

*Thursday, November 19, 2009*

Gentlemen of the media, we are delighted to welcome you to this interactive forum which is taking place at the Liberia National Office of the West African Examinations Council. You will recall that a similar forum was held about this time last year on issues of significance to education in Liberia. I thank you for your usual understanding and interest in the affairs of our organization and I commend you for portraying a high sense of responsibility in the practice of your profession. I want to assure you that WAEC will continue to partner with you, gentlemen of the media, whenever the need arises for us to get information across to the Liberian public.

The events of this week, which commenced on Sunday, November 15, 2009 and will end tomorrow, Friday, November 20, 2009, are of importance to stakeholders in education in Liberia. The main events of the week are the series of meetings of the Liberia Committees of the West African Examinations Council which were held in Monrovia and at which various decisions were taken for the growth and development of the education sector.

The Committees of Council that met during the period are the Liberia Aptitude Tests and Examinations Committee (LATEC), the Liberia Administrative and Finance (A & F) Committee and the Liberia National Committee which is the highest decision-making organ of the Council in Liberia. The members of the Council's Committees are made up of Government nominees, representatives of the Ministry of Education, Universities, National Association of Liberia School Principals, and other interests. The Statutory Chairman of the Committees is the Chief Government Nominee of Liberia on Council, Honourable (Mrs.) Hester Williams-Catakaw.

Gentlemen of the media, LATEC, at its meeting on Monday, received reports on the examinations conducted in Liberia in the 2008/2009 reporting year. The poor performance of candidates in the examinations took the front burners during the discussions, and members urged school authorities and education administrators to ensure that all schools presenting candidates for public examinations acquired the appropriate examination syllabuses for adequate preparation and improved performance. They added that the Ministry of Education, through its appropriate departments, as well as other relevant agencies should intensify the inspection/monitoring of schools to ensure strict adherence to the teaching curriculum provided by the government for the complete education of the Liberian child.

The Committee noted with concern that no candidate in Liberia qualified in 2008 for consideration for the International Excellence Award or the National Distinction/Merit Award which WAEC gives annually in actualisation of one of the objects of its Endowment Fund. The Committee therefore urged the government, education administrators, parents and patriotic citizens of Liberia to take up the challenge and adopt workable strategies to raise the level of academic attainment in schools in the years ahead.

The Committee however, observed with delight that no incidence of malpractice was reported in the November/December 2008 series of examinations in Liberia. It urged the Ministry of Education and WAEC to intensify public sensitization efforts on the rules and regulations governing the conduct of public examinations so as to guide schools and candidates against the perpetration of examination malpractice.

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The Committee recalled that Her Excellency, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf had earlier given assurance that Liberian candidates would write the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in 2011. The Committee however noted that the structures currently in place for the take-off of the examination in Liberia were still very far from being adequate. It therefore urged the government to keep alive the hope of the Liberian child to have the opportunity, sooner than later, to compete with his/her peers in the other member countries of WAEC. The Committee was however, confident that the government would do everything possible to meet the target date of 2011 for the commencement of the international examination in Liberia.

The Liberia Administrative and Finance Committee, at its meeting, noted with appreciation the preparations being made for the hosting of the 58th Annual Council Meeting by the Government of the Republic of Liberia in March 2010, in line with the principle of rotational hosting of the meeting by member countries. The Committee noted that the 57th Annual Council Meeting was hosted by the Republic of Sierra Leone in March this year and that the Republic of Ghana would host the 59th Annual Council Meeting in 2011.

Gentlemen of the media, before the week-long series of meetings started, precisely on Sunday, November 15, 2009, the Registrar along with the Head of National Office led the Management team on a courtesy visit to the Mayor of Tubmanburg, Bomi County, Mayor Gbillely D. Karnley Snr., who had earlier in the year allocated three acres of land to WAEC for the building of a Regional Office in Bomi County.

We want to place on record our profound appreciation to the eminent Mayor of Tubmanburg for his noble and highly patriotic gesture which we have accepted as an indication of his good foresight, love for his people and commitment to the development of education in the Republic of Liberia. The establishment of Regional Offices is an effective way of bringing the Council's services closer to the people. We are therefore confident that as the gains of the Mayor's kind gesture become visible in the very near future, WAEC as well as the people of Bomi County will remain eternally grateful to him and posterity will not fail to accord him the due recognition.

We want to use this opportunity to solicit the assistance of the government, donor agencies, corporate organizations, and patriotic individuals towards the development of the land.

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While at Tubmanburg, the Management team also paid a courtesy visit to the Nigerian Battalion 22 (NIBATT 22) of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), Fatoma Camp, Tubmanburg in acknowledgement of the tremendous assistance which UNMIL has continued to render to the Council in ensuring the smooth conduct of its examinations in Liberia. As you may be aware, UNMIL has been assisting WAEC in air-lifting its printed question papers, providing safe custody for the papers and providing logistic support for the distribution of materials to examination centres nation-wide. The Management team was received with notable cordiality and pageantry by the officers and soldiers of NIBATT 22 led by the Commanding Officer, Lt. Colonel Benjamin Olufemi Sawyerr.

The Registrar, who is a Nigerian, and indeed the first female Nigerian to be appointed Registrar of WAEC in the 58 years of the Council's existence, used the occasion of the courtesy visit to felicitate with the Nigerian officers and soldiers for being part of history by serving on UNMIL. She commended them for their outstanding contributions to the peace-keeping efforts in Liberia and admonished them to continue to be good ambassadors of Nigeria and to keep Nigeria's flag flying high.

Before departing Tubmanburg, the Registrar had the rare honour and privilege of laying the foundation stone of the Nigeria Hut, a project of NIBATT 22, located near the Blue Lake. The Registrar, on the occasion, assured both the Mayor of Tubmanburg and the Commanding Officer of NIBATT 22 that WAEC would readily cooperate with them and support any venture that would improve the quality of education in the Bomi County.

Gentlemen of the media, I thank you for your attention.