

Hon. Jerolinmick M. Piah, Minister of Information, Cultural Affairs, and Tourism

Hon. Darlington A. P. Smith, Deputy Director-General / Human Resource Management and Policy, CSA

Hon. Dahnu Mianyen., Deputy Director-General / Administration, CSA

Other Esteemed Officials of Government and Special Guests here present

The Fourth Estate

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I want to start by extending my thanks and appreciation to the Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Honorable Jerolinmik Matthew Piah who could not be here with us today due to international engagement for the continued partnership in disseminating information on what we are doing at the Civil Service Agency (CSA) to the Liberian people. Notwithstanding, his capable team has welcomed us here today, and I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge Minister Daniel O. Sando, Deputy Minister for Public Affairs, and the rest of the team here today. We truly and deeply appreciate our collaboration.

Behind me is my team of very illustrious professionals – my two Deputy Director-Generals, Darlington A.P. Smith and Dahnu Mianyen, whose support I continue to enjoy, and the technical team working on several reform initiatives at the CSA. Thank you all gentlemen.

Today's briefing is intended to update the media and the Liberian people in general, on progress made since we last appeared here. As you may all know by now, our work at the CSA is statutory and legal. We are the Government of Liberia's (GOL) entity responsible for managing the human resources, service delivery, effectiveness, and efficiency of the Civil Service, which entails planning human capacity needs, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, and career development of civil servants.

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Additionally, the CSA provides policy advice to the Government of Liberia in key areas of the Public Service including organization, staffing, pay and benefits, pension, conditions of service, and human resources development. Ultimately, the CSA ensures that the Liberian civil service is competent, professional, and motivated and that it meets the workforce needs of the Government and delivers quality and efficient services to our nation. This mandate is not only prescriptive but also instructive and we intend to fully execute it. In this respect, we will report on the following for today's briefing:

- Mobile Money Transaction discrepancies on the national payroll
- Blocking/suspension of 6,387 unverified individuals on the national payroll as recommended by the GAC.
- Blocking of 146 unverified employees of the Central Administration of the House of Representatives
- Update on the 2024 Retirement and Pension Scheme

Mobile Money Transaction discrepancies on the national payroll

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, fellow Liberians – it saddens us to report that the CSA in its ongoing GoL payroll sanitization exercise has uncovered alarming discrepancies. There are individuals who have been trusted to do right by their conscience and country but chose to deliberately defraud the State. I know I have had several unpleasant days, weeks, and months knowing how some of our compatriots have consistently plotted to exploit and deprive ordinary Liberians of basic social services that the State should provide through the rightful use of your taxes but that they have flaunted the same in your very eyes.

The Government of Liberia, cognizant of the challenges employees in rural areas face in accessing banking facilities and the costs associated with traveling to areas to access banks, rolled out salary payments using Mobile Money Transfer through LoneStar and Orange GSM Companies. As part of our responsibilities to ensure that the GoL has a credible payroll, we reached out to the Attorney-General to pray the Monrovia City Court for a Writ of Subpoena Duces Tecum to the two GSM companies to produce transaction histories of all salaries paid to GoL employees using their platforms. We are happy to report that the two companies are cooperating with us. Notably, LoneStar Cell MTN provided several months of payment transactions. We have been assured by Orange through the Monrovia City Court that we will receive statements of recent transactions.

For this briefing, my team decided to run an analysis of July 2024. Below are the findings from this analysis:

- A total of 4,738 transactions were done both in LRD and USD.
- Of this number, we were able to verify that only 3,884 transactions matched employees' names that were on the payroll and whose names also matched the names associated with the MTN numbers
- 166 individuals got paid part of their salaries in LRD via mobile money and the USD component through the bank. In other words, these employees were able to access their USD salaries at a bank but could not access the LRD component through the very bank. This category of payment represents LRD\$2,761,628.80 and US\$57,052.57. Annualizing this amount will give you LRD\$ 33,139,545.60 and US\$684,630.84. That's the amount yearly we are paying to individuals who we are made to believe can access part of their salary using a bank and the other part using mobile money.
- During our analysis, we also discovered that payments were made to Agents/businesses – 7 agents/businesses representing 22 transactions totaling LRD\$294,071.00 and US\$4,366. Multiplying this by 12, you have LD\$ 3,528,852.00 and US\$52,392. That's the amount yearly we have been paying from our payroll account to Agents/Businesses.

