



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
FREETOWN MUNICIPALITY

18th October 2021

Dear Freetonians

As many of you would be aware, I was invited to the Anti-Corruption Commission (“ACC”) for an interview on 14th July 2021 and again on 9th September 2021. I attended these interviews and cooperated fully with the investigating officers. I have recently been contacted by the ACC requesting yet another interview. In the light of my unwavering commitment to integrity, accountability and transparency and being very conscious of my hard earned local and international reputation for upholding these values, I have decided to write this open letter to Freetonians to explain the nature of the ACC investigation.

The Audit Service Sierra Leone Audit Report 2019 raised an audit query “Payment of Overseas Expenses for non-council staff” on page 91. The payments, totalling Le200m (approximately USD 20,000) related to the airfares, hotel costs and per diems of the Mayor’s Delivery Unit Team Lead who travelled with me on six official overseas trips over the course of that year.

The Mayor’s Delivery Unit (“MDU”) Team Lead has worked at the Freetown City Council as a consultant on a full-time basis since 2018 and is paid by the Embassy of Ireland. The Embassy of Ireland provided a letter (which has been shared with the ACC) confirming that consultancy fees paid to the MDU Team Lead do not cover travel costs. It is expected that any official travel costs and expenses to support the work of the Freetown City Council would be paid for by Freetown City Council (“FCC”).

There are a number of additional points that I would like to highlight in respect of the ACC investigation:

- There is absolutely no dispute or disagreement that the travel costs of the MDU Team Lead were paid for by FCC. The payments were approved after seeking the professional advice of the Chief Administrator and as with all payments made by FCC, on each occasion the payments were signed by the Chief Administrator, the Finance Officer and myself
- The decision to have the MDU Team Lead accompany me to these meetings was because of the international networking, marketing, media engagement and resource mobilisation skills and competencies she possesses, and which were required to support me in these specific meetings
- The MDU Team Lead played an instrumental role in all the meetings she attended; her participation was critical for the pre-meeting preparation, optimisation of my time at those meetings and for post-meeting follow ups that have resulted in significant financing and technical support for advancing the #TransformFreetown Agenda.

Earlier efforts by me to have the FCC Chief Administrator play the role described above were unsuccessful. We travelled to the United Nations General Assembly together in September 2019 and the Chief Administrator was unavailable to attend all the sessions including the meetings in which a relationship was established with the philanthropist who subsequently funded the FCC Early Learning Adventure Centers in the Congo Water and Krootown Road markets. The post meeting follow-up work was delayed but eventually led by the MDU Team Lead (although not present at that meeting), rather than by the Chief Administrator.

A further reinforcement of my decision to travel with the MDU Team Lead was provided by my experience of nominating the Chief Administrator to participate in the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Programme in July 2018. I was selected as one of 40 mayors from around the world to participate in this programme under the mentorship of Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Each mayor was asked to nominate senior staff members who would also participate in the programme starting a month later. The programme structure required participants to spend a week in the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership classroom in New York City followed by a year of participating in monthly virtual classroom sessions. The Chief Administrator attended the New York session but did not log into any of the virtual classroom sessions for the rest of the year. This experience, together with the Chief Administrator's stated aversion to the use of emails, contributed to the decision to have the MDU Team Lead accompany me on key official trips in order to ensure that there would be appropriate follow up.

It is very important to note that my decision to travel with the MDU Team Lead on certain trips did not preclude FCC councilors and staff from travelling to international events. FCC Councilors made 6 overseas trips and FCC staff made 4 overseas trips during 2019.

At the start of my interview with the ACC investigating officer on 14th July 2021, I was informed that the investigation was in respect of a potential "Abuse of Office" and "Mis-use of Public Funds". At the end of the interview the Anti-Corruption Commissioner explained that this was really a procedural matter as it is common practice for MDAs to cover travel expenses for certain categories of non-staff personnel and that this practice is routinely highlighted by Audit Services. The Anti-Corruption Commissioner specifically cited the example of the Ministry of Sports which he said regularly covers the travel expenses of sports journalists that travel with the Minister even though the journalists are not Ministry staff. He went on to say that numerous other examples abound.

