



**OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENT BUILDING
OAU DRIVE, TOWER HILL
FREETOWN
Tel: 232-076-615187
E-mail: admin@parliament.gov.sl**



**PRESS RELEASE
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DAY ONE: PARLIAMENT COMMENCES DEBATE ON PRESIDENTIAL SPEECH

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Tuesday 17th January, 2017 commenced debate on the Presidential Speech delivered by President Koroma on the 15th December 2016, in the Chamber of Parliament, indicating the proclamation of the Fifth session of the Fourth Parliament.

The motion for debate was moved and seconded by Hon. Ibrahim Ben Kargbo and Hon. Claude D.M Kamanda, respectively that “be it resolved that we the Members of Parliament here assembled wish to thank His Excellency the President for the Address he so graciously delivered on the occasion of the State Opening of the Fifth Session of the Fourth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone in the Chamber of Parliament on Thursday 15th December, 2016”.

Whilst speaking to the motion, Hon. Ibrahim Ben Kargbo recalled when President Koroma said that once he assumed office in 2007, he already had an agenda for the development of Sierra Leone, including electricity and regular water supply. These he furthered, were critical to the Agenda for Change which he described as the policy direction for the development of the country. He said that upon assumption of office, President Koroma discovered that Freetown was one of the darkest cities in the world, which warranted him after a week to visit the Bumbuna waterfalls so as to explore the possibilities of enhancing regular electricity supply in the country. He also thanked President Koroma for using his administrative and leadership acumen to attract foreign direct investments like African Minerals Limited and London Mining Company, supporting the economy by creating jobs for Sierra Leoneans. These espoused gains; he said were affected by the twin-shocks of ebola and the drop in the ore prices in the world market. He also said that the rationalization measures were announced and implemented by Government to cushion the economic shock from which we are rapidly recovering and that by next year the economy would return to normalcy. He referred to President Koroma as having the “midas touch”, i.e whatever President Koroma touches, becomes gold. He averred comparatively with neighboring countries that Sierra Leone is number one in respect of roads and infrastructure, whilst speaking

on the need for tourists' attractions and the introduction of the free healthcare initiative targeting women and children in the country.

For his part, Hon. Francis Amara Kai-Samba acknowledged that in spite of challenges Government had made conscious strides in addressing issues which include water, electricity, education and health. He also said that ebola had compounded the challenges in the health sector, whilst making reference to the Free Health Care Initiative (FHCI) such as the distribution and supply of drugs and the high rate of infant morbidity in the country. Whilst thanking Government for the three-towns water project, he called on them to address the issue of water challenge in the Western Area. He furthered that despite Government's efforts in the energy sector, he spoke on the need for sustainable and clean supply to prevent outages. He also called for a conducive learning environment, and for teachers' absorption and speedy recruitment. He said the Eastern Region is the only one amongst others that is not having a university, unlike the West, North, and Southern Regions. He spoke on the proposals that had been put in place to upgrade Eastern Polytechnic to a university status. He averred that the entire country had enjoyed infrastructural development in respect of roads with the exception Kenema and its township. He said that the 5.2 kilometer Blama-Hangha road had been abandoned by the contractor for lack of initial payment by Government, whilst calling on the Government to improve on the welfare of the people and to also control the current inflation in the country.

Hon. Paramount Chief Sheku Tejan Fasuluku Sonsiama III described President Koroma as a man with vision, whilst lauding his drive towards infrastructural development in the country. He informed the House that as a result of that vision whose evidence is abundantly clear, he now drives less than two hours from Kono to Makeni, which was previously a day's journey. He also thanked President Koroma for the two roads which he commissioned recently in Koinadugu with tendencies to affect Kono District positively as his chieftdom in the north is bordered with Koinadugu District. He advised MPs to speak country and not politics.

Other MPs spoke to the motion as the debate continues.