



**Statement Delivered by Josiah F. Joekai, Jr., Director-General of the
Civil Service Agency, at the Regular
Press Briefing of the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism (MICAT)**

Hon. Jerelimick M. Piah, Minister of Information, Cultural Affairs, and Tourism
**Hon. Darlington A. P. Smith, Deputy Director General for Human Resource Management
and Policy of the CSA**
Hon. Dahnu Mianyen., Deputy Director General for Administration of the CSA
Other Esteemed Officials of Government and Special Guests
Our Distinguished Fourth Estate Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Civil Service Agency, I sincerely thank the Ministry of Information Cultural Affairs and Tourism family for graciously allowing us to address the nation from this platform. Minister Jerelimick M. Piah, I assure you of the CSA's unwavering commitment and readiness to forge a partnership with MICAT to advance the goals of the ARREST Agenda.

The Government of Liberia, led by His Excellency President Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Sr., is steadfast in its commitment to transparency, accountability, and good governance in public finance management. Therefore, recognizing the pressing need for reforms within our civil service, we embark on a decisive journey to overhaul our workforce for enhanced transparency, efficiency, and productivity.

Today, it is glaringly evident that widespread discrepancies, inefficiencies, and irregularities plague our civil service. As highlighted during my induction ceremony, I assumed

responsibility for an excessively bloated payroll, encompassing 67,746 personnel across 103 governmental spending entities. This translates to an alarming average monthly wage expenditure of US\$23,543,874.64.

To illustrate the magnitude of this issue, a basic employee headcount exercise conducted by the CSA at select spending entities yielded troubling results:

- At the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs, a significant portion of the workforce, represented by 69 individuals, could not be properly accounted for, strongly suggesting the presence of ghost employees.
- Similarly, at the Liberia National Police, 98 employees remained untraceable, raising suspicions of fictitious personnel on the payroll.

Regular internal controls audits and assessments conducted by the Internal Audit Agency consistently unveil numerous detrimental issues persistently undermining the integrity and efficiency of the civil service. A few of these critical issues include:

- Payments to individuals or personnel for services not rendered, indicating instances of fraudulent payments.
- Payments issued to ghost employees, resulting in substantial financial losses due to fraud, wastage, and misappropriation of funds.
- Violation of chapter 7/Section 2.5 of the Standing Orders of 2012 by paying full salaries to employees on study leaves.
- Unauthorized absences from official duties, with illegitimate or no excuses provided to cover up these instances.
- The continued payment of salaries to employees who have left their positions due to resignation, dismissal, redundancy, or death highlights serious flaws in payroll management and public finance accountability.

Additionally, the past administration spent US\$ 6.1 million in the last fiscal year alone on consulting services. This astronomically high expenditure does not reflect the quality of the job or consultancy provided. Taking the CSA as a case study, we reviewed the folders of 18 consultants selected, employed, and remunerated; I found the following:

- None of the 18 consultants received a contract until after 9 months into the so-called annual engagement;
- Of the 18 consultants, 8 did not have a valid contract in their folders
- Only 12 consultants participated in a headcount exercise. The remaining 6 did not show up to date and are still unaccounted for despite receiving payments. In short, they're ghosts, and
- No reports for services provided, no performance appraisal reports, no timesheets, and no Terms of Reference (ToR)

The revelation of these disparities underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to rectify these egregious discrepancies and prevent further misuse of public funds. Such reforms are imperative to restore our civil service's efficiency, responsiveness, and integrity and ensure accountability and transparency.

Consequently, the Civil Service Agency (CSA) has taken decisive action by requesting the General Auditing Commission (GAC) to examine payroll compliance across all 103 spending entities forensically.

This audit, covering the period January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2023, will provide vital insights into the extent of financial mismanagement and irregularities within the system. The government fully supports this critical national initiative and is committed to providing the necessary resources to facilitate the CSA and GAC's effective execution of this audit. Additionally, the Honorable Liberian Senate and House of Representatives are expected to offer unwavering support for auditing their respective central administrations' payrolls. Given their vested interest in addressing the reported human resource management and financial malpractices that have plagued our civil service, their cooperation is essential in ensuring the success of these reforms.

