

**Minister-Designate Gongar Decries 'Chaotic' Education System in Liberia: 04/26/2010 - Nat Nyuan Bayjay, nbayjay@frontpageafrica.com ( 231-77-402-737**

Monrovia - The man who President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf hopes will help solve the country's poor educational system has described as chaotic the current educational system that he may be inheriting from dismissed Dr. Joseph Kortu's administration as he emphasized that the solution to the country's educational problem is the introduction of what he termed as a culture of reading.



Education Minister-Designate Othello Gongar told members of the Senate Committee Monday during a rather friendly and interactive senate hearing that the country's educational system is in complete chaos, though he declined to say whether it was worsened during former Education Minister Kortu's administration.

"The current educational system? I'd say that the educational system is now in a chaos", he responded to a question from one of the Senate Committee members who wanted to be convinced that the Minister-Designate knows the status of a system he would be assuming shortly if confirmed.

Gongar whose appointment meant the dismissal of embattled Dr. Kortu will be returning to the Ministry of Education for the second time as Minister if confirmed by the Liberian Senate, having previously served under the late President Samuel Doe's administration as Liberia's last pre-war Education Minister. He emphasized that there has been no successful system at the Education Ministry as long as he can remember despite attempts in the past to do so.

When quizzed on why he thinks that the country's educational system is in such a messy and chaotic condition, the experienced-looking and confident Education Minister-Designate named as one major factor the ministry staffers' inability to be able to identify or know what their functions are. "People don't know what their functions or jobs are at the Ministry", he sounded.

He told members of the Committee that his vast experience in handling Liberia's educational sector in the past will help remedy the country's current educational problem.

#### **Liberia At Risk Without 'Culture of Reading'**

With a bulk of the already less than approximately 30 per cent of the country's literate population lacking serious interest in developing any habit of reading, the new man to take charge of the country's destitute educational sector has identified as a serious risk to achieving any educational ambition any reform without the introduction of what he termed as a culture of reading.

Education Designate-Minister Gongar promised to introduce a culture of reading as a key component of whatever reform he and his new team want to bring about at the Education Ministry. "Without a reading culture, Liberia is at risk" he said. He also promised that when confirmed he and his team will put forth attractive incentives that will take and keep teachers in the rural parts of the country as part of his decentralization plan.

#### **'War Erases Accomplishments'**

The former Education Minister who is seeking his second chance for the same post however blamed the war for destroying whatever legacies and developments left behind by him during his five years spent as the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL)'s education minister in pre-war Liberia.

Curiosity from the Chairman of the Senate's Education Committee, Grand Kru County's Blamo Nelson, sparked questions about his previous accomplishments in which Gongar replied: "Most of our accomplishments were destroyed in the war".

He named the institution of a good library system and well-equipped science laboratories as some of the remarkable achievements he tailored during his past ministerial function.

Also facing the Senate's Committee Tuesday was Deputy Minister-Designate for Instruction, Martoh Kpangbai who assured the Senators that when confirmed the issues of sub-standardized and non-fixed curriculum will be addressed with urgency.

"It is an embarrassing situation that Liberian students will take a regional test with none making a pass", Kpangbai lamented as he told the Senate to hold him accountable if corrective measures are not taken in these directions.

It is a known fact that most of the schools throughout the land and breath of Liberia lack or refuse to follow any prescribed instructional curriculum, a factor that most observes attribute to the regular mass failure of Liberian students during public and regional examinations. Kpangbai replaces the Former Deputy Minister for Instructions, Hester Catakaw if confirmed.

Catakaw, in addition to her sharing the 'irresponsible' label branded by President Sirleaf as a result of the President's huge disappointment in her and her former boss Kortu, was also reported to being involved in other financial acts as media reports reported that she crossed a US\$45,000 deal with a local printing press for the printing of 5,000 text books comprising of stories written mainly by local writers outside of the Ministry's Financial section.

Gongar, on the other hand, would become President Sirleaf's second education minister after she relieved Dr. Kortu of his post in the midst of several complaints concerning his under-performance including his implication in the General Auditing Commission (GAC)'s 'Heavily Indebted Poor Countries' (HIPC) audit report.

The former Education Minister's situation was further worsened by the President's own assessment of the Jonathan E. Goodrich School's terrible and ill-filthy condition which led her to describe him at the time as "irresponsible behavior". These were coupled with several media reports of the Ministry's insensitivity to the plight of hundreds of Liberian school children who, if fortunate to have a school building, would have to sit on bear floors and lack stationary while others complain of an ineffective 'Compulsory Free Education' as professed by the Unity Party (UP) government.