

Liberia: Government Orders LAC Rubber Processing Factory Remains Closed



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Monrovia – The Government of Liberia has ordered that Rubber Processing Factory at the Liberia Agricultural Company (LAC) remains closed until it is assessed by independent technicians for the purpose of safety of workers following the recent industrial accident.

On Saturday, August 28, 2021 a joint delegations of the Executive and the Senate Committee on Labour visited LAC to understand the actual circumstances that led to the industrial accident which resulted to the killing of one of the company's employee, late Emmanuel Joe.

Members of the joint delegations were: the Chairman of Senate Committee on Labour, Senator Willington Geevon Smith and Senator J. Milton Tenjay, Labour Minister, Cllr. Charles H. Gibson, Agriculture Minister Jennis Cooper, Acting Justice Minister, Nyenatee Tuan, Deputy Police Director Prince Mulbah among others.

Speaking to journalists after the day long visit, Labour Minister Cllr. Charles H. Gibson said “We met and held discussions with the family and shared their grief, we conveyed the government condolences. We held discussions with the workers union, they held their part of the story and concerns. We inspected the factory where the incident took place and concluded with a meeting with the management.”

Minister Gibson said that during these meetings, the delegations stressed the need for the management to work along with the family to ensure the peaceful and decent burial of the deceased and were informed that there are ongoing negotiations between the family and the management regarding benefits.

The Minister said that the Labour Ministry is going to position two technicians, the Assistant Director for Trade Union Affairs and Social dialogue, Mr. Dominic Wreh, who will work along with the Workers Union, the family and Management to ensure that what they are discussing is concluded and the deceased is given a decent burial as well as peace and tranquility remains at LAC. While the Director of the Industrial Safety Department of the Ministry, Mr. Author Jimmy will conduct an assessment on safety requirements and policies at the company.

“We want to ensure that by Wednesday of next week, to determine whether the factory is safe enough for operations. But before that time, we intend to open it partially for our farmers who want to sell their rubber can have them sold and allow stock pad rubber that the company has already processed be taken to the port before it deteriorates and buyers to refuse them. We hope that by next week, we will arrive at these objectives.”

The Liberian Labour Minister maintained that his Ministry will continue its investigations after the burial on all aspects of labour at LAC.

He described what happened at LAC borders around culpability, but more so, it bordered clearly on cooperative negligence and as such, on the principle of defendant superior, Management takes responsibility for what its workers do. And as such, in this instance, it was a working day, there were supervisors, technicians, cleaners and whatever happened at that site, the management assumes responsibility.

Also speaking was the Senate Committee Chairman on Labour, Senator Willington Geevon Smith who described the discussion as fruitful noting that the safety of workers at the company was highlighted. Senator Smith said that the senate is concerned about stability and harmony on the plantation and as such will be reporting to plenary on Tuesday on situation at LAC.

On other issues concerning the operations and administration of the company as it relates to the aftermath of this situation, Sen. Smith said that the Ministry of Labour and line ministries responsible will conclude on that with the workers union and management. "It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour to advice on what the company should do and not to do, but I am here to report to Plenary as head of the Committee what these Ministries responsible agreed to do to restore harmony and stability at the plantation.

The Acting Justice Minister Cllr. Nyenatee Tuan said that a team from the Crime Service Division of the Liberia National Police (LNP) has been dispatched to the plantation and is conducting forensic investigations into the situation. He said that giving the important and concerned of the government, a team of ministers was constituted to come and do an assessment to be better situated to endorse whatever that comes from the police.

He said that following the holding of meetings with the family, workers union and management, the government is fully equip on how their thinking can be shifted and focused.

On the question of security at the plantation, the Acting Justice Minister said that they have met and encouraged the Workers Union to do all in their power to ensure that there should not be an industrial unrest at the plantation and hope all will remain civil and respect the law noting that all conflict ends at the table.

For her part, Minister of Agriculture, Madam Jennis Cooper extended sympathy on behalf of the Agriculture family and her Ministry to the bereaved family and all workers of LAC for the lost. She said LAC has been a key partner to the Liberia since 1959, especially in agriculture production and productivity.

Minister Cooper said that the Management has assumed full responsibility of all of the consequences that had come up as the result of this industrial accident.

“What we are looking forward to as a Ministry and government to see is how quickly we can resolve all of the situation that led to such an irreparable incident and start up production in the way that it does not endanger anybody again.”

Speaking on behalf of the Workers Union, the Mother Union of the LAC Workers, the General Agriculture and Allied Workers Union of Liberia (GAAWUL), President General, Mr. James Geeve praised the Government of Liberia timely interventions and assured the government of the workers full cooperation in ensuring that their colleague gets a decent and peaceful burial.

He welcomed the Ministry of Labour efforts in ensuring that the safety of workers of the company are guarantee and safety policies are put in place to avoid a repeat of the industrial accidents and injuries at the company.

Earlier, during the meeting with the family, they requested for a befitting burial of their relative. They however said that their relative will not be bury until discussions surrounding their demands to management are concluded and signed into a memorandum of understanding (MOU).

As part of their demands, the family asked that the decease first son or child who is a disable and a first-year college student be sent outside Liberia to continue his education.

Secondly, they want the other four children in grade school be fully educated to first degree level.

Thirdly, buy two lots of land and build three units with three bed-rooms each well-furnished for the family.

Four, that three family members plus his wife be provided employment by the company.

Five, all other cash benefits be paid in full to the family; and

Lastly, provide food and drinks to the family home during the period of bereavement for the up keeping of the family members and visitors.

It be recalled that late last week an employee of the LAC got killed as a result of an industrial accident at the rubber processing factory of the company.

 Post Views: 2

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