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PRESS RELEASE

THIRD ALLOTTED DAY: CONTINUATION OF PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has Wednesday 30th May 2018 for the third successive days continued debate on the “Motion of Thanks to President Bio” for the Speech he delivered on the occasion of the State Opening of Parliament.

In view of what Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu had said earlier, presiding Speaker of the House, Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas has warned members of the public not to use any other device to record the proceedings of Parliament from the galleries, other than the Press which has such authority. He continued that any member of the public caught recording the proceedings of the House will be charged with contempt.

He has also summoned Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Government, including Professional Heads and senior administrative staff of MDAs to witness the Presidential Debate, failing which it will be deemed to be contemptuous.

Contributing to the debate, Hon. Hindolo M. Gevao of SLPP commended the past government for efforts made in energy, infrastructure and other areas aimed at improving the socio-economic livelihood of the people. Speaking on the use of executive powers, he decried former President Koroma “for the sacking of the former Vice President and the appointment of Victor Bockarie Foh to the Office of Vice President”. He referred to that action as “unconstitutional because both of them were deemed to have been duly elected as President and Vice President respectively”. He also blamed the past government “for not taking action against the police who shot defenseless demonstrators dead in Kono, Kabala, Freetown and other places in the country”, saying that those human rights abuses went without remedial and compensatory considerations. He called on the new Government not to follow bad precedents such as “the malicious and vexatious trials of Hon. Rado Yokie, Theresa Mbomaya et al, without justice being served”. He congratulated President Bio for his intention to overhaul the Judiciary, noting the suspension and reinstatement of Judges. On religion, he said “one Bishop Aruna was prevented from working in Makeni because he was deemed to have come from elsewhere in the country”.

Speaking on the challenges of water and sanitation in his constituency, he said the only clinic serving 43,000 constituents is yet to receive drugs from the free healthcare initiated by former President Koroma.

Hon. Osman Abdal Timbo in his submission said that the realm of politics is different from the profession of law, whilst commending President Bio for the developmental aspirations he had articulated in the Speech delivered to Parliament. In spite of some lacunae, according to him, he referred to the Speech as being “representative of the aspirations of the people”; saying that whether APC, C4C, or NGC would have won the presidential election, any of theirs could not have been different from his. He also said that “there is nothing new in the New Direction, other than continuity”, whilst speaking on education and the unbundling of the energy sector. He praised former President Koroma for laying the foundation of development and called on the SLPP for building on the programmes initiated by the past government, describing development as a “process”. He cautioned the new Government that “they will be judged by what they did and not what the APC did”. He also said that “coming events cast their shadows and that they should not be in a hurry to judge SLPP as they are only 55 days in governance”, whilst decrying “the executive orders on tax exemptions without recourse to agreements that had been signed, the booting of MPs from Parliament, the reinstatement of Dr. Sarah Bendu, the eviction of a Judge from his official vehicle, and the assault on the Mayor of Freetown”.

Hon. Quintin Salia-Konneh, an Independent MP thanked President Bio for carving out the road map for the development of the country, and described the Speech as “the best he has ever seen in Sierra Leone”. Speaking on critical examination, he called on MPs to provide insights and recommendations to assist the President to achieve his developmental aspirations. Allaying the fears expressed by some MPs on the implementation of the free education policy, he cited the minimum of 20% budgetary allocations to the Ministries of Education. He called “for the reversal of 6344 system of education because it only expanded the nominal value of students and left the real value of teachers”, and “the removal of the two shift with the view to increasing the contact hours in schools, including the approval and recruitment of trained and qualified teachers”. He also said “out of the six schools in his constituency, serving over 1000 pupils, only one had been approved”, whilst calling for the approval of schools that had been in operation for the past ten years and encouraged President Bio to personally supervise the implementation of the free education initiative.

Hon. Saa Francis Bendu of C4C commended President Bio and submitted that “his constituents had suffered for far too long in the hands of different players”. Speaking on inequality, he called for the review of the Mines and Minerals Act to enhance healthy sharing of the proceeds from mines to benefit the people and the affected communities. He also said that “they are yet to get the 60% shares from the sales of the 706 carat diamond by the past government”, whilst speaking on the challenges of water and agriculture in his constituency. He continued that “the issue of disability has been neglected for a long time now, in spite of the establishment of a Commission on Disability, which is benefiting the administrators instead of the beneficiaries”. In order to tap the potentials of persons with disability, he called on Government to open access to education at tertiary level, provide employment, and make buildings disable-friendly, whilst appealing to the Ministers of Defence and Internal Affairs “that recruitment at the security sector should be devolved and devoid of regional bias”.

Other MPs spoke to the motion.

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