by journalists and civil society organisations that wish to undertake investigations on the use of public funds.

Nevertheless, willfully mislabeling, misinterpreting legitimate and fully audited disbursements, as “financial crimes” and “corruption”, is questionable. This could be implied as an attempt to incite public mistrust, anger, and possible unrest in the country. This could also be perceived as an attempt to divert public attention from the tremendous gains Sierra Leone has made in its fight against corruption, which has been fully recognized by our development partners.



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