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Sierra Leone suspends health officials

January 31 2013 at 12:27am

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Freetown - Sierra Leone President Ernest Koroma has ordered the suspension of 10 health ministry officials implicated in the alleged misuse of more than a million dollars in donor funds, the government said on Wednesday.

"The nature and weight of the allegation make it imperative that those involved should be suspended from office to preclude obstruction and interference to the conduct of the investigation," a government statement read.

"Accordingly, President Koroma has directed that the 10 officials be suspended from office with immediate effect."

The officials include the ministry's chief medical officer, two permanent secretaries and accountants.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is investigating the misappropriation of 750 000 euros donated by the Geneva-based Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) and the American-linked Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

As a result of the graft claims, GAVI has frozen a grant of over \$500 000 and a new two-year grant of more than \$5-million.

The allegations include "undocumented expenses, cash disbursements from bank accounts without documentation and overcharged procurement costs relating to the purchase of ambulances", according to the ACC.

According to World Health Organisation statistics, GAVI assistance to Sierra Leone since 2000 has totalled over \$24-million for the purchase of vaccines such as the five-in-one shot which protects children against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis B and Hib (Haemophilus influenzae). - Sapa-AFP



Sierra Leone President Ernest Koroma has ordered the suspension of 10 health officials pending the results of a probe. File photo: Rebecca Blackwell

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