

OAU DRIVE, TOWER HILL, FREETOWN

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

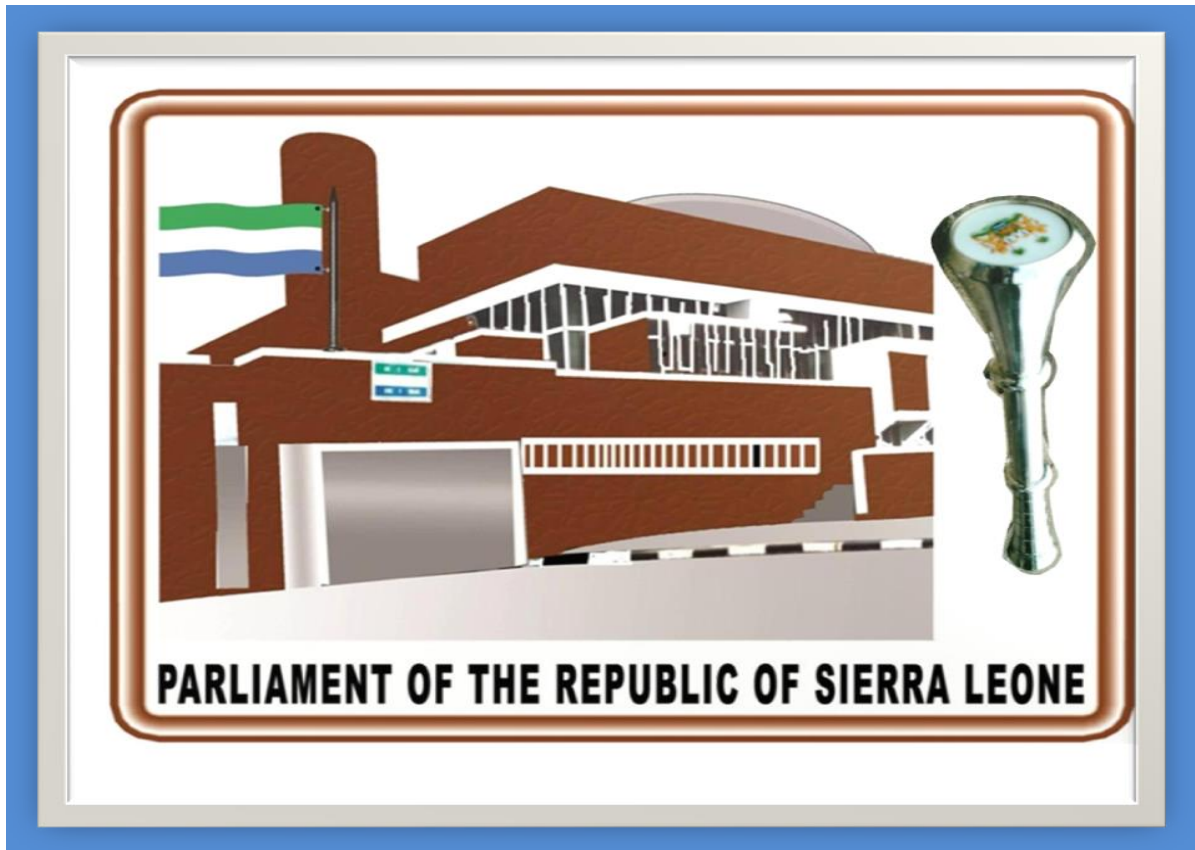
[HANSARD]

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

FIRST SESSION –FIRST MEETING

THURSDAY, 11TH APRIL, 2024

SESSION – 2023/2024



OAU DRIVE, TOWER HILL, FREETOWN

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

[HANSARD]

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First Meeting of the First Session of the Sixth Parliament
of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone.

Proceedings of the Sitting of the House
Held on Thursday, 11th April, 2024

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PROCLAMATION BY HIS EXCELLENCY RTD BRIGADIER JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, SUPREME HEAD OF STATE AND GRAND COMMANDER OF THE ORDER OF THE REPUBLIC, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES, FOUNTAIN HEAD OF UNITY, HONOUR, FREEDOM AND JUSTICE, CONSTITUTIONAL INSTRUMENT NO.5 OF 2004.



