

THE STAGE MEDIA-LIBERIA

NEWSLETTER - EDITION THREE



STORIES IN THIS EDITION



Explainer: The Effects of Power Theft in Margibi



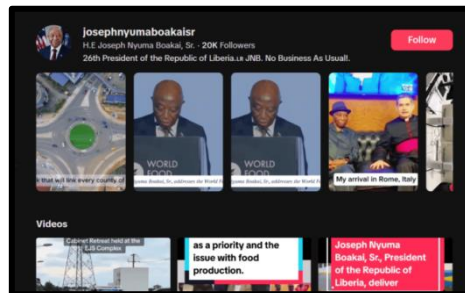
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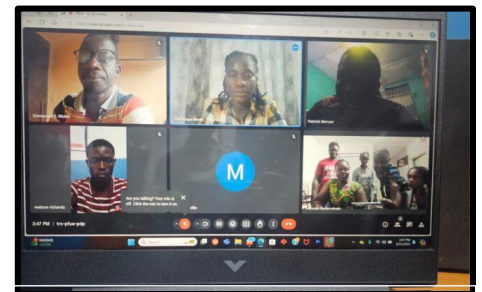
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Explainer! Does President Boakai have a TikTok account?



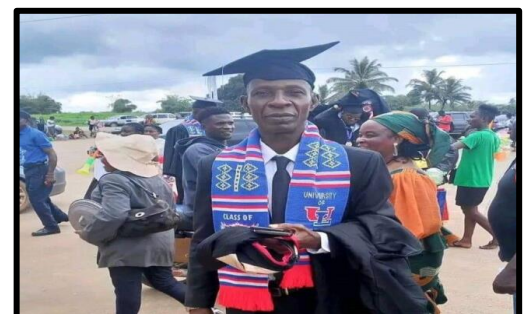
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Editor's Note

The Stage Media (TSM), Liberia's first fact-checking media institution with the overarching vision of mitigating misinformation and disinformation was established in 2020 to tackle misinformation and disinformation while bringing to light untold stories of survivors and ensuring that the powerful and elites are held accountable.

With the wide spread of misinformation and disinformation across various social media platforms in Liberia, it has been an amazing journey providing verified content for Liberians over the last four years.

To ensure our fact-check cuts across every sector irrespective of educational background, our content with support from the International Fact-checking Network is translated into pidgin and aired on local radio stations in the counties. Those pidgin contents are also published on our YouTube channel and other social media pages.

TSM has promoted media literacy to enable citizens to become knowledgeable about the danger of information disorder to have the public participate in decision-making processes from an informed background. Also, we strongly believe that educating the public will make them verify content before sharing it on various social media handles.

At ***TSM***, we believe that providing verified information to the public and having them participate in information verification improves accountability, good governance, respect of the rule of law, and promotes a responsible society.

In September, we published five explainers and eleven Fact-checks.

We urge you to always follow our social media pages and website to get verify content.





Explainer: The Effects of Power Theft in Margibi

By: The Stage Media-Liberia

The Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC), established by the government in 1973, is responsible for providing reliable electricity across Liberia. However, power theft, where individuals bypass or tamper with electric meters to access electricity illegally, is rampant, particularly in Margibi County. This unlawful act is undermining the financial stability of LEC, leading to damaged transformers, power outages, and increased fire hazards from improper connections.

Recent incidents include the arrest of 23 business owners in Margibi for electricity theft, with one prominent case involving the CEO of Lofa Mineral Water Company. Power theft is classified as a second-degree felony in Liberia and is punishable by fines or imprisonment. The illegal practice has caused LEC to lose around \$48 million annually, according to CEO Monie Captan, prompting stronger enforcement of the Anti-Power Theft Law.

Citizens, particularly those who pay for electricity, are frustrated by this situation, as it not only affects service quality but also creates an unfair financial burden. Public calls are being made for stricter legal actions against perpetrators to protect the integrity of Liberia's electricity supply.



Claim: 1. LRA does not purchase cars for government officials; GSA does.

Claim: 2. According to the law, no vehicle above \$45,000 US can be purchased for a minister.