It is often said that "he who comes with equity must come with clean hands." In other words, these crucial workforce reforms must begin with the CSA itself. Over the last six years, the government and its partners spent millions of United States Dollars on projects intended to modernize critical human resource management systems, including payroll, performance management, testing, employment, and pension.

For example, the World Bank spent over US\$10,000,000 (Ten Million) on the Public Sector Modernization Project (PSMP). Several other government entities received hundreds of thousands of dollars from our own and foreign taxpayers to implement different aspects of the project. So, it is only befitting that we gain full insight into the project's success and failure measures.

Against this backdrop, we have requested the GAC conduct a forensic system and financial audit of the CSA's governance and fiscal operations, including government funding and donor support, from January 1, 2018, to December 31, 2023. This audit is expected to be part of scheduled audits beginning July 2024, which will be covered in the GAC's budget. We profoundly thank the GAC for this support.

We sincerely thank our partners for their invaluable support, with special recognition to the World Bank for its assistance during the previous payroll audit in 2021. Regrettably, despite the recommendations made during that audit, implementation did not follow suit, underscoring the necessity for the forthcoming payroll examination and the CSA's audit. I am delighted that the CSA is collaborating closely with the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning to finalize the payroll automation process. This initiative involves transitioning our payroll system from the highly manipulated Alternative Temporary Automated Pay System (ATAPS) to the more efficient and modern Civil Service Management system. This transition marks a significant 100-day deliverable milestone of

President Boakai's administration to streamline our payroll management procedures, greatly minimizing human intervention and reducing instances of waste and abuse of public finance.

Moreover, while transitioning to the new system, we intend to keep the ATAPs version of the payroll accessible specifically during the upcoming essential payroll compliance audit and the CSA system and financial audit to ensure that all payroll-related discrepancies are appropriately captured during these audits.

As an integral part of CSA's ongoing reform efforts, we have meticulously drafted comprehensive policy guidelines to transform the selection, employment, and management of consultants and consulting firms across the government. This policy, when completed in about two weeks from now, will be officially launched by His Excellency, President Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Sr., marking a significant departure from the immediate past corrupt consultancy practices.

To provide context, the previous administration's expenditure on consultancy services only for the last fiscal year amounted to a staggering US\$6.1 million. In stark contrast, the CSA has proposed a consultancy budget allocation of US\$2,000,000 for the upcoming fiscal period, reflecting an impressive savings of US\$4.1 million. This fiscal prudence, coupled with implementing the brand-new consultancy policy guidelines, promises to yield substantial dividends for the government. With this austerity measure, the government can now redirect the 4.1 million savings to other basic services including education, agriculture, health care, and sanitation, consistent with the ARREST Agenda.

Today, with immediate effect, the Civil Service Agency has blocked the salaries and subsequently removed from the payroll all individuals employed as of December 18, 2023, in violation of former President George Manneh Weah's directive to suspend all new employment and service contracts across government institutions. Additionally, the CSA will work with all spending entities concerned to reverse all promotions and salary increments during the period of the presidential directive.

Regarding personnel headcounts conducted at the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs, Liberia National Police, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the CSA has also blocked on their payrolls with immediate effect employees not accounted for, pending the conclusion of the verification exercises.

Also, the CSA has realized that several individuals on the payroll receiving pay whose personnel action notices (PAN) have not been completed in keeping with Chapter 3, section 4.4 of the Civil Service Standing Orders of 2012. You may be interested to know that several individuals were placed on the payroll through emails, matrices, and phone

calls. Consequently, the CSA is thoroughly reviewing the payroll and incomplete personnel action notices of the individuals concerned for further action.

With these strategic reform measures in place for the immediate term, we are confident that the government will achieve significant cost savings and optimize the value derived from sanitizing the payroll and consultancy engagements, ultimately ensuring that taxpayers' money is utilized judiciously and effectively.

The CSA remains steadfast in its commitment to these immediate reform processes to foster a more accountable, efficient, and productive civil service for all Liberians.

I thank you!