THE CHAMBER OF PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

Official Hansard Report of the Proceedings of the House

FIRST SESSION – FIRST MEETING OF THE SIXTH PARLIAMENT OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC

Thursday, 11th April, 2024.

I. PRAYERS

[The Table Clerk, Mr Lincoln, Read the Prayers]

[The House met at 10:00 a.m. in Parliament Building, Tower Hill, Freetown]

[The Deputy Speaker, Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas, in the Chair]

The House was called to Order

Suspension of S. O. 5[2]

HON. MATHEW S. NYUMA [Leader of Government Business]: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I beg to amend the Order Paper as follows: Constitutional Instrument item one [1] should be placed under item V. I also want to make correction on item V. I refer you to S.O. 47[3] of the Standing Orders. With your leave, it says: "Every Bill shall be accompanied by a memorandum, signed by the Minister in the case of a Government Bill, and in the case of the non-government Bill by the Member wishing to introduce it, stating concisely the objects and reasons for the Bill." We do not have a memorandum attached to it. So, the Minister should send us the memorandum before we debate this Bill. For item IV, the last sentence is dissimilar to item V. Therefore item V should be expunged from the Order Paper. Mr Speaker, I so move.

THE SPEAKER: Any seconder?

HON. BASHIRU SILIKIE: I so second, Mr Speaker.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed To]

[The Motion to amend the Oder Paper has been carried].

II. ADOPTION OF THE RECORD VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY SITTING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 27TH MARCH, 2024.

Honourable Members, we shall now consider the record of Votes and Proceedings for the parliamentary sitting, held on Wednesday, 27th March, 2024. As usual, we shall skip pages 1-4 and start with Page 5. Page 5? Page 6? Page 7? Page 8? Page 9? Can someone move for the adoption of the record of Votes and Proceedings for the parliamentary sitting, held on Wednesday, 27th March, 2024 as presented?

HON. JOSEPH WILLIAM-LAMIN: I so move, Mr Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Any seconder?

HON. NENEH LEBBIE: I so second, Mr Speaker.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[The record of Votes and Proceedings for the Parliamentary sitting, held on Wednesday, 27th March, 2024 has been adopted as presented]

III. PAPER LAID

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE

MOHAMED LAMIN TARAWALLY ESQ [*Attorney General and Minister of Justice*]:

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, with your leave, I beg to lay on the Table of this Honourable House the following Paper:

Proclamation by His Excellency Rtd Brigadier Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic, supreme Head of State and grand commander of the Order of the Republic, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Fountain Head of Unity, Honour, Freedom and Justice, Constitutional Instrument No.5 of 2004.

HON. MATHEW S. NYUMA: Mr Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues on the other side. When we first started discussing the issue of drugs, all of us made a proposal that it was time for us to talk about public emergency. Some of us were very precise about that. Let us talk about the public health emergency because we have regulations that are in existence. I still want to say that my colleagues were very emphatic about declaring public emergency regarding KUSH. However, let us stick to the word 'drug' because we have other hard drugs that people take. This is not only about Kush and in fact the nomenclature will change with time. We were united when making our proposal for public health emergency. We want to fight for our young people.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to draw the attention of the Minister to certain provisions, if he intends to continue with the public health emergency. We do not know the next step he will take, but we do not want people to deliberately misuse the public emergency. So, we want to draw your attention to certain provisions, such as Section 29[3a] of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act No.6 of 1991. Inasmuch as we got supports from our colleagues on the other side, we do not want people to misuse the public emergency. So, you must be guided as we did for Ebola and Covid 19. I vividly recalled that we argued vigorously on the regulations. I was expecting you, perhaps, to have the regulations side by side with the proclamation. We have put in place task force. However, I want to draw the Minister's attention to Section 29[5] of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, which has to do with the regulations regarding public emergencies, especially when it has been proclaimed. I want the Minister to tell us why we do not have the regulations

here that should support the public health emergency? Although we know by constitutional provision that such provision is going to expire tomorrow. We do not want people to misuse it and we want to have a focused point. That is just the clarification we need. I thank you.

