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PRESS RELEASE

DAY THREE OF 2017 BUDGET DEBATE

21/11/16: On day three of continued debate on the 2017 Budget in the Parliament of Sierra Leone, 21st November 2016, the Minister of Finance clarified that due to projections in the increase of fuel pump price between Le 5,500 and Le 6,430 respectively, the Petroleum Regulatory Agency advised that the pump price for fuel be sold at Le 6,000 in order to avoid further increase in price by June 2017, having due regard for its impact on the masses.

Contributing to the debate, Hon. Helen Kuyembah said that the budget is speaking to the poor with the view of hitting hard on the have nots, particularly the rural poor, instead of the haves. She said that austerity and bad economy should not have come into being if the huge funds allocated to MDAs had been effectively utilized for service delivery, noting the loss of revenues that had been exposed by Audit Service Sierra Leone. She was gratified with the drive towards economic diversification, specifying the need for an agro-based economy with the aim of achieving food sufficiency, whilst recalling that the extractives had failed us in this country. She opined that the NRA is meeting her targets on revenue mobilization, yet the Ministry of Finance is complaining of budget deficit. She called for decrease in the wage bill due to the creation of several offices that are performing functions similar to the respective MDAs.

Hon. Hannah Songowa Bundu reacted by alluding to the Holy Bible that those with unshakable faith are bound to succeed and be richly rewarded by the Lord. She said that the Ministry of Energy is recording huge loss due to faulty transmission lines and poor generation of revenue. Despite Le 133 Billion that has been allocated to the Ministry of Energy, she called for additional allocation through a supplementary budget. She also called on the Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, with due regard to her Ministry's allocation, to use those funds particularly for the protection of women and children. She also called on her colleague MPs to support the budget for the development of the country at this challenging moment.

On her part, Hon. Navo KaiKai said that a "recession in UK is better than prosperity in Sierra Leone", whilst comparing the health service delivery in both countries. She furthered that the Pendembu-Kailahun Road is in a deplorable state, the reason why fuel is being sold at "Le8,000 per liter, and she now needs "Le 1,000,000 to travel from Freetown to her constituency". She called for a decrease in the price of wheat flour and an increase in the tax on cigarettes to prevent people dying from tobacco related diseases. She averred that the hospital in Kailahun is running without electricity.

Hon. Karifala Sheku Conteh recalled the hey days of the economic boom in the country at the time when Government was subsidizing fuel, increasing the minimum wage to Le 500,000 and the continued increase in salaries. He also said that the pump price is tied to the dollar, whilst noting the depreciation of the Leone. He espoused the successes of the Government in the energy sector, thus the elimination of "Kabbah Tigers" in the country, whilst decrying the chairperson for the Trade Committee in Parliament for failing to summon the Minister of Trade and the agency concerned to provide sufficient explanation to the people of Sierra Leone on the removal of fuel subsidy and its subsequent pricing.

Other MPs also contributed to the debate that may end tomorrow.

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