By: The Stage Media-Liberia

Aloysius Howe claimed on social media that the Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA) does not purchase cars for government officials, but rather the General Service Agency (GSA) does. He also stated that according to the law, no vehicle over \$45,000 can be purchased for a minister. Howe's post gained significant attention amid controversy surrounding Amin Modad, the Minister of Commerce, who faced criticism for allegedly using funds from a company under investigation to buy a luxury car. Modad clarified that the vehicle was purchased for the ministry and not for personal use.

Verification efforts revealed that while the LRA typically does not buy vehicles for government officials, it can provide logistical support when needed for revenue collection. The GSA, according to its procurement department, no longer has the authority to purchase vehicles for officials since the enactment of the Public Procurement and Concession Commission Act in 2010; this responsibility now falls to individual ministries.

Furthermore, research confirmed that the 2024 Budget Law states that the procurement of government vehicles for ministers (excluding top officials like the President and Chief Justice) must not exceed \$45,000. Therefore, while Howe's assertion about the GSA is misleading, his claim regarding the price ceiling for ministers' vehicles is accurate.

Claim: "A Grand Gedean girl, identified as Promise Bowah, was tragically killed by her boyfriend in Caldwell."

Verdict: Correct

By: Ayeason Yeeba



A claim posted by Inside Grand Gedeh on social media reported that a 21-year-old woman, Promise Bowah, and her five-year-old child were tragically killed by her boyfriend, Madison Garpeh, in White Plain, Upper Caldwell. The post mentioned that Bowah was four months pregnant and that Garpeh was on the run after the alleged murders.

Upon verification, the spokesperson for the Liberia National Police, Cecelia Clarke, confirmed that Bowah was six months pregnant at the time of her death and that Garpeh has been arrested. However, the suspect has not yet spoken to confirm his involvement in the killings. The police also issued a press release on the matter.

Conclusion:

The claim made by Inside Grand Gedeh is correct, as the suspect, Madison Garpeh, is now in police custody.



Claim: "An innocent secondary student of S.D. School System whose parents cannot afford graduation fees is ordered, handcuffed, and imprisoned on her way to jail."

Verdict: Misleading

By: Augusta Lafalay

On September 25, 2024, Martin K.N. Kollie claimed that Grace B. Jlateh, a student of S.D. School System in Brewerville, Liberia, was arrested and handcuffed because her family couldn't afford US\$125 in graduation fees. Kollie's claim sparked significant attention online.

However, upon investigation, it was found that Grace had already paid the US\$125 fee in full. The issue arose over a US\$10 collateral fee for the rental of her graduation gown, which was to be refunded upon the gown's return. Grace could not pay the extra US\$10 and, accompanied by her sister, demanded her graduation package. This led to an altercation where both sisters allegedly insulted the school's principal, Papa V. Corneh, and threatened to disrupt the graduation ceremony.

In response, Principal Corneh filed a complaint with the local court. When a sheriff arrived to enforce the court's order, Grace was identified and unexpectedly handcuffed, though Corneh stated he did not intend for her to be treated this way. The principal claimed that the arrest was meant for Grace's sister, who had threatened to disrupt the event, not for Grace herself.



Claim: “8,510 newborns die annually during childbirth in Liberia.”

Verdict: Mostly Correct

By: R. Joyclyn Wea

Martin K.N. Kollie claimed that 1,100 women and 8,510 newborns die annually during childbirth in Liberia, citing the World Health Organization (WHO). Data from various sources, including a UNICEF report and the Liberia Demographic and Health Surveys (LDHS), confirm high maternal and newborn mortality rates in Liberia. The 2024 UNICEF press release and World Bank data support the figure of 1,100 maternal deaths annually.

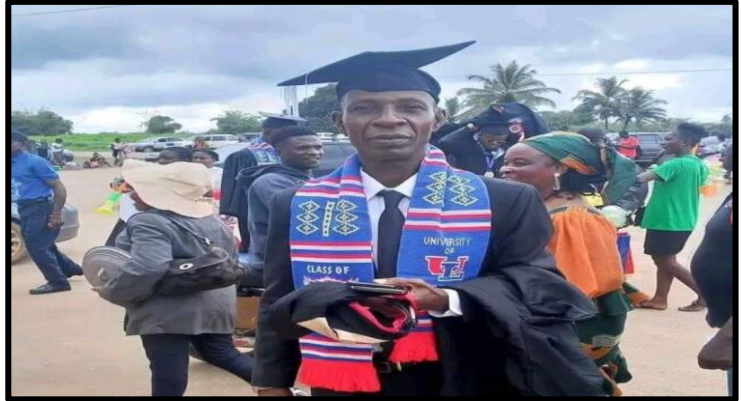
Liberia ranks among the highest globally for maternal and newborn mortality, with the country facing significant challenges in improving infant and maternal health outcomes. As of 2024, the infant mortality rate in Liberia is estimated at 45.642 deaths per 1,000 live births, marking a gradual decline from previous years.