MR MOHAMED LAMIN TARAWALLY ESQ: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I seriously take into consideration what the Leader of Government Business has proposed. However, when the Covid 19 regulation was passed by this House, we anticipated incident of this nature if something like this happens in future, it would save us time to make laws and regulations ahead, rather than waiting for time when the incident will happen. This will delay the entire process. There is the National Drugs Control Act of 2008 and there is a regulation for the National Drugs Arrest and Seizure. Also, there are other regulations to which in my estimation, the Minister of Health after lying his Paper, will continue by declaring National Public Health Emergency, guided by the regulations. There are regulations that are already in existence, particularly the National Drugs for Arrest and Seizure.

HON. DANIEL KOROMA [*Deputy Leader II of the Opposition*]: Mr Speaker, all of us are aware of the statement made by the Leader of Government Business. He said we are in full support of this process because it was emanated from all of us. However, we need to do it properly. I do not think it is expedient to use regulation that was made pursuant to an Act of Parliament for a particular institution to operate or to give operation to a particular institution. So, they should use that one as a regulation for the state of emergency and their defects. We should not be lazy. If we are declaring a state of emergency, there has to be regulations based on the purport of the state of emergency and the reason for it.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we cannot import regulations because the details are different and for every state of emergency, you must have a tribunal before the commencement of the state of emergency. The composition of that tribunal and the manner of appointment is very simple. The Chief Justice appoints the Chairman and three members and then the Bar Association appoints two other legal practitioners of not less than fifteen years standing. However, the tribunal must be in existence in the first place

before operation. Therefore, Section 29[5] of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, as the Leader rightly said that if it is abused by way of detention and even if the person requests for his or her release and he is not released after 30 days, he can refer to that tribunal. It should not be after the abuse of that right before you think about tribunal. The tribunal should be set up. Within one hour, that tribunal will be set up.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the regulation should have been in place by now or at least within the process. I do not know your definition of publication; but in my opinion, the pronouncement made by the President does not constitute publication. It is only when the proclamation has been published in the Gazette we call that publication. The nature of publication in this gazette is on the 9th April, 2024. So, it will not expire tomorrow, in my opinion. The publication, which the Attorney General and Minister of Justice did, was done on the 9th April, 2024. So, you have six days to provide the regulations. Therefore, there is a space of time and we want this thing to be done quickly. We are ready to speed it up. We want this state of emergency to be in operation as quick as possible. For some of us, we are just from our constituencies and we discussed this matter with our local authorities. The local authorities are powerless to help the President to control this problem, unless this state of emergency comes into operation. So, that is my opinion, Mr Speaker. We still have time because the publication was made in the gazette, instead of pronouncement. As I said earlier, we cannot import regulation by Act of Parliament to act as a regulation for a state of emergency. They are different, Honourable Members.

HON. MATHEW S. NYUMA: Mr Speaker, you would agree with me that Constitutional Instrument, Statutory Instrument and the Laws have different meanings. However, for this particular one, you have to be specific. We can even add two or three lines as stated by the Honourable Member. It depends on where you want to do the interpretation that has to do with the publication or declaration, which the President will sign. Section 29[3A] of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone mentions seven days. Well, the one is talking about publication and the other is talking about gazetting.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Minister spoke about the Public Health Emergency. If it is being pronounced by the President, you must develop regulations. We do not want people to misuse the public health emergency. I will not change my words. I was making

