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PRESS RELEASE

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PARLIAMENT COMMENCES DEBATE ON 2017 BUDGET

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Thursday 17th November 2016 commenced debate on the 2017 Budget, being an Act that provides for the authorization of expenditure from the Consolidated Revenue Fund and other related matters for the services of Sierra Leone.

Presenting the Le 4.7 Trillion Budget for debate in Parliament and subsequent approval, Minister of Finance Momodu L. Kargbo said among other things that the Budget aims to plan for next year with a big difference, noting fiscal strategy that is cognizant of risks, recalling the twin-shocks of ebola and the drop in the prices of ore, and the passage of the Public Financial Management Act of 2016. He also said that the Budget aims at a reduction on donor-dependence and the fostering and development of local industries with the view of generating revenues for the development of the country. However, he noted the depreciation of the Leone, reduction of cocoa export and inflation. He emphasized that we move from import-dependence to local production.

Several MPs spoke to the motion, but Hon. Hassan Sheriff, Chairman for the Finance Committee decried the Ministry of Finance for the late submission of the Budget citing the PFM Act, 2016 which provides that the Budget should be submitted two months before the close of the financial year. He also said that Parliament is the only body authorized by law to give duty waivers, but unfortunately Ministry of Finance had been doing so without recourse to Parliament. He noted that an MP/Minister could be granted a duty waiver once in every five years. He also blamed the Ministry of Finance for failing to present the Finance Bill to Parliament which will provide direction for taxation and revenue mobilization. He said the current increase in the pump price of Le 6,000 is against the proposed one in the Budget that is Le 5,500. He said that the sum of Le 7.7 Billion allocated to Parliament is small with little or nothing to do oversight on the executive and called for budget increase to Parliament. He also said that the Ministry of Finance should treat Parliament as a separate Arm of Government and not like a subvented agency; whilst decrying the late payment of salaries to staff of Parliament. He warned that any MDA that fails to appear before parliament will have their budget withheld.

Hon. Mustapha M. Braima alluded to the Bible that “he who oppresses the poor reproaches God” whilst describing the budget as “unrealistic, inconsistent and anti-poor”. He also decried the timing of the removal of fuel subsidy which he said would escalate the

suffering of the masses. He also talked on a fake 35% projection on excise duties for tobacco that is not locally produced in the country. Hon. Braima also laughed at the Le 600 being tagged per child for the school feeding programme, whilst referring to it as provocative. He also said that the mining royalties were poorly managed by the Government. He furthered that the Budget is not committed to international obligations such as the Maputo Protocol and the Abuja Declaration on health, whilst accusing the Budget of an excess float of Le 10 Billion on subsidies.

The debate continues tomorrow and MDAs are strongly warned to attend and on time.