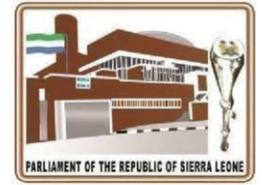




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E-mail: [sierraleoneparliament@hotmail.com](mailto:sierraleoneparliament@hotmail.com)/[admin@parliament.gov.sl](mailto:admin@parliament.gov.sl)

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**PRESS RELEASE**



**ECOFEPA HEIGHTENS SENSITIZATION CAMPAIGN TO INCREASE 30% QUOTA FOR WOMEN IN POLITICS WITHIN THE ECOWAS REGION**

The ECOWAS Female Parliamentarians Association (ECOFEPA) has on Friday 17/03/2023, at the Sierra Leone Foreign Service Academy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Tower Hill Freetown, commenced a sensitization campaign on proportional representation of women in politics and to also increase the 30% quota for women in politics within the ECOWAS Region. The theme for the event was, "Scaling up political partnerships between men and women".

The purpose of the two days event was geared towards reinforcing the call to increase the quota of 30% female representation in the ECOWAS Region. It also serves as a rallying point to boost women's access, participation, and representation in politics and decision-making.

In her welcome address, the President of ECOFEPA, Hon. Woraye Sarr applauded the work of Sierra Leone in the promotion of gender mainstreaming and also acknowledged the work of ECOFEPA in the promotion of gender parity in the subregion.

In her special remarks, the Sierra Leone Parliamentary Female Caucus President and also a member of ECOFEPA, Hon. Veronica Kadie Sesay called for the need to translate female representation into action than reducing it to a mere talkshow. She accorded deserving praises to the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Dr. Julius Maada Bio for his endless commitments to the promotion of gender equality in Sierra Leone. She equally called on political parties to adhere to the promotion of female participation in the next coming election in Sierra Leone. "We want the 30% quota to be implemented", she said. Hon. Veronica Kadie Sesay further commended donor partners for their support towards the implementation of gender mainstreaming into politics. She also commended the Leadership of Parliament for supporting and enacting the Gender Empowerment bill into law.

In his statement, the Speaker of ECOWAS Parliament, Hon. Dr. Sidie Mohamed Tunis registered his profound thanks and appreciation to President Bio and the First Lady, Dr. Fatima Maada Bio for championing Gender and Women's Empowerment initiatives in Sierra Leone. He said leaders in any spheres of life have the responsibilities to promote and safeguard women. The ECOWAS Speaker added that the event would help broaden the horizon of participants in terms of promoting women's empowerment. He therefore, encouraged all to take the event very seriously for the betterment of the ECOWAS Region. He said since the June 24th election is just too close, he encouraged the youth to be responsible and always endeavor to remain peaceful. He concluded by inspiring all women to join their political parties of choice as the 30% quota is there to protect them.

Delivering the keynote statement on behalf of the First Lady, Ambassador Foday Yumkella, the Minister of Political and Public Affairs thanked President Bio for his vision to promoting gender equality in Sierra Leone. He said the President initiated

the Free Quality Education to have an enlightened society. He added that the "Hands off Our Girls" campaign by the First Lady, coupled with an amendment to the Sexual Offense Act, have been very pivotal in promoting gender equality. He thanked ECOFEPA for championing such a campaign and for also choosing Sierra Leone as a host for the event.

The British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Lisa Chesney, said the UK has tripled appointment positions for women. She added that most senior positions in the UK are occupied by women. She also congratulated the Sierra Leone Parliament for enacting the Gender Empowerment Act. She urged all and sundry to place a continuous effort for creating an enabling environment across the ECOWAS Region for women's empowerment. She also implored all the highly placed women to support other women in terms of representation. She registered her 100% support to all political parties in terms of women's empowerment. She concluded by encouraging leaders of political parties to follow the 30% quota for women in the next election as provided by law.

European Union Ambassador to Sierra Leone, Manuel Muller confessed that Gender Equality is fundamental to the development of any nation. He congratulated Sierra Leone for the enactment of the Gender Act, especially for the 30% quota which is expected to come into fruition in the June 24th Elections. He said the EU and Sierra Leone share strong partnerships in terms of promoting gender equality. He added that the EU would support any institution for the promotion of gender equality. He encouraged all and to put robust measures in place to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Representative, Dr. Pa Lamin Bai said the kind of solidarity shown in women's participation in Sierra Leone is exceptional and commended the government for championing the promotion of gender equality. He also said that UNDP has been partnering with many institutions for the enactment of gender bill into law, adding "let's go for quality representation for female participation in politics", he concluded.

Representing the Chief Electoral Commissioner, Madam Marian Sia Nyuma-Mojui, intimated the gathering that the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone is determined to executing its mandate as prescribed in the laws of Sierra Leone. She said that the Commission has done some legal reviews to cater for the most

marginalized groups including, women and persons living with disability. She disclosed that the nomination fees for Members of Parliament are six months of the minimum salary wage, twelve months of the minimum salary wage for presidential candidates and so on. She expressed optimism that the next composition of the Parliament of Sierra Leone would be very colourful in terms of women's representation after the June 24 elections. Madam Moijui also spoke on the need for continuous peace and stability across the ECOWAS Region.

On his part, the Deputy Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, Buakai Bindi Hindowa intimated that the ministry was created by President Bio because the President believes that the empowerment of women and children is key to his government's agenda. He said the engagement was just a testament that women should not be limited to the four corners of the kitchen, but rather serve as active partners in development. The Deputy Minister also commended the Gender and Women's Empowerment Act and added that, the Act provides for 30% quota for female representation and 30% for appointive positions. He added that women's participation in politics is about making themselves available to contribute to overcoming the challenges for national development. He said plans are at an advanced stage to implement the Gender and Women's Empowerment Act in ensuring that men and women work side by side for the betterment of the country.

The President for All Political Parties Women's Association, Augusta James Terma thanked the ECOFEPA for organizing such an important occasion in fulfillment of promoting women's involvement in decision-making. She also celebrated President Bio for signing into law the Gender Empowerment Act. She, therefore, called for continuous sensitization on the Gender Empowerment Act. She also called on leaders of political parties to place women in all their political party's lists in achieving the 30% for women to appointive and elective positions.

Chairperson, 50/50 Group, Dr. Fredlin M' Mock applauded the commitments of political parties to supporting women in politics and admonishing them to translate their words into action. She acknowledged the work of Parliament in support of women's empowerment. She spoke on the need for total collaboration among stakeholders in shaping the dynamics of women's solidarity in Sierra Leone.

Parliamentary and Public Relations Department  
Parliament of Sierra Leone

+23278495023/+23276625960/+23278426851/+23278697776