Conclusion: Kollie's claim is mostly accurate, as the data confirms Liberia's extremely high maternal and newborn mortality rates.

Claim: “Commerce and Trade Inspector General Dorr Cooper ID#26371 belongs to a dead person.”

Verdict: Unproven, we found no record of the claim.

By: Augusta Lafalay



Martin K.N. Kollie claimed that Dorr Cooper, Commerce and Trade Inspector General, used an ID number that belonged to a deceased person, raising suspicions about Cooper's academic credentials at the University of Liberia (UL). Kollie alleged that Cooper did not attend classes and obtained his student clearance illegitimately. However, Kollie did not provide any proof about the deceased person tied to the ID number.

The University of Liberia confirmed that Cooper was not a member of the 104th graduating class, but investigations into the claims were still ongoing. A professor at UL expressed concern over Cooper's ID number, but no conclusive evidence was provided. Another individual claiming the ID belonged to his deceased uncle did not respond to verification attempts.

Conclusion: There is currently no evidence proving that Cooper's ID number belonged to a deceased person.



Claim 1: “Apply for the American Visa Lottery to relocate to the United States at no cost.”

Claim 2: “Get Instant Visa to Canada”

Verdict: Those websites offering visas to America and Canada are fake.

By: Augusta Lafalay



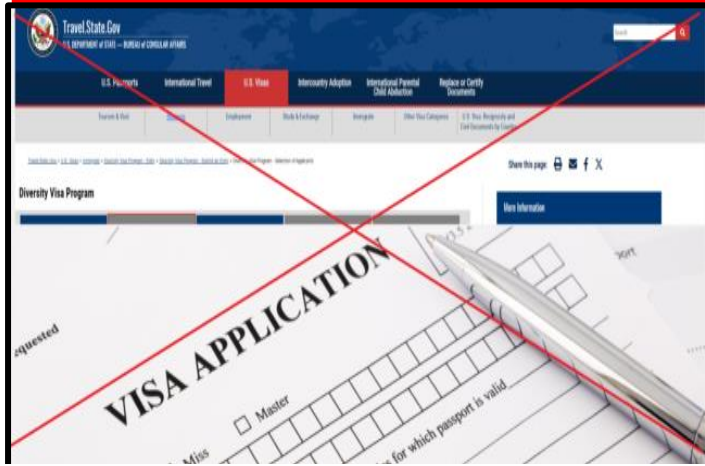
Explainer: Was Tweah Given VIP Treatment by the Court?

By: Augusta Lafalay

This claim arose after ex-Finance Minister Samuel Tweah turned himself in to Criminal Court ‘C’ following a writ of arrest for multiple charges, including economic sabotage and theft of public funds. Darlington Collins, a Liberian student, alleged that unlike U.S. courts, where an accused has 72 hours to comply with court orders, Liberian courts offer VIP treatment, suggesting special privileges for high-profile individuals.

Verification showed that while three other former officials were detained for failing to post bond, Tweah, upon his return to Liberia, secured an \$8 million property bond and was not imprisoned. No record exists proving Tweah received special treatment beyond following standard legal procedures. The case against him is scheduled for trial on November 12, 2024.

Conclusion: The claim that Tweah and others received VIP treatment remains unproven, as there is no documented evidence of preferential treatment beyond the usual legal processes.