- Alarming, a whopping 205 and 223 (mix of LRD and USD) individuals got paid for July via mobile money but are nowhere to be found on the national payroll. Monthly, we have been paying LRD\$ 3,080,614.00 and US\$47,550. Yearly, this amounts to LRD\$36,967,368.00 and US\$570,600.00.
- Another category of transaction is names of individuals on payroll do not match with names associated with mobile money accounts. For example, the name on the payroll is Josiah F. Joekai whereas the name associated with the mobile money account is Ellen Peters. I'm sorry if anyone here or their family member has that name. But you get the point. Now, this category represents up to 220 transactions. Monthly, a total of LRD\$1,311,360 and US\$27,543 were paid from our GoL Mobile Money payroll. Multiplied by 12, a total of LRD\$ 15,736,320 and US\$330,516 have been paid in this category.

**Ladies and gentlemen of the press.
Distinguished colleagues
Fellow Liberians,**

I am sure you are now thinking to yourself, how is this even possible? Is he just throwing numbers out there? No, I am not. These records are available and will be made public in the coming days. Names of businesses involved will be exposed. Masterminds will be named and those used to carry out this malicious act will be shamed. Now let me paint the real picture here after calling all these numbers. Annually, the government has lost **LRD\$89,372,085.60** and **US\$1,683,138.84**. The following is at this moment decided:

- The 166 individuals receiving part of their salaries through mobile money and the other part through a bank will be BLOCKED immediately pending further notice.
- The 220 whose names on the payroll don't match those associated with the mobile money account will also be BLOCKED effective immediately.
- The 7 Agents/Businesses that have received payments to their accounts will be turned over to the appropriate authority for further investigation

- Individuals responsible for sending salaries to 223 mobile money accounts but are not on the payroll will be forwarded to the relevant authority for investigation
- A total of 613 names on the payroll will be blocked immediately until further investigation and or verification is carried out.

Blocking/suspension of 6,387 unverified employees on the national payroll as recommended by the GAC.

A national compliance audit of the GoL payroll was conducted by the General Auditing Commission (GAC) covering the period between 2018 and 2021. In 2022, the report, among other things, revealed that 9,287 employees, representing 13% of the workforce and receiving %US\$3.7M monthly could not be verified during the exercise. A 90-day Post Audit Verification Exercise was conducted as an opportunity for concerned employees to be verified. Only 2,900 were verified. Since then, 6,387 remained unverified. The government continues to lose a staggering US\$2.5M to these potential ghosts representing about 9% of the total workforce. May I hasten to point out that these verification exercises are all **MANDATORY**.

The Auditor General (AG) recommended in the Audit report that these unverified individuals should be temporarily blocked. In his recommendation, the Auditor General maintained that “The Office of Comptroller and Accountant General (CAG) would place a moratorium on salaries of all employees (6,387) not verified during the physical verification exercise and for whom legitimate excuses were not provided.”

Consequently, the CSA has blocked the 6,387 potential ghosts on the payroll pending a two-month verification after which they will be permanently removed from the payroll. Although this action is very belated due to the insensitivity and inaction of the previous government, it however demonstrates the CSA and Ministry of Finance and Development Planning’s (MFDP) commitment to curbing waste and abuse of public resources, sanitizing the national payroll, and bringing to book unscrupulous individuals who continue to loot the national treasury.

As a final effort to ensure those blocked have the opportunity to provide evidence as to why they should not be blocked from the payroll, an additional 60 days has been granted for them to verify their status. This exercise commenced on September 2, 2024, and is expected to run through November 4, 2024. Thereafter, those unverified will be permanently removed from the national payroll.

At some point and very soon, the CSA and the MFDP will in categorical terms inform the Liberian people about the amount of money that has been wasted/spent on ghosts, fake names, double dippers, getting salaries from two or more Spending Entities' payrolls, and those I like to refer to as living ghosts – they are the ones who are legitimately employed but refused to show up to work but get paid for work not done. We remain relentless in this endeavor and will ask the media and all well-meaning Liberians to support us as we all try to the problems and build this country. We at the CSA cannot do it alone.

