



**OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF PARLIAMENT  
PARLIAMENT BUILDING  
OAU DRIVE, TOWER HILL  
FREETOWN**

E-mail: [sierraleoneparliament@hotmail.com](mailto:sierraleoneparliament@hotmail.com)/[admin@parliament.gov.sl](mailto:admin@parliament.gov.sl)



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**PRESS RELEASE**

**FIFTH AND FINAL ALLOTTED DAY: ENDS PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE**

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Friday 01st June 2018 concluded five consecutive days of debate on the “Motion of Thanks to President Bio” for his debutant Presidential Speech, delivered on the occasion of the State Opening of the First Session of the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone.

Congratulating MPs for their brilliant contributions during the course of the debate, the Rt. Hon. Speaker of Parliament, Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu said that “the tone and temperament in respect of the agenda for the new Parliament has been properly set in motion”. He also called on the Ministry of Finance to strengthen parliamentary oversight, with a view to discourage the “habit of receiving handouts from MDAs”, but to enhance Parliament to effectively hold the executive to account for the actualization and fulfillment of the grand vision of President Bio.

Contributing to the debate, the Leader of NGC, Alhaji Dr. Kandeh Kolleh Yumkella commended President Bio for the presentation of a detailed Speech to Parliament, by clearly outlining his vision aimed at addressing the challenges he has inherited. He also called on new MPs not to be partisan and defensive of laws that had been passed, but rather be concerned with the national interest. He told the APC not to lay claims on Bumbuna because that project commenced when he was still in school, whilst saying that our development had been bedeviled by poor performance indicators and structural challenges, and re-stated the importance of effective oversight on the activities of the executive. In support of President Bio’s initiatives, he called for collective efforts, collaboration, speaking truth to power, and promised to later submit to him a document to help him succeed in his vision for free education, “which is partially in existence but has to be scaled up”. He espoused that “they will support the Government to attract additional funds for the implementation of the free education policy, saying that \$41 million is a drop in the bucket and therefore not enough”. He also spoke against examination malpractices, sexually transmitted grades, and the need for high enrolment to universities, expensive university forms, and the need for online application to gain access to tertiary education. On “rankonomics”, he called on the SLPP to copy good laws, whilst speaking on under-performing and bloated contracts, and the need for seriously looking into the recommendations of the Auditor General’s Report. In respect of diversification, he also called on the Government to improve and add value on our agricultural and marine products; in particular to gain access to the EU market, and investment in horticulture, and that Government is using “\$10 Million” for

the importation of onions. He also called for active surveillance at our sea where we are losing over “\$50 Million” to poaching and other illegal and unregulated fishing methods. Speaking on justice, he said that “it should not be used in a predatory manner”, whilst speaking on the need for the review of the laws related to dual citizenship, and the diversification of our energy sources.

Hon. Hassan Sesay of APC and the Opposition Whip commended President Bio and warned that “if ideas are not put into action, it will only remain as ideological attraction”. He called for the examination of the public service that had been put together since independence, whilst speaking on energy. He also said that “the President has reneged on his promise of de-politicizing NATCOM by appointing the Chairman of SLPP to that office, having regards for APC’s Momoh Konteh, who was appointed to that office and later made Chairman for APC in Koinadugu District”, whilst saying “it was the APC that created the institutions that are now generating huge funds for SLPP, that is few days in governance”.

Reacting, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas commended President Bio and corrected “that it was the late President Tejan Kabbah who created the institutions that are generating revenues for the country”, whilst talking on the politics of truth. He also recalled the politics of fear and intimidation “when political opponents were arrested, locked up, and their seats declared vacant, allowing others to go un-opposed”. He called on MPs to serve the people well, describing the policies on health and roads as “good but were misdirected and bloated with inordinate costs”. In spite of the huge funds spent on energy, he blamed the past government for electricity outages in the country, whilst speaking on revenue mobilization, the need to improve agriculture, civic education, political tolerance, and to remove beggars and children from the streets.

Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Cherner R.M Bah thanked MPs for their fruitful deliberations and recalled his chairmanship of PAC, in line with transparency and accountability. He referred to the Auditor General as “a staff of Parliament and that the President was ill-advised to review Section 119 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone”. He also said that “if the queries of the Auditor General are directed to the ACC, then we don’t need to have the PAC in Parliament”. He also said that before 2007, one could hardly hear about the Auditor General’s Report to Parliament. He also considered himself as “someone who likes and supports women”. He said in view of the wrong painting of the economy, he referred to “austerity and fiscal discipline as one and the same”. He also spoke “on debt waivers by the Paris Club and the \$1.5 Billion debt left by the late Tejan Kabbah SLPP government, and how donors lost confidence prior to the 2007 general elections”, whilst boasting of the credit worthiness of the past government. He also espoused the need to improve tourism by positively selling the country to attract investors, and replicate similar experiences in Rwanda and South Africa to the advantage of Sierra Leone. Supporting a review of the Mines and Minerals Act of 2009 enacted to replace a decree, he said it is necessary to address mines related issues since 1930, when diamond was first discovered. He also called on the Government to build on the FHCI, and boasted that “funds have been secured already from ECOWAS for the construction of a university in Kono District”. He called for national cohesion and that “special attention be paid to the military”, with a view to improving their conditions of service. He also encouraged the Government to create land banks

as the land tenure system is driving investors away, saying “that the people voted President Bio to State House and the APC to head Parliament”.

Concluding the debate, the Leader of Government Business, Hon. Mohamed Sidie Tunis commended MPs for their contributions and described the debate as “very constructive and informative”. He assured Dr. Kandeh Yumkella of Government’s support to ensure that Sierra Leone gains access to the EU market. He said that the “President’s intention of de-politicizing NATCOM is not in respect of appointment, but rather to free it from “orders from above”, saying that the “APC did not benefit from debt waivers because of the mismanagement of the economy”. He expressed his support for the review of Section 119 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone to enhance prosecution by the ACC, without waiting on Parliament, recalling that the APC watered down the Auditor General’s Report on the real time audit on the management of the Ebola funds by punishing “small boys”. Speaking on Bumbuna and alternative energy, he blamed APC for electricity outages few days out of governance, despite huge funds that had been spent over the years. He also said that the APC had been spending Billion of Leones on fuel for generators and assured the public that measures are being put in place for Freetown to enjoy 24 hours electricity, whilst citing huge arrears of domestic and external debts that have been inherited by the SLPP Government. He also said that the “IMF and World Bank left the country because of the mismanagement of the economy before the 2018 general elections”. He decried the past government for the unlawful sacking of the former Vice President of Sierra Leone. He also acclaimed the President’s initiative of owning a farm before getting public appointments, promising that a blue print will be brought to Parliament for approval before the commencement of President Bio’s free education policy next academic year. He also lauded the reversal from 6344 to 6334 system of education.

Department of Public Relations

Parliament of Sierra Leone

OAU Drive, Tower Hill

Freetown

Tel: +23278495023/+23277669726/+23278426851