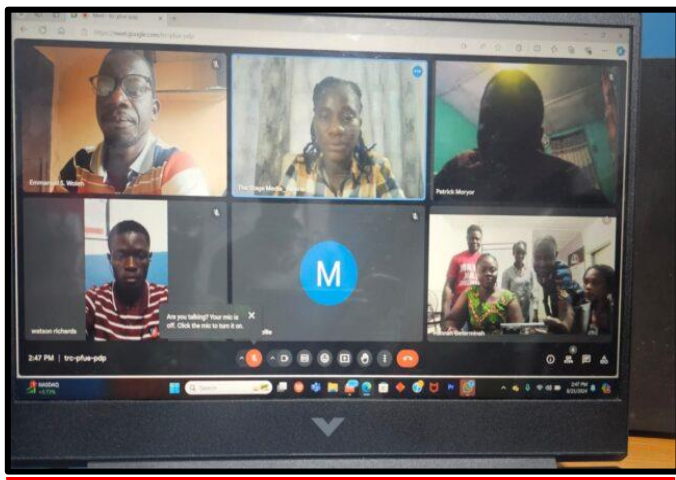


Two circulating claims on WhatsApp and Messenger promote websites offering free applications for U.S. and Canadian visas, including the "American Visa Lottery" and "Canada Visa Lottery."

These websites request personal details and encourage users to share links to increase their chances of selection. After verification using online tools, the websites were found to have poor trust scores and lack credibility. Official visa processes for both countries do not operate through such platforms.

Conclusion: The websites offering U.S. and Canadian visas through these lotteries are fraudulent. Applicants should avoid these fake sites and refer to official government sources for accurate visa information.





Explainer: TSM improves Journalists' skills to tackle Information Disorder

By: The Stage Media-Liberia

In June, Stage Media-Liberia (TSM) was awarded the BUILD grant to enhance fact-checking efforts in Liberia. As part of this initiative, TSM launched a fellowship program in five counties, partnering with local radio stations to air content in Liberian pidgin, ensuring accessible and trustworthy information for rural communities.

Fellows were trained in fact-checking tools, policies, and reporting skills to combat misinformation. Over the next eight months, they will produce fact-checked content to hold public figures accountable.

The project aims to improve media literacy and trust while addressing Liberia's information disorder.

Claim: "MTN-30th Anniversary Gifts, everyone can win 50GB Internet Data and iPhone 16."

Verdict: Fake website rewarding MTN, 30th Anniversary Gift.

By: Augusta Lafalay

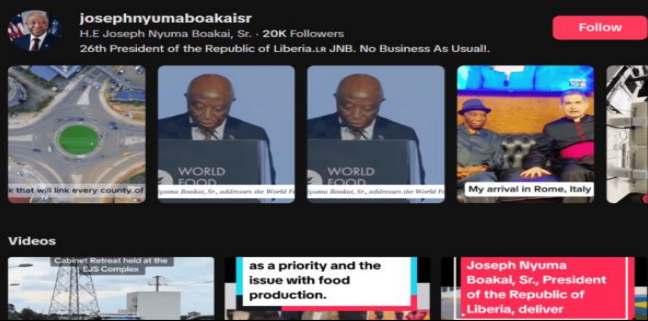


A circulating WhatsApp message claims that MTN is celebrating its 30th anniversary by offering users 50GB of Internet data and an iPhone 16. The message links to a website that presents MTN's logo and invites users to answer a few questions before claiming a reward. After completing the questions, users receive a message claiming they've won an iPhone 15 Pro Max, but they must first share the link with five WhatsApp groups or 15 friends to claim the prize.

Upon investigation, the website was found to be suspicious. Scam detection tools showed that the site had a low trust score (1%) and was hosted on a recently created domain, which is a red flag for scams. Additionally, the website's security protocol (HTTP) does not necessarily ensure legitimacy.

Conclusion: The website and offer are part of a scam, using common phishing tactics. There is no genuine MTN promotion offering these gifts. Users are advised not to engage with the website.





Explainer! Does President Boakai have a TikTok account?

By: R. Joyclyn Wea

TikTok is becoming increasingly popular among Liberia's youthful population, alongside WhatsApp and Facebook, which had 1.3 million users (26.4% of the population) by 2021, a notable rise from 2.5% in 2010. President Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Liberia's 26th president, took office in 2023 after decades of public service.

A TikTok account claiming to belong to President Boakai has surfaced with 17.2K followers and 49.3K likes. The account, created recently, features the quote, "26th President of the Republic of Liberia. LR JNB. No Business As Usual!" The first post appeared on August 17, 2024, tagged "Liberia Transition," and the latest post was on October 16, 2024, during Boakai's speech at the World Food Forum in Rome.

