



SIERRA LEONE GOVERNMENT
NATIONAL COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE CENTRE (NACOVERC)
FREETOWN

Press Release

Freetown 7th June, 2021

NaCOVERC Rejoinder to Africanist Press Article-“Hidden Covid Funds”

The attention of NaCOVERC has been drawn to an article reportedly published by the Africanist Press titled “Hidden COVID Funds”.

Whilst NaCOVERC appreciates the duty to inform, NaCOVERC regrets to note that the article constitutes a wrong characterization of the Emergency Response which is guided by the hallmarks of legitimacy, transparency and accountability.

NaCOVERC advises as follows:

1. NaCOVERC was created by regulations pursuant to the declaration of a state of emergency by H.E. President Bio in March 2020. The regulations established a financial management system for COVID-19 funds, and the Response has at all material times been conducted within an extraordinary emergency context. Guided by the regulations which created it as an extra-budgetary agency, NaCOVERC has full authority to open accounts in commercial banks to support its operations, but without sacrificing the values of prudent financial management.
2. As the Africanist Press states in the said article, Section 47(4) of the Public Financial Management Act (PFMA) of 2016 states “Any bank accounts of budgetary agencies, subvented agencies, or other entities in the central government, whether in Sierra Leone or elsewhere, shall not be opened or closed except under the authority of the Minister signified by the Accountant-General, and no bank may open any such account without such authority.” At the end of the article, the Africanist press says, “Jacob Jusu Saffa, the Finance Minister under whose directive the Account was opened, is now the Chief Minister.” NaCOVERC does not understand how an account opened with the fiat of the Minister of Finance in line with the said Act can be regarded as illegal.
3. At the time the account at the Union Trust Bank was opened by NaCOVERC, Mr. Sheku Bangura was the Deputy Coordinator at NaCOVERC with specific responsibility for finance and administration, while Mr. Sylvester Johnny was and still is the head of the Admin and Finance pillar at NaCOVERC and the two men are the principal signatories to the said account which is being operated in line with the regulations that established NaCOVERC.

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4. NaCOVERC has periodically released summary of financials to the press up till its last press briefing at the Ministry of Information and Communications conference room on May 20 this year; and has also done so at combined CSO-Media engagements (the last of the three engagements was on March 29, 2021 at the Bank Complex), during which there have been full disclosures of the financial status of the Response, including funds collected through testing fees and fines.
 5. NaCOVERC operates a number of bank accounts in commercial banks in order to facilitate payments directly into bank accounts, particularly from outside Sierra Leone, since individuals cannot pay directly to the Bank of Sierra Leone. Payments are made into these accounts through funds collected via mobile, credit/ debit cards or cash payments directly into the bank accounts (with NaCOVERC having full visibility). This is to prevent cash transactions with individuals, thus ensuring all funds are collected and accounted for. Accounts are currently held in the following banks and mobile phone companies:
 6. The total funds collected so far are, in fact, significantly higher than what the Africanist Press has reported. The following is a breakdown of the funds held in various accounts:
 - a. **Laboratory Testing (July 2020 – May 2021)**
 - i. Union Trust Bank - Le. 18,184,695,149.00
 - ii. ECOBANK -Le. 27,749,320,003.71
 - iii. ECOBANK (US\$ equiv)-Le. 5,167,115,520.00
 - iv. Orange -Le. 3,775,828,000.00
 - v. Africell- Le. 779,994,000.00
 - vi. Revaluation (US\$ equiv)-Le. 87,368,960.00
 - b. **CEMS**
 - i. Rokel Commercial (CEM fines) – Le. 1,347,317,444.00
- TOTAL (Testing & Fines) - Le. 57,091,639,076.71**

7. NaCOVERC appreciates the support from our Banks and Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) whose robust technology and payment system infrastructure have made it seamless for travellers to and from Sierra Leone to fulfil Covid-19 requirements.

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We remain committed to accountability and transparency and our books and accounts are open to audits.

8. The Presidential Task force for COVID-19 has been kept informed of the funds collected so far and has decided that these funds will be used to fund tangible projects that will be a lasting legacy. So far, not a single cent of the funds collected has been used for any purpose. It is expected that President Bio will soon inform the public what these funds will be used for.

Finally, the Africanist Press in its article, claimed it “could not reach Ministry of Finance officials or NaCOVERC for comments regarding the status of the UTB COVID-19 Lab Account and why monies have not been transferred into the CRF. Phone calls to both agencies went unanswered.”

While NaCOVERC does not particularly doubt the truth of this statement, it wishes to inform the Africanist Press and all other media institutions that in future, any one of the following people at NaCOVERC could be contacted for clarification of any issue:

Hon. Sheku Bangura, Chairman, NaCOVERC

Hon. Solomon Jamiru, Spokesman, NaCOVERC

Mr. Harold Thomas, Risk Communication Lead, NaCOVERC

Dr. Julius Spencer, Strategic Adviser-Public Information, NaCOVERC



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Solomon Jamiru Esq
Spokesperson

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