

CELEBRATING 'THIEVES'

"The same Liberian people who are crying every day saying there is corruption were given the opportunity to hear a case of corruption and bring down guilty verdict and they started accepting bribe, this thing has to stop." – LACC Chairman, James Verdier



Liberians Celebrate Corrupt Officials - Anti-Corruption Agency Laments

By Edwin Genoway, Jr

Published in the Wednesday, February 8, 2017 edition of FrontPage Africa.

After losing several corruption cases in Liberia, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) Chairman, Cllr. James Verdier, has accused Liberians of celebrating corrupt officials of government.

Cllr. Verdier said Liberians who are to be helping in the fight against corruption were found in the act of partying with officials of government accused or indicted of corruption.

Speaking on the Truth FM breakfast show, Cllr. Verdier described Liberians as beneficiaries of corrupt officials while public officials themselves were benefactors of the corruption virus.

"Even Liberians themselves celebrate public officials who are engaged in corruption," he said.

"They celebrate them because they are beneficiaries and these public officials serve as benefactors of corruption."

"So whenever someone is accused of corruption, instead of condemning and denouncing them, they are upholding them -- they carry them in the churches and honor them--these are the kind of things we need to talk about and stop," Cllr Verdier said.

The LACC boss averred that the attitude of some Liberians in defending public officials accused of corruption calls themselves into question.

"Take for example the NPA case with Matilda Parker, why will the jurors accept to be tampered with?"

The jurors are not people from space. They are comprised of people within the community, but they were tampered with and that is an integrity problem," he explained.

"Liberians complained of corruption but do nothing to fight the virus."

"The same Liberian people who are crying every day saying there is corruption, were given the opportunity to hear a case of corruption and bring down guilty verdict and they started accepting bribe. This thing has to stop!"

He, however, disclosed that the LACC is bent on building a stellar legal team to battle corruption at all levels.

"We are trying to build a team."

"The legal team has been doing very well. I can't say that it is the best legal team; we are striving to improve our legal team; we are striving to improve our investigative ability to make sure that we can conduct timely independent and credible investigation that will be able to gather enough evidence that are prosecutable and we're working on these things," he said.

He praised the LACC for making progress in the fight to battle corruption, saying the institution is still in its infancy stage.

"The institution has been around just since 2008. I think it's going to grow stronger and better in terms of investigation and prosecution but again people say you put your mouth where your money is."

"For an institution that is so underfunded, I think the LACC has done whole lot of good things that people are missing, maybe we are not putting all of them out there but I think our team is getting better, we need more funding that we can build far more better legal team that will be able to win cases."

Prospect in the fight of corruption

The LACC boss also pointed out some of what he sees as prospects of the Commission.

"There are high huge prospects in terms of the rule of law. Rule of law will prevail in terms of the fight against corruption."

"We will begin to see some dividends in the not too distance future."

"As a matter of fact, I will not be immediate because different things are happening. Different foundations have been laid and we need to just improve upon it but I am saying using our current laws, we have to keep fighting. We have to keep pushing."

He said people are beginning to understand that corruption deprives the country of development.

"It deprives people of education, it deprives nation of huge dividends. If we continue to turn a blind side, the issue of corruption will overpower us."

He said the people are disappointed in in the fight of corruption because they expect rapid result.

"I think the disappointment comes because the general public expected certain things to happen with maximum speed and maybe we are not experiencing this level of speed."

"But I believe strongly as a professional and as a lawyer and as an advocate of human rights, I believe there have been giant steps taken."

"Look, we need to commend the government first for establishing these institutions of anti-corruption."

Cllr. Verdier said the fight against corruption is not only theirs but other anti-graft institutions as well.

"We are making steps and making strides to make sure that we can provide some relief to the Liberian people. Government officials do not have an enclave that they can run to forever."

"The laws have been promulgated and strengthened and I think with time, many persons will begin to go behind bars because of this. We cannot get frustrated; we cannot be defeated because the issue of corruption has been in Liberia since 1864."

He said one of the frustrations of the LACC is the lack of corruption court in Liberia and he's not in the know of a plan by the Legislature to establish one.

"I don't know any record on the establishment of corruption court before the lawmakers and this has been part of our frustration."

"We have recommended in all our annual reports that we need to do something to move ahead of this whole fight."

"We provided a situation where the LACC will be able to take cases to court directly and stop waiting for three months."

"We done some good work and provided some support to the office of the President by submitting a bill, a revised act of the LACC to the office of the President."

"We are hoping that she can actually present this to the legislature so the legislature can act on it to establish the corruption court,"

Cordial relationship with Legislature

The relationship between the Legislature has not been cordial in the past few months since the LACC invited former Speaker Alex Tyler and Representative Adolph Lawrence and other lawmakers for an investigation into acts of corruption

Cllr. Verdier said he expects cordiality among all branches of government and not just the LACC and the Legislature.

"Our relationship should actually be cordial with all branches of government but unfortunately with the National Legislature, I don't think our relationship has been that cordial and we are looking forward to improve upon that."