I couldn't agree more with the Anti-Corruption Commissioner. Indeed, on page 434 of the Audit Service Sierra Leone Audit Report 2019, there is an audit query number 5.50.2. titled "Daily Subsistence Allowance Paid to Ineligible Individual" which reads "A sample of the payment vouchers were inspected in respect of overseas travelling. It was observed that DSA allowance of \$2,160 was paid to a Mr. Paul Massaquoi as part of the delegation of the Office of the First Lady during a visit to Niamey, Niger to attend the 23rd Oadflad Ordinary General Assembly. We however observed that Paul Massaquoi was neither staff, nor a consultant in the Office of the President or the First Lady. As a result, we have considered this expenditure to be ineligible." It is clear that MDAs covering the expenses of non-staff personnel is a common occurrence.

The Audit Services Sierra Leone query about the MDU Team Lead's travel costs on page 91 states "since this transaction was not budgeted for by the Council and without the appropriate approval, we deemed it as ineligible expense". Our management response to the audit query was that there was an approved travel budget and that FCC did not have a policy that excluded the travel costs of appropriate non-staff personnel from being covered by that budget. At FCC we have since taken steps to further clarify our policies and have instituted a documented procedure to deal with travel by appropriate non-staff personnel.

I think it is important for Freetonians to note that the ongoing investigation into the payment of the MDU Team Lead's travel costs was first brought to my attention in January 2021 and that it has been going on for at least 10 months now. It is my understanding that the MDU Team Lead, the Chief Administrator, the Finance Officer, the Human Resources Officer, the current Head of Protocol, the former Head of Protocol, the former Budget and Finance Chairperson and myself have all been interviewed multiple times. Whilst I would not presume to try to second guess the work of the Anti-Corruption Commissioner, I am at a loss to understand what additional information I can usefully provide on this matter.

Attached is a list of the six meetings and some of the resultant benefits derived from the in-person and post meeting follow-up engagement of the MDU Team Lead. Additionally, I have attached letters from C40 Cities Group and the Global Parliament of Mayors that provide more specific information about the beneficial outcomes of the MDU Team Lead's participation in the related meetings. This clearly establishes Value for Money for the travel payments made for the MDU Team Lead.

I am very aware that the perception of the Mayor of Freetown attending what appears to be endless interviews at the ACC might be a cause for concern for Freetonians. I have therefore written to you today to ensure that you have a full grasp of the issues and so that you are assured that your trust and confidence in my integrity, accountability and transparency is not misplaced.

Humbly in your service



Yvonne Aki-Sawyer OBE
Mayor of Freetown

Attachment 1

Details of the six official overseas trips in respect of which the MDU Team Lead travelled with Mayor Aki-Sawyer and highlights of the benefits derived from the in-person and post-meeting work done by the MDU Team Lead.

Host Organisation	Benefits Derived from the In-Person & Post-Meeting Work done by MDU Team Lead
Women4Climate Meeting, France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of Women4Climate Freetown initiative with 8 mentees who are provided with professional guidance on climate related projects Exposure of Freetown to C40 Cities resulting in an invitation to join that organization later in 2019
C40 Cities World Mayor's Summit, Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My campaign and election as the Vice-Chair of C40 Cities in 2021 and through this Freetown being supported with technical assistance for the development of a Climate Action Plan and exclusive rights to submit proposals to the C40 City Finance Facility Support of my role Co-Chair of the C40-MMC Taskforce on Climate and Migration and funding for 40 tricycles from the Global City Fund
International African American Museum, United States of America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreement to collaborate on the establishment of a satellite of the International African American Museum in Freetown Pursuance of opportunities for funding the rehabilitation of the old FCC building as second phase of City of Zurich collaboration
Bloomberg CityLab, United States of America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for the construction of Wilberforce Market by Bloomberg Philanthropies Selection of Freetown as only African city to virtually host Bloomberg Virtual CityLab 2021 and subsequent participation in the Bloomberg Global Mayor's Challenge
United Cities and Local Governments, South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings held on the margins of this event with the AfDB resulted in an opportunity to source funding through and collaboration with the AfDB in respect of the feasibility studies for the Cable Car system Establishment of a city-to-city collaboration with Mannheim, Germany which has led to a urban planning project Crystallisation of funding for the UNCDF and Swiss Development Corporation Blue Peace Initiative that is now underway to deliver community water solutions
TED Talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very intensive technical support was required pre, at and post the event. The success led to a subsequent Ted Talk on #FreetownTheTree which has resulted in additional funding opportunities for this and related climate action projects