Despite these activities, the account's authenticity is questionable. Emails sent to Presidential Press Secretary Kula Fofana for verification have gone unanswered. According to cyber technician Edward Brown, it is important for the government to develop clear communication strategies, especially with youth, who increasingly rely on social media for information.

Conclusion: TSM cannot independently confirm the legitimacy of the TikTok account. Public caution is advised when interacting with the account, as there are uncertainties about its authenticity.



Claim: "The CDC government failed the MCC Compass five times within six years."

Verdict: Misleading

By: The Stage Media-Liberia

Daniel O. Sando, Deputy Minister for Public Affairs in Liberia, claimed that the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) government failed the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compass five times within six years. However, this claim has been deemed misleading.

Research indicates that from 2018 to 2022, Liberia only passed the MCC Compass indicators twice, in 2018 and 2023. The CDC government failed the MCC compass on four occasions, not five as claimed by Sando. The MCC assesses countries based on governance, economic freedom, and social conditions to determine eligibility for funding, using third-party indicators to evaluate performance in key areas.

In conclusion, while Sando's assertion contained some truth, it overstated the failures of the CDC government regarding the MCC compass.





Claim: “Anyone who refuses to update their SIM card using National Identification ID and LTA six months from now will be blocked with immediate effect.”

Verdict: True, LTA urged residents of Liberia to register their SIM cards using the National Identification Card.

By: The Stage Media-Liberia

Shine Liberia reported that the Liberia Telecommunication Authority (LTA) stated individuals who do not update their SIM cards using the National Identification ID within six months will face immediate deactivation. This claim has been verified as true.

The LTA announced a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Identification Registry (NIR) to facilitate free National ID registration for updating SIM card information. According to the LTA, all SIM card owners must register their numbers with their Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) using the NIR-issued ID. Failure to comply within the specified timeframe will result in the deactivation of unregistered SIM cards.

Thus, the claim by Shine Liberia accurately reflects the LTA's directive regarding SIM card registration in Liberia.



Claim: “New Georgia United Methodist Church members protest against same-sex marriage in the church.”

Verdict: Misleading, no same-sex wedding or marriage happens at the United Methodist Church in New Georgia.

By: Ayeason Yeeba

The claim that members of the New Georgia United Methodist Church protested against same-sex marriage due to an alleged gay wedding has been found misleading. On October 13, 2024, a local blog, *Online Parrot*, reported that a same-sex marriage ceremony was taking place at the church, leading to protests from some church members. However, investigations revealed no such wedding occurred.

Bishop Samuel Quire of the United Methodist Church in Liberia confirmed there was no gay wedding at the church, asserting that the UMC will not endorse same-sex marriage. Despite the U.S. General Conference lifting its ban on same-sex marriage, the Liberian branch of the UMC has not accepted any such arrangements.

Eyewitnesses and police statements corroborate that while protests did occur, they were related to the suspension of Rev. Leo Mason, a pastor who opposed same-sex marriage, not a wedding. Thus, while there were protests, they were not in response to a same-sex marriage as initially reported.





Claim: “The MVTC had \$111,476 in the 2022 fiscal budget; in 2023, they had \$140,579. This year, under the rescue government, their fiscal budget is \$4000. And this government is committed to youth education and empowerment.”

Verdict: True, the government reduced the MVTC budget from US\$ 140,879 to US\$ 4,000 but the figures stated by Howe were either overstated or understated.

By: The Stage Media-Liberia



Explainer: What to Know About Christopher Wleh Sivili's Case

By: Augusta Lafalay

Christopher Wleh Sivili, a former student leader at the University of Liberia, is seeking justice for alleged torture he endured during an anti-Weah protest on Liberia's Independence Day in 2022. Sivili and members of the Student Unification Party (SUP) protested against the government when they clashed with a pro-Weah group, leading to Sivili being captured, stripped, and tortured.

Following the incident, the Liberia National Police arrested several individuals from the Coalition for Democratic Change Council of Patriots (CDC-COP) on August 2, 2023. They were charged with serious offenses, but the government struggled to present evidence, leading to a delay in the trial process.