reference to public health emergency because of the provisions in the Act. As Honourable Daniel B. Koroma said, we do not want people to feel that we are using the public health emergency for any ulterior motive. That is why people are always asking for regulations, even if just few sentences. As the Minister said, I was very careful when talking about the expiration date. This is because when it comes to constitutional issues, it has to do with interpretations.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, during Covid 19, lots of regulations came up, but some expired due to certain reasons. We bent backwards to understand that those are not normal times. We have to understand the situation and even go further to assist the government in developing other regulations. We gave the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice some days to come up with another regulation. What we are now saying is not far from what we did. Like I said, we are in unity in making our submissions in the chamber. I want to thank the Minister for taking it on board. There are people in other places who always say, S.O 2. Dis na public emergency are kin do anything. No, you cannot do anything. We want it to be guided by regulations. They are now referring us to the public emergency which we are yet to see, unless the Minister makes a pronouncement that there is a Public Health Emergency. There must be that pronouncement from the Minister. What we have now is a public emergency proclamation from the President. So, seven days is enough to put in place the regulations. So they can even send the regulations to us and the Minister can even suggest for a debate. We will debate them.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I am sure if they want to continue with it, there is no problem, but if they do not want to continue, but rely on the public health emergency, let them do the needful. Honourable Daniel B. Koroma, I hope we are on the same page. We do not want people to misunderstand Parliament by saying, S.O.2 na Parliament bin say. So, we want to guide the process, Mr Minister. I know you are under pressure because you called personally and told me that we must do something to show that we are also interested. Again, if the Minister wants to continue, he should provide some regulations to support this proclamation. Section 29 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone talks about public emergency and that is why we are in support of him. However, we are also in support of the law. He asked me this morning about the procedure, but I told him that we should

first of all lay it. To be frank, I did what I was supposed to do because there is a provision that talks about the process, so that people will not quote us. We are elected by the people and we are here to represent them and protect their interests.

THE SPEAKER: Mr Attorney General and Minister of Justice, the Leader of Government Business and the Acting Leader of the Opposition have raised a very powerful point. The fundamental issue about the State of Emergency is a due process. You can operate under the public health emergency, but due process must be followed. The difference with the State of Emergency is due process. That is why you cannot operate effectively under regulations that we have with the Public Health Emergency. So, I urge you to do your own regulations, given the necessary powers to effect the State of Emergency; otherwise it will be difficult. I am saying this because even under the Public Health Emergency, if you arrest somebody, it has to take a required time like three days, that person has to come to court and so on and so forth. You cannot just go into people's premises to do certain things. However, under the State of Emergency, with the relevant regulations, due process might help the operations to be very effective. So, I want you to buy into the submissions made by the Leader of Government Business and the Acting Leader of the Opposition.

HON. DANIEL B. KOROMA: This is just an appeal based on the relevant requirements. I want the tribunal to be set up. It takes less than one hour for the Chief Justice to appoint the Chairman and then the Bar Association to appoint two legal practitioners of not less than fifteen years simple. We do not have to wait until there is need for somebody to appear before the tribunal before you start thinking who should be members of that tribunal. Let there be a tribunal and let the Speaker be aware of its membership.

THE SPEAKER: All of those can be done today. You can even put together your relevant regulations today against the next adjourned date.

MR MOHAMED LAMIN TARAWALLY: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker and Honourable Members. Mr Speaker, I want to state here that the issue about the Public Health Emergency regulation that we are talking about is a National Drugs Control Act of 2008, Act No.10 of 2008 in which there was a regulation of National Drugs Control [Arrest and Seizure 2021]. The essence of this regulation was anticipated that there would come a time when there would be abuse of drugs and substance abuse. It is not the name that

we are referring to as KUSH. This is because Kush is a brand, but the chemistry of Kush comes from various sources. I am not against or dismissing what the two leaders have said, but I want to draw their attention to the National Drugs Control Act and the Arrest and Seizure Regulation, 2021. We will soon go through this to see where we can make any other amendments in supporting or facilitating the Paper that has just been laid.

