

CNDRA Press Statement

By P. Bloh Sayeh, Director-General
(August 2, 2013)

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Fourth Estate, on behalf of the Administration and General Staff of the Center for National Documents, Record Agency (CNDRA) I am most pleased to welcome you to the refurbished home of CNDRA.

As you are aware, during the course of the last two weeks, some employees of CNDRA staged a disruptive protest at our offices which was reported in both the electronic and print media. For instance; some of the papers carried headlines such as “Trouble At Archives Center”, “Explosion at CNDRA” etc.

On Monday, July 15, predicated on these stories in the press, I appointed a committee headed by the Deputy Director-General who met with 14 employees to ascertain their grievances. They promised to provide same in writing.

Sadly, these employees who termed themselves as “Aggrieved Employees” abandoned their duties on Wednesday July 17, to display placards on the street and within the Customer Service area of our facilities, and prevented customers from transacting with us, which impeded our revenue collection as all of our customers had to flee our compound.

Additionally, one of these employees accompanied by his colleagues, obstructed the delivery of power to our facilities by locking the generator room. Sensing the danger that might have erupted as a result of these disruptive actions, the Administration immediately called the police and their intervention brought the situation under control.

Ladies and gentlemen of the media, while waiting to receive concerns or grievances from these employees, we were instead greeted on Wednesday, July 17 with lawlessness in an attempt by them to cause chaos at CNDRA.

Finally, on July 22, a document was delivered to the Deputy Director-General, signed by Mr. Ebenezer Borbor. He signed on behalf of the “Aggrieved Employees” and also as a “Whistle Blower”. Because of the law regarding whistle blower, we have turned this document over to our lawyer and will not be directly responding to the accusations made in that document. But there are other accusations made which have been published by some of you in the media. I will have no problem responding to those.

We suspect that some of these accusations may be related to the major transformation that has taken place since our administration took over, four years ago. Further, the on-going reform measures associated with the Digital Scanning Center(DSC) and the Customer Service Center (CSC) have put a major dent into the organized revenue diversion syndicate that previously existed.

Hence, we like to briefly discuss the transformation, future plans for our Agency, and then take you on a tour of our facilities.

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The transformation at CNDRA began with a small team of committed staff back in 2010 with the help and guidance of an experienced consultant and academician, Dr. Verlon Stone of Indiana University. His research results provided the basis for the creation of our Digital Scanning Center that we are so proud of today. Dr. Stone also provided us (including me) orientation in preparing and submitting funding request to the World Bank. Parallel with Dr. Stone's assignment, the Civil Service Agency seconded Mr. Forkpa Kemah, a US-Trained Library Specialist to CNDRA. He immediately joined the core team of reformers in helping to plan and secure national and international support for the new CNDRA.

Needless to say, we received the funding from the World Bank for the Digital Scanning Center. We also got funding from the Millennium Challenge Corporation/USAID to help build other aspects of the agency. Other funding and material support came from such sources as Norwegian Refugee Council, that went straight to training and capacity building, especial in computer literacy. This paid off when implementation of the DSC began in 2011.

The turning point in the transformation of CNDRA came when we recruited an experienced, US-Trained Liberian Computer Consultant through recommendations from Dr. Stone and a friend of CNDRA, Dr Jeanette Carter. Mr. Ounzuba Kemeh-Gama was hired with funding from the World Bank in 2011. He brings nearly 30 years of IT experience, working both in Liberia and the US. With Dr. Stone's research results, support from the WB and MCC and a mandate to deliver an integrated solution, Ounzuba has worked tirelessly for nearly two years to design and develop the DSC and CSC. Today, these two units of CNDRA are the pillars upon which we are managing our reforms. At the DSC, all historical land deed records are processed by a team of trained scanning technicians. Over half of the nearly 800 ledger books have been digitized. Additional books are expected from the Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Customer Service Center, originally recommended in a study done by Andy Smith (MCC-funded international consultant) is now an extension of the DSC and a one-stop service point for all services at CNDRA. The CSC was opened in September 2012. **Since then, all Deed Records are being scanned into our database instead of transcribed by hand into ledger books.** Additionally, all other CNDRA services, including processing of Marriage Certificates are now channeled through a transparent customer service area. New workflows and computer systems have been introduced that help to reduce customer waiting time, improve customer experience, streamline processes and improve revenue collection. **Today, cost for each service is clearly posted outside. The 10 Steps for Land Deed Registration is posted at our entrance. A cashier booth is in clear sight for billing and receiving of cash. All major payments are made at Ministry of Finance by customers. Smaller LD payments are collected and deposited with MOF weekly by our finance staff.**