In October 2023, the defense motioned for dismissal of the charges due to the government's failure to proceed with the trial as mandated by law. The court granted this motion, allowing the government to re-file if they could gather sufficient evidence in the future.

As of July 2024, Sivili continues to call for an independent investigation, citing ongoing trauma and mental health issues stemming from the incident. Legal experts indicated that while the previous case was dismissed without prejudice, the government has the option to pursue a new indictment.

Aloysius Howe, former Special Assistant to Liberia's Ex-Finance Minister, claimed that the Monrovia Vocational Training Center (MVTC) had its budget drastically reduced from \$140,879 in 2023 to \$4,000 in 2024 under President Joseph N. Boakai's administration.

Verification revealed that while Howe correctly stated the 2024 budget allocation for MVTC is indeed \$4,000, his figures for the previous years were inaccurate. The actual budget for MVTC in 2022 was \$149,756, not the \$111,476 he mentioned, and the 2023 allocation was \$140,879, slightly higher than the \$140,579 he claimed.

In conclusion, Howe's assertion about the significant budget cut for MVTC is true, but the figures he provided for the earlier fiscal years were either overstated or understated.



Claim 1: “Sen. Abraham Darius Dillon took US\$45K for a car, US\$10K for constituency visits, 5K for furniture, 3K for scratch cards, 3K gas slips, 75K for retreat food, etc. It’s even more than Amin Modad’s US\$96K.”

Claim 2: “Yearly Budget of Sen. Darius Dillon: 10k for constituency visit and a 45k Jeep.”

Verdict: Partly true and Misleading

By: Augusta Lafalay

Martin K.N. Kollie claimed that Montserrado County Senator Abraham Darius Dillon received over US\$96,000, including US\$45,000 for a car, US\$10,000 for constituency visits, and various other amounts for scratch cards, gas slips, and retreat food.

In response, Senator Dillon refuted these claims, stating he has not received any of those specific funds, including the US\$45,000 vehicle allocation, which he has not yet accessed or purchased.

Other officials confirmed that legislators receive US\$2,000 monthly for gas and US\$10,000 annually for constituency visits, but no funding for scratch cards or the amounts cited by Kollie.

Research into the 2024 National Budget showed accurate allocations for constituency visits and gasoline but no support for the specific claims made by Kollie. Thus, Kollie's assertions regarding Dillon's budget are deemed misleading.



Claim: “Hon. Cllr. J. Fonati Koffa, during his tenure as Deputy Speaker of the 54th Legislature, alarmingly overspent his budget.”

Verdict: True, 2023 showed the current Speaker overspent when he served as deputy speaker.

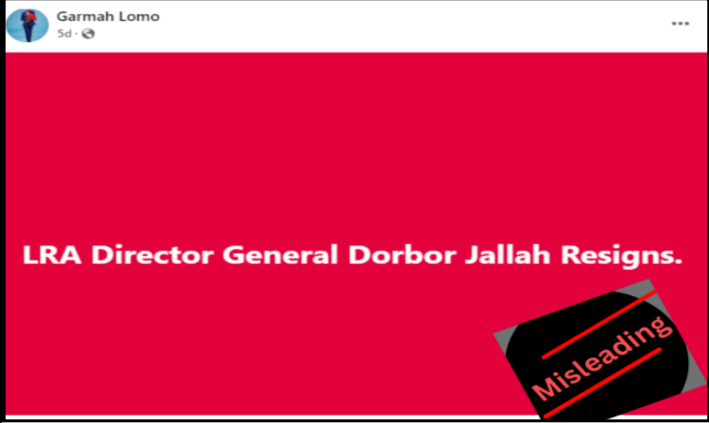
By: Hannah N. Geterminah

A resolution signed by members of Liberia's 55th legislature accused Hon. Cllr. J. Fonati Koffa, the current Speaker of the House, of significantly overspending his budget during his time as Deputy Speaker in the 54th Legislature. The resolution claimed Koffa's office spent US\$4,038,687 in fiscal year 2023, which was US\$2,936,159 over the budgeted amount of US\$1,102,528.

The lawmakers referenced the 2024 Draft National Budget and stated that this overspending reflected systemic corruption, undermining the credibility of the Speaker's office.