THE SPEAKER: Like I said, Mr Minister, let us do not go round and round this particular issue. I want you to buy into the submissions of the Leader of Government Business and the Acting Leader of the Opposition. The mere fact that you are talking about an Act of Parliament, we will tell you that due process must be followed at all times; otherwise you cannot effectively deal with this matter. When you bring a proclamation, you should bring the relevant regulations to effect that proclamation, otherwise it is neither here nor there. That is what we are saying, Mr Minister. So, please turn down that argument and accept the position of the leaders. I accept that as well. Mr Minister, even as I sit here, I have seen the issues and please accept the submissions. We have to proceed instead of going back and forth on this particular issue.

HON. DANIEL B. KOROMA: Mr Speaker, I want to draw the attention of the Minister and Members of Parliament to S.O. 41. It reads: "whenever Mr Speaker or the Chairman, intervenes during a debate, any Member, then speaking or offering to speak, must resume his seat and the House or Committee is to be silent, so that Mr Speaker or the Chairman may be heard without interruption." I am saying this because I noticed that when the Speaker intervened, the Minister was still standing several times.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, what we are saying is that there is a proclamation and we knew it was in this Parliament that the National Drugs Law Enforcement Act was passed and we brought the regulations regarding Seizure and Arrest. It was us that enacted that law; but today, what we have before us is a proclamation as per Section 29 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. So, whatever that is in the Constitution supersedes any other Act of Parliament we have passed in this Well. So, what should be done is to ensure that the Proclamation should follow what Section 29 of the Constitution states. You can extract all these issues and bring them as regulations.

HON. BASHIRU SILIKIE: Mr Minister, please put all other regulations together and bring them in this Well. Honourable Members, let me make my position very clear to the House that when a leader is up, the Floor is given to the Leader. You might all be leaders tomorrow. When we came to this Well, Hon. Bashiru Silikie, Hon. Dickson M. Rogers and I were placed at the back seat. Our leaders did not even tolerate us to say a word when they got up to speak. Today, you are ordinary Members, but tomorrow you might take over and the same respect will be accorded to you.

HON. AARON A. KOROMA: It is not a surprise to some of us that were in the Fourth Parliament. I thank you very much for representing us. I want to make some admonishments to the Minister. I could vividly remember when the President declared the State of Emergency on Covid 19, we had several issues in drafting and bringing the regulations to Parliament. I am sure that was one of the reasons that led to the removal of that particular Minister. This is because she brought embarrassment to the Presidency. The Constitution is very instructive and let him know that the Paper the Minister has just laid will only have effect after the seven days period; otherwise after the seven days, there will be no State of Emergency except Parliament approves it by two/third majority. So, we want him to know that the rules, like what the Leaders have said, are simply asking the Minister how he intends doing the implementation.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, state of emergency is just an ordinary frame. If you do not have regulations, there is no way we can have a state of emergency that will actually achieve the objective of His Excellency. Already, the President has declared state of public emergency for twelve months period. So, whatever emergency that comes up, it is not necessary any more. The Minister was talking about public health emergency and the President has declared an emergency that is supreme and that should cover all other emergencies. So, that should be the focus and for that to become effective, it has to be in line with the regulations. So, I want to applaud the Minister because he has proven to be a very thorough and effective friend of this House. Parliament has given you the guide and you should do the needful.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, let me tell you that it is not easy to bring a lawyer down with any particular idea. That is the problem he has. It is not easy for you to tell a lawyer that no this is what we do here.

HON AARON KOROMA: Let the Minister do the needful.

THE SPEAKER: Mr Minister, please accept, so that the next adjourned date, we will get everything sorted out.

MOHAMED LAMIN TARAWALLY: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the points are noted and I will do the needful.

HON. AMARA M. KARGBO: Mr Speaker, there is a proposition by the Minister of Fisheries and Mining Resources to close down the entire artisanal fishing industry of this country for a month. If that happens, it will cause an untold suffering in the entire country. Mr Speaker, I know you are aware that there are no improved cold-rooms in the country. Let us assume that we have those facilities, when will the fish reach our people in the provinces.

THE SPEAKER: Have you brought that to her notice?

HON. AMARA M. KARGBO: Not yet, Mr Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: What I want you to do is to write a letter to the Chair of the Committee on Fisheries, copy the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, the Leader of Government Business, Leader of the Opposition and the Clerk of Parliament. I want this issue to be addressed at the Committee level. Maybe you can submit a report to the plenary for consideration.

