

# 'Hands-off': Senator Wants Executive Off County's Mittal Steel Benefits

01/08/09 - Nat Nyuan Bayjay, nbayjay@frontpageafrica.com ( 231-77-402-737)

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mid tense debate and mounting pressure between the Executive Branch involving some of its ministers and superintendents on one hand and members of the Legislative Branch from both levels of the National Legislature on the other hand, some lawmakers appear unhappy with the Executive arm of government and want its hands completely off the social development packages for counties that are fortunate to have the giant steel company, ArcelorMittal, operating.

Nimba, Grand Bassa and Bong Counties are three counties that have been benefitting from the Social Development Funds allotted annually in the tone of US\$1.3 million, US\$1 million and US\$500,000 respectively by ArcelorMittal in accordance with the Mineral Development Agreement (MDA) signed between the company and the Liberian Government.

Lawmakers from particularly the two counties of Grand Bassa and Nimba have been crying foul on the management of the funds, stating and constantly crying on the shoulders of the third branch of government who they allege are misapplying the funds through its Ministers of Internal Affairs and Lands, Mines and Energy while at the same time the superintendents' of these counties hands are being tied into the saga most often.

Following constant outcry by Nimba County Senior Senator Prince Johnson (independent) on the matter, Grand Bassa County Junior Senator Nathaniel S. Innis, Sr. (Liberty Party-LP) became the latest member of the First Branch of government to join in the fray.

Senator Innis told FrontPageAfrica that it is time that the Executive takes its hands-off the SDF of the counties because, according to him, those it placed in care of the funds are "eating it".

"Let it be known to all of you my Bassa citizens and residents that as your elected senators and representatives, we are far away from spending development funds. In other words, we do not spend money but we allocate money for the Executive to spend in the interest of you the citizens and the country", he said.

Senator Innis, during his annual legislative report told the citizens and residents of Grand Bassa County that the county's share of the ArcelorMittal's Social Development Fund has not been fully received by the county while Bong and Nimba Counties have fully received theirs.



## NOT SPENDING MONEY

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*Senator Nathaniel S. Innis, Sr., Grand Bassa County Junior (Liberty Party-LP)*

“It is also important and regrettable to report to you that Nimba and Bong Counties received all of their funds from ArcelorMittal Steel’s contribution for 2008/2009 through the Government which are being deposited in their respective bank accounts. But Bassa is yet to receive the balance US\$1, 3331,507 for Fiscal 2008/2009”, the Bassa lawmaker pointed out.

He said the amount of US\$2, 331,507 was the direct cash paid by ArcelorMittal to the Liberian Government for the county’s Social Development Fund out of which only US\$1 million was received by the county as indicated by the superintendent of the county.

He further stated that another US\$1 million has been budgeted again for the current Fiscal Year 2009/2010 in addition to the balance over US\$1.3 million.

With the long standing unresolved dispute between two of the county’s lawmakers and its superintendent in persons of the junior senator and Representative Gabriel Smith (both of the Liberty Party) and Superintendent Julia Duncan-Cassell, Senator Innis continues to insist that the citizens should hold the Executive Branch, through the Superintendent and the Ministers of Internal Affairs and Lands, Mines and Energy, responsible for what he considers to be the unaccounted portion of the county’s Social Development Fund.

He stated: “What becomes of the balance of the Social Development Funds for the county placed in the National Budget for 2008/2009 which budget period has lapsed? Where is the money? This is what you our citizens and residents need to know”.

There have been deep debates and arguments among members of the National Legislature and various superintendents over the handling of the County Development Funds (CDF), an annual budgetary allocation of US\$15,000 meant for each of the country’s 15 counties. As a result, the headache among legislative members and superintendents from counties such as Nimba, Grand Bassa and Bong have been doubled with the introduction of the ArcelorMittal’s SDF adding to that of the CDF.

During her annual address to the National Legislature in 2009, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf told members of that august body that they must refrain from the CDF—something that resulted into heated arguments as lawmakers at the time protested that it was unacceptable as this would yield to the Executive’s absolute control of the CDF’s.

Commenting on the Report of the erstwhile Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the Liberty Party lawmaker informed his citizens that responding on the Report would mean ‘jumping the gun’ as the National Legislature is on break and that President Sirleaf has not failed to implement the recommendations of the report yet.

He said that the National Legislature will only act within the framework of the law if the President fails or refuses to implement the Report within three months in accordance to Section 48 of the TRC’s Act.

Since taking their annual break over three months now, reactions from members of the National Legislature concerning the TRC Report have been different with some of them saying they must hold palava-hut discussions with those they represent while others say they would only act on the Report when they resume in about a week’s time.

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