Verification of these claims revealed that while the initial budget allocation for Koffa's office was indeed US\$1,102,528, the actual expenditure reached US\$4,038,687, confirming the allegation of overspending. Thus, the claim is deemed true.





Claim: "LRA Director General Dorbor Jallah Resigns."

Verdict: **Misleading**, LRA Boss has not resigned

By: **Augusta Lafalay**

A claim was made by journalist Garmah Lomo that Dorbor Jallah, the Director General of the Liberian Revenue Authority (LRA), had resigned. This claim generated some attention on social media. However, verification revealed that Jallah has not resigned and remains in his position.

He publicly stated, "I've not resigned. I'm still the Commissioner General," and emphasized that he and his team are focused on expanding Liberia's revenue. The LRA's official Facebook page also confirmed that Jallah has not stepped down, and Presidential Press Secretary Kula Fofana labeled the resignation claim as "untrue."

While there have been public calls for Jallah's resignation following controversies related to the Commerce Minister's resignation, the claim of his resignation is deemed misleading.



Explainer: Has 72nd UMC Broken Away From LAC-UMC?

By: **Ayeason Yeeba**

An investigation by Stage Media-Liberia has revealed that the Seventy-Second United Methodist Church in Paynesville has removed its name from the building amid ongoing tensions regarding same-sex marriage and the removal of certain pastors. The decision came after protests against the alleged removal of pastors who preached against same-sex marriage.

On October 13, 2024, news circulated about a purported gay wedding officiated at the Seventy-Second UMC, leading to protests by church members who accused Bishop Samuel Quire of unjustly removing their pastors. The Liberia National Police intervened to restore order during the disruption of worship services.

Senior Pastor Rev. Kenneth C. Jackson confirmed that while the church's name has been removed, it remains under the United Methodist Church (UMC). Jackson has opposed the concept of regionalization, which allows local churches to adapt their policies, viewing it as contrary to biblical principles. He accused Quire and another church leader of misrepresenting regionalization and acting against the church's beliefs on same-sex marriage.

Jackson indicated that the church plans to officially leave the UMC by February 2025. UMC officials denied any involvement in same-sex marriage and claimed the suspensions of pastors were due to their disrespect towards the bishop. The controversy highlights a split within the church regarding its stance on social issues and governance.





Claim: “JZyNo Unveils His \$2 Million Mansion in Liberia” and “CIC Builds \$1.1 Million House”

Verdict: False images posted by Worldwide News Blog do not belong to CIC and JZYNO.

By: R. Joyclyn Wea

Worldwide News Blog published claims that Liberian artists JZyNo and Maurice Tosh Gayflor (CIC) unveiled mansions worth \$2 million and \$1.1 million, respectively. However, investigations reveal that these claims are false.

On October 20, 2024, the blog's posts attracted considerable attention, but upon verification, both JZyNo and CIC denied any such constructions. JZyNo clarified that the information was fabricated, suggesting it was merely "a blogging thing," and he shared a post about enjoying his ride to his apartment, which the blog misrepresented to imply he owned the alleged mansion.

Additionally, photo verification using Yandex indicated that the images shared by the blog were manipulated. Further searches on both artists' social media profiles revealed no announcements regarding new homes. The conclusion is that the blog's posts are fake and aimed at gaining followers through misleading information.



Claim: “500 persons successfully passed out of the 10k plus persons who submitted their application to the Liberia Immigration Service.”

Verdict: True, there were over 10,000 applicants, but only 500 were selected.

By: The Stage Media-Liberia

Shine Liberia, an online blog, claimed that 500 individuals successfully passed the recruitment process out of more than 10,000 applicants for the Liberia Immigration Service (LIS). This claim has been verified as true.

Stephen H. Zargo, the Commissioner of the LIS, confirmed in a press briefing that the agency received 9,743 applications. After a series of tests and evaluations, the number was narrowed down to 500 recruits, who were selected for training in Foya, Lofa County.

Thus, the post from Shine Liberia was accurate, confirming that 500 people passed out of the over 10,000 applicants.



TO READ THE FULL STORIES GO TO OUR WEBSITE:



**ALSO IF YOU SEE A CLAIM AND YOU WANT US TO
FACT-CHECK IT SEND IT TO +231 77 593 7658**