Blocking of 146 unverified employees of the Central Administration of the House of Representatives

In continuation of the ongoing headcount and physical verification exercise, a team from the CSA conducted the same with employees of the Central Administration of the House of Representatives. During the exercise, a total of 146 employees on the payroll could not be verified and have therefore been blocked pending further verification.

We like to, at this point recognize the cooperation of the leadership of the House of Representatives through its Rules, Order, and Administration during the execution of this exercise. In our next briefing, we will report on the outcomes of the verification and headcount exercises conducted at the Central Administrations of the House of Representatives and the Liberian Senate.

Update on the 2024 Retirement and Pension Scheme

On Monday, August 26, 2024, the CSA, in collaboration with the National Social Security and Welfare Corporation (NASSCORP) commenced a National Pre-Retirement Counselling Workshop and Data Collection exercise for soon-to-be-retired employees of the government. The exercise, which is taking place across the country has seen employees from 10 out of the 15 counties attending.

So far, 809 potential retirees have come forward and participated in the exercise. In Montserrado County, the Monrovia Vocational Training Center on Somalia Drive and the VIP Entrance of the Samuel K. Doe Sports Complex in Paynesville account for 309 retirees so far. Grand Kru and Lofa Counties have processed 129 and 107 employees, respectively.

The purpose of this exercise is to ensure that prospective pensioners/retirees phase out of active service with the government and provide them with the necessary tools and information needed to begin the retirement phase of their lives. The CSA and NASSCORP intend to ensure that this exercise also serves the purpose of post-career counseling for prospective retirees.

We have communicated with the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Pro Tempore of the Liberian Senate to instruct their respective Human Resource Directors to inform prospective retirees to take advantage of this exercise. About 2,000 employees across all 103 Spending Entities (SE) of the GoL are expected to be retired in 2024.

The CSA would hasten to remind all heads of Spending Entities that retirement is not optional as contained in Section 5 (3.5.1) of the Standing Orders of the Civil Service which states **“Unless ordered otherwise by Government, every employee shall be compulsorily retired at the age of 60, or after a minimum of 25 years of service as specified under Section 1 of the Government Employees Pension Act.”** Only the CSA can and may decide if anyone after attaining the age of 65 years or having served for more than 25 consecutive years can continue to work in government and remain on GoL payroll.

National Civil Service Testing Center

The civil service plays a crucial role in ensuring the effective functioning of the government by recruiting qualified individuals to fill various public sector roles. However, a reliable, transparent, and efficient mechanism for testing and evaluating potential candidates is essential to maintain high standards of public service. The proposed Testing Center will streamline the recruitment process, enhance transparency, and promote meritocracy in the public sector.

The primary objectives of establishing the National Civil Service Testing Center are:

- To provide a standardized and fair testing environment for all civil service applicants.
- To ensure a transparent, efficient, and merit-based recruitment process.
- To improve the quality of civil service recruitment by utilizing modern testing technologies and methodologies.
- To reduce administrative burden and costs associated with the traditional testing process.

The establishment of a dedicated National Civil Service Testing Center is a vital step towards ensuring a fair, efficient, and transparent recruitment process for civil service positions. By investing in modern testing facilities and technologies, the government can enhance public confidence in the civil service, improve the quality of its workforce, and promote merit-based recruitment practices. We are working with stakeholders to source funding for the procurement of needed items to equip the center.

Mr. Acting Minister, members of the media, it is always a pleasing honor to speak to our people – informing them not only of the challenges we are faced with daily but to also report gains we continue to make along the way. We took on this job knowing the latent challenges, especially dealing with practices that have somewhat managed to be normalized – like double dipping, ghost names, etc. But because we are convinced that true change must start with us, we are prepared to be labeled, insulted, misrepresented, and maligned but we remain relentless and focused on the task at hand. Eternal gratitude to H.E. President Joseph N. Boakai for the opportunity to lead the charge of ensuring that our civil service is one of decency, integrity, commitment, and dedication.

I want to thank you all for coming here today and to the people of Liberia for listening from wherever you are.

God Bless You and Bless Liberia!

