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**22nd FEBRUARY 2019**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**PARLIAMENT APPROVES STATE OF PUBLIC EMERGENCY ON RAPE**

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Friday 22nd February 2019 debated and approved with some dissenting voices, a presidential proclamation on the commission of rape against women, girls and babies throughout the Republic of Sierra Leone.

The Rt. Hon. Speaker of Parliament, Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu ruled in finality that "the ayes have it", adding that "rape is an extraordinary situation which warrants an extraordinary measure like a presidential proclamation aimed at curbing this dreadful menace in our society".

In line with provision of the relevant Section in Act No. 6 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, that deals with the opinion of the President in declaring a state of emergency in the country whether in part or a whole, the following presidential proclamation was approved in Parliament:

"Now, therefore, I Rtd. Brig. Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Supreme Head of State, Grand Commander of the Order of the Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Sierra Leone, having regard to the prevalence of crimes of sexual violence committed against women, girls and babies, throughout Sierra Leone, do hereby, by this proclamation declare that a State of Public Emergency exists regarding rape and sexual violence in the whole of the Republic of Sierra Leone with effect from the 7th day of February, 2019".

Seconding the motion, the Deputy Leader of Government Business, Hon. Mathew S. Nyuma decried the high rate of reported incidences of rape and called on the House to support the approval of the presidential proclamation in light of the oath they had taken to defend and protect the people of Sierra Leone.

Hon. Daniel B. Koroma said that "I preferred an amendment to the Sexual Offences Act of 2012 regarding rape to a presidential proclamation on rape with the maximum punishment of life imprisonment".

The Rt. Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas informed the House about an incidence of anal penetration done to a five year old girl by a 43 year old man that has left the girl now "paralyzed".

Hon. Veronica K. Sesay, President of the Parliamentary Female Caucus described rape as "madness" and even called for rapists to be "sentenced to life imprisonment with castration and hard labour", whilst calling for a bi-partisan support in light of the Resolution adopted by the House on women, peace and security.

Leader of the National Grand Coalition, Hon. Alhaji Dr. Kandeh Kolleh Yumkella said that "I preferred the stiffest of punishment for rapists including life imprisonment, but through an amendment to the Sexual Offences Act of 2012, to a presidential proclamation", whilst recalling and alluding to Dr. Abdulai O. Conteh's Essay on the 1991 Constitution on how the APC used state of emergency to crackdown on their political opponents.

Paramount Chief Member of Parliament from Pujehun, Hon. Matilda Y. Minah also supported the presidential proclamation on rape and other forms of sexual violence against women, girls and babies in the country.

Acting Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Ibrahim Ben Kargbo also said that "the APC prefers an amendment to the Sexual Offences Act of 2012 to accommodate a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, to a presidential proclamation".

The Leader of Government Business, Hon. Sidie M. Tunis praised President Bio for declaring a state of public emergency on rape against women, girls and babies in Sierra Leone.

Other MPs spoke to the motion.

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