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To support the CSC and the DSC computer systems, a highly skilled Network Administrator, Lamine Kamara was recruited last year in anticipation of CNDRA's Headquarters being fully networked and connected to the Monrovia Fiber Optic infrastructure. We expect this to happen before the end of 2013.

I am happy to report that the DSC and CSC are both managed by recently trained CNDRA staff with only oversight by the consultant.

As part of this transformation, the Ministry of Finance/Central Bank will very soon be opening an annex on our premises. This will significantly impact the waiting time and satisfaction of our customers.

Members of the Press, recently, we discovered and were able to bring some very valuable national documents to CNDRA. You are aware of this because the President of Liberia visited and inspected these historical documents. The President has already given approval for additional GOL funding to assist us in the preserving these documents and improving security and protecting the premises where these holdings are kept.

Looking into the future, we will be placing considerable emphasis on preserving government records and making them accessible to the public through our freedom of information mandate. During the tour, you will see newly renovated repositories for presidential papers, deed documents and public records in general. In collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, a new designated space is now ready to receive critical financial records from 2006 to present, consistent with the IMF mandate. We believe this will provide us an opportunity to pilot some of our new ideas for the preservation, drawing on our recent experience with the Digitization of Deeds records. The new security initiatives include video surveillance, access control, and fire suppression for selected areas of our premises.

In this quarter, we will begin transforming our county offices to reflect some of the reforms now in place at our headquarters in Monrovia. Our Buchanan and Ganta offices will be the first to be equipped with computers to connect to our servers here in order to provide similar services to our customers in those areas.

Members of the Press, all of these reforms could not have been possible without the development of human capacity. Hence, we have spent considerable effort to train and retrain our staff over the last four years. Recently nine members of our staff return from a 6-week Preservation Training at Ghana Archives. A member of our staff also returned over the weekend from a 9-month IT training in Accra. He will be taking up his position as Assistant Supervisor for Technical Support in the DSC. More than 20 members of our junior and senior staff completed various training 2-8 week courses at LIPA earlier this year.

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We are very supportive of our staff in pursuing efforts to improve themselves and will continue as resources are available. Several staff members are currently attending university both at the undergraduate and graduate level with our financial support or flexibility with working hours. Our Deputy Director-General, Mr. Alexander Saylee is a student at the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law while the Financial Comptroller, Personnel Director, Information Director, and Technical Coordinator are all pursuing studies at the University of Liberia under CNDRA local scholarship program.

Finally, Members of the Press, as we prepare to integrate all of our systems and services and move our Agency forward, we will be guided by objectivity as we make hard choices and bold decisions. Toward this end, through assistance from MCC, we have recruited a young Liberian Consultant with considerable experience in Auditing and project management, Mr. Martin Saye Kolleh. He will be working directly in my office to assist in transforming the various units of CNDRA consistent with the mandate of the Agency. This will definitely be a process and not an event because we think it will be on-going and deliberately slow in order to bring all of our employees along.

Members of the Press, I will now take questions before we proceed with the tour.

TOUR Plan

1. Digital Scanning Center
2. Customer Service Center

Soon to be opened

1. Ministry of Finance/Central Bank branch
2. MOF financial document center