



Joint Press Statement for Immediate Release

(Monrovia, 8 June 2020). Recent media reports and complaints about Bad Labor Practices at Bridge International Academies (BIA) have claimed the attention of the Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education (COTAE) and the National Teachers Association of Liberia (NTAL). BIA is a controversial for-profit company and a major actor involved with the outsourcing of public schools under the Liberia Educational Advancement Program (LEAP), formerly Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL). They have received government funding to run 170 schools as part of LEAP.

Information [published](#) last week alleges that staff salaries in the company were reduced by 80-90 percent, while employees still work from home, which totally contravenes the Labor Ministry's COVID-19 Preparedness Guide for Workplaces. The article also alleges poor labor conditions and illegal dismissal and suspension among other issues, and the Ministry of Labor [announced](#) on 25 May opening an inquiry about these concerns. We wish to applaud the Ministry for launching an independent investigation into these reported excesses, which have characterized BIA's operation since 2016. Also, we wish to express our solidarity with former and current BIA staffs who are mustering the courage to speak out against unfavorable treatments they are being subjected to by the company.

BIA's involvement in Liberia has been debated since the outset, as the company initially [intended](#) to singlehandedly take over all public primary schools in the country, which generated local, regional and global outcries, including from civil society organizations, teachers, parents, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education. In 2017, an [independent evaluation](#) commissioned by the Liberian Government further raised concerns by showing that the company's cost was very high, while not delivering results at the level of this cost, and that it [expelled](#) children and teachers. The American company also operates in Kenya and Uganda, where it has similarly been denounced for its poor labor practices and lack of respect for the rule of law, which led a group of Kenyan citizens to lodge a [complaint](#) with the World Bank's accountability body: Compliance Advisory Ombudsman (CAO) in 2018.

This latest development validates longstanding stakeholders' concerns about the dangers of outsourcing public schools to a group whose foremost interest is profit and not the fulfillment and protection of the right to education of all children/students, as provided for by the Abidjan Principles on the right to education, the Sustainable Development Goal 4, Article 6 of the 1986 Liberian constitution, and other international and regional frameworks. It is disturbing that, while other companies are finding ways to

address the plights of their workers, especially during COVID-19, which has affected all facets of society, BIA will choose to, among other things “cut the salaries of its essential staff by over 80%”, as complained to the Ministry of Labor by some employees.

Recommendations:

We call on the Ministry of education to terminate its partnership with BIA, as it is causing more harm for the sector than good. A company that priorities profit over quality and fulfillment of the right to education of all Liberian children should have no place in the Liberian Education sector. Anything to the contrary will suggest that MOE sanctions poor treatment of Liberians by BIA and its largely profit-oriented operation in the country, which is at the expense of the already struggling education sector of Liberia.

Also, we call on the Ministry of Education to ensure that its current and future policies and programs meet human rights standards, including the recently adopted Abidjan Principles on the right to education. The Abidjan Principles require that the Government focuses on strengthening public education, and should a partnership be developed, it must be done without commercial actors and in accordance with the rule of law.

Finally, we call on the public (parents, students, teachers, journalists, civil society actors and other groups) to independently monitor and timely report on respect of the right to education at all private and public schools across the country, especially those awarded to BIA and other groups making business out of public education in Liberia, thus undermining the right to education of all citizens.

COTAE and NTAL remain committed to supporting holistic and sustainable efforts to improve the Liberian Education system and not one that commercializes public education and creates more mess in the sector.

Signed

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