

Press Statement
Honorable Varney A. Sirleaf
Internal Affairs Minister
Regular Press Briefing
Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism
Thursday, September 6, 2018

Officials of MICAT,

Members of Press:

I want thank the authorities of MICAT for maintaining the spirit of Government's regular engagements with the media through the Thursday briefing sessions.

Thank you too, Deputy Minister Fahngon for the invitation extended me to come and interact with my good friends of the media.

For me, this is one of the best partnerships we are forging with the media so that collectively, we all inform the public.

The Ministry of Internal remains committed to be a partner to the media.

Over the last few months, a lot of things have happened involving the Ministry of Internal Affairs. We have been very engaging with the public on our activities; whether through social media, radio, TV or newspaper.

Passage of Local Government Bill:

Let me, on behalf of my Ministry, Governance Commission and the Executive Branch of Government take this time to commend the Liberian Senate for the passage of the Local Government Bill into law after two years of scrutiny. As you maybe aware, the LGA was passed by the House of Representatives in September, 2016 and the sent to the Senate for its Concurrence. We are grateful to Protempore Senator Albert Chie for the leadership, particularly Maryland County Senator and Chair on the Committee on Internal Affairs Gbleh-bo Brown, his entire Committee as well as the Committees on Good Governance, Peace & Reconciliation, ad Judiciary. We want to thank our donor partners who are supporting our Decentralization and Local Governance programs. The Local Government Act (LGA) is a significant tool for legal and regulatory framework for decentralization of governance and limited share of power and authority and form of stronger partnerships between central and local governments.

I am very optimistic that the joint Conference Committee of the House and Senate would take final approval actions on the instrument before they go for their annual break.

Peacebuilding & reconciliation:

Through our National Peace Ambassador and the Peacebuilding Office, a lot of local peace initiatives are taken place in communities and counties.

Our communities are becoming even more peaceful and our people are reconciling among themselves

Boundary Dispute resettlements

There are lot of disputes over boundaries both inter-County disputes (between two or more counties), and intra-County conflicts (boundary conflicts within counties-between certain localities).

Some, especially inter-County boundary disputes are not new, while others are just being reported.

While border points in some localities are not exactly demarcated, we have realized that some the emerging conflicts are linked to commercial interests or discovery of minerals.

In order to find the best solutions to these cases have begun a mapping of all boundary dispute localities in Liberia. We are working county superintendents to achieve this goal. As was do between river Gee and Grand Gedeh, we are working in partnership with Carter Center to apply alternative dispute mechanism through dialogue to solve problems. Additionally, we have written LISGIS and Land Authority for proper collaboration and coordination. The aim is to ensure that once resolved, LISGIS will reproduce a map reflecting the new realities.

County Tours

Consistent with my mandate to coordinate between central Government in Monrovia and local administrations at the county level, I recently embarked on a tour of the counties.

The tour is intended to:

- Thanks to the people for electing Dr. George Manneh Weah as President of Liberia;
- Assure them that the President is doing everything possible their lives;
- Assess ongoing development projects;
- Acquaint myself and the new at MIA with the County teams, their programs, challenges and prospects;

Before Dependence Day July 26, I led my team to Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Montserrado, Margibi and Bong.

Just last week, I was in the southeast; namely parts of RiverCess, Sione, Grand Kru (Sass Town), Maryland, RiverGee, Grand Gedeh and Nimba.

The rest of the counties including Gbarpolu, Lofa, RiverCess and Grand Bassa will be covered.

Tour during the rains/ hopeful people

As a messenger for the President, I decided with the approval of the President for me to make these tours during the rainy time so as to identify their people and feel their struggles as well and assure that the roads will be paved.

The people were receptive and I know they are hopeful in their son, the President of Liberia, Amb. Dr. George Manneh Weah. I also rallied their support to the President.

As a messenger, I took the message of peace, reconciliation, communal farming and forming stronger partnership with government.

We have various engagements with the people where we explain the President's agenda and solicit the people's inputs and concerns.

These inputs and concerns are noted, and upon completion of the 15 counties, a comprehensive report will be submitted to the President.

Meanwhile, as the lead coordinating Ministry, we take note of everything regardless of the Ministry and agency concerned report instantly to the head of that Agency.

Local Government Payroll

One the key findings so far has to do the payroll challenges of local government workers (chiefs and their staff etc)

In order to find a solution to the problem, I have instructed all superintendents, beginning with the Southeast, to bring along all personnel listings for us investigate, regularize and in collaboration with the CSA put the legitimate people on payroll.

Misuse of Cultural Values and practices

Of late, there have been reports of what I call **misuse of Cultural and traditional Values and practices.**

In Nimba, a Pastor was allegedly forced into the Poro;

In RiverGee, the Bush King as used to temporarily halt road works of the Chinese road construction company;

We also heard of a situation in King Jor, Grand Cape Mount County, among others.

Let me state that the Government respects and will continue to uphold the values of our culture and tradition. However, the MIA will not allow the misuse of same practices.

While I was in the southeast, I instructed my Bureau of Culture and Chief Zanzan Karwor to immediately intervene. Let me report the situations have been resolved. Where applicable, the legal system is taking its course.

We cannot and must not use our tradition in the wrong way.

Additionally, while in the southeast, I called on traditional leaders and chiefs to desist from judging criminal cases. Judicial officials in the counties have complained that this situation is undermining their functions at county level.

Let me restate that our people in the counties are committed working closely with the Government under President George Manneh Weah for the development of the Country.

I thank you