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PRESS RELEASE

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PARLIAMENT ENGAGES SALCAB

The Parliament of Sierra Leone, through its Committee on Information and Communications, chaired by Hon. Benneh Bangura has on Tuesday 06th December 2016 at the Freetown Golf Club, engaged officials of the Sierra Leone Cable (SALCAB) to better understand their operations in the country, noting the terrestrial and fibre-optic cables for the provision of effective communications and internet service for the people of Sierra Leone and beyond.

Chairman for the occasion, Hon. Ibrahim Ben Kargbo recalled the landing of the fibre-optic cables in Sierra Leone with the view of improving internet and communications service to the people of Sierra Leone at a reduced cost. He praised President Koroma for getting a World Bank support geared towards improving on our Information, Communications and Technology infrastructure in the country. He said that “we are proud of having SALCAB” to improve on telecommunications, whilst speaking on the ECOWAN, a terrestrial network which is connected to other countries in the sub-region.

The Chairman for the Committee on Information and Communications in Parliament, Hon. Benneh Bangura said that the “Committee has undertaken a policy of engaging MDAs under her purview” as constitutionally obliged to promote and showcase their good work and advocate for improvement as and when necessary. He furthered that “SALCAB is 100% funded by GoSL and World Bank”, whilst talking on the fibre-optic and the ECOWAN project aimed at improving information dissemination in the country, particularly to bring the work of MDAs closer to the people of Sierra Leone.

Managing Director of SALCAB said that the advent of SALCAB has greatly reduced the cost of accessing internet applications like facebook, whatsapp and others. He boasted that “SALCAB is currently financially buoyant and well positioned”. Speaking on the positives of internet access on education, he informed MPs and others present that they are currently

working on a World Bank's supported project of connecting 10-universities and schools in the country to enhance the academic pursuits of students and pupils in the country. He also averred that over 70 MDAs are currently connected to the ECOWAN internet provision with the view of expanding similar service to the remaining ones.

Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Chernor Bah was filled with joy when they referred to Hon. Ibrahim Ben Kargbo as "father of the fibre-optic" in Sierra Leone. He also said that he was glad to learn that IFMIS, an accounting software package had been linked to the ECOWAN, noting the challenges it had before with our financial management. He called on SALCAB to assist us to go e-parliament as a separate arm of government to reduce cost and to further enhance the operations of Parliament regarding service delivery.

Minority Leader of the House, Hon. Dr. Bernadette Lahai as former rappporteur of the ICT in the Pan-African Parliament underscored the importance of ICT for socio-economic advancement, whilst espousing on the comparative advantage cable has over satellite internet provision. She also said the project is a \$31 Million grant of which SALCAB is the limited guarantor.

Majority Leader of the House, Hon. Ibrahim Bundu said that "Parliament has engaged SALCAB to take its work to the people". He furthered that late transmission of information to people has its attendant effects, whilst referencing the 2016 Finance Act that had been passed by Parliament and approved by the President and which resulted in the price hike of imported alcoholic content in the country. He called on SALCAB to use Parliament as a vehicle of transmitting its messages to the people, and spoke on the investment opportunities such as buying shares and to provide internet service to the people besides using Africell or Airtel.

Whilst giving the vote of thanks, Alhaji S. Mansaray assured the Deputy Speaker that in "three months, we will go e-parliament", and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Communications spoke on behalf of the Minister.