HON. AMARA M. KARGBO: I will surely do that sir.

HON. MATHEW S NYUMA: I wonder why directives are always given under S.O 23. These are always personal explanation; therefore, there is no need to take directives. The Speaker's ruling is final.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, it is personal.

HON. MATHEW S. NYUMA: So, as a Member of Parliament, you should use the normal procedure.

THE SPEAKER: Yes that is why I am telling him.

HON. MATHEW S. NYUMA: It is not strange. This is just to control the fishery industry because this is not a new phenomenon. It has happened over twenty or thirty years ago. We have areas where fishing activities take place. People want to do fishing throughout the year. So, it is a complex situation. I know that his people want to hear from him as Member of Parliament, but if he wants us to take it seriously he should follow the procedure. A Member of Parliament is expected to know what is happening in the community. As I said earlier, it is not a new phenomenon. I just want to lend my voice to what he has said. They are only trying to make the fishery industry lucrative and not to do otherwise.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please reach out to the Chair and then get us informed. Thank you very much.

HON. ALPHA F. M. JABBIE: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, since last week and for the past few days, a Member from the Opposition in Kambia District, Hon. Abdul K. Kamara has been on social media and now he has gone to the main stream media making outrageous allegations against the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education.

HON. DANIEL B. KOROMA: Point of Order, Mr Speaker. The Honourable Member from Kabala is not a new Member of Parliament. The reason I allowed the Honourable Member from Tombo is because I acknowledged that he is a new Member of Parliament and his explanation was important even though he stood on a wrong platform. I decided to keep quiet because he is a new Member of Parliament. The issue was important and I agree with you. According to the Leader of Government Business, you need not to give directives. However, his directives were quite in place and it is for the betterment of this country. So, whether it is a wrong or right platform, as long as your decision is for the betterment of this country, so be it. I want to caution the Honourable Member from Falaba not to introduce controversial issues under S. O 23. If it is a controversial issue, then he should use the correct procedure.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Alpha Jabbie, any explanation under S O 23 should not be a subject of debate or argument or contention. So do you want to modify what you are trying to say?

HON. ALPHA F. M. MADIE: Mr Speaker, this is a very important issue. I am the Chairman of that Committee.

HON. DANIEL B. KOROMA: Mr Speaker, he stood on S.O 23 and we cannot allow that.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please allow him.

HON. DANIEL B. KOROMA: I should allow him on S.O 23?

THE SPEAKER: Well, not specifically on S.O 23.

HON. DANIEL B. KOROMA: But he stood on S.O 23. This is for precedent sake, Mr Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: I am allowing him as the arbiter of the procedure here.

HON. ALPHA F. M. JABBIE: I am moving from S.O 23 to S.O 34. As Chairman of the MBSSE Oversight Committee in Parliament, if anything relating to the Ministry is going wrong, I have to come to Parliament to report. Since last week, people have been on social media and main stream media, making outrageous allegations against the MBSSE, regarding the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. Let me highlight some of the allegations he made. The first allegation is that the whole of Kambia District will not be sending a single candidate to take the 2024 WASSCE. The second allegation is that **80%** of schools in Bombali will not be taking the 2024 WASSCE. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, these two statements are **100%** false and baseless.

HON. TAMBA KELLIE: The Honourable Member over there seems to be making pejorative connotation about Hon. Abdul Karim Kargbo in his absence. He is not here to defend himself.

HON. ALPHA F. M. JABBIE: No, I cannot wait until he comes.

HON. TAMBA KELLIE: I am coming.

HON. ALPHA F. M. JABBIE: I am explaining, Honourable Member.

HON. TAMBA KELLIE: Mr Chairman, when you were speaking, you were not interjected. Please do not interject me please.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members order! Please hold on.

HON. TAMBA KELLIE: Can we have some decorum, please? Mr Chairman I will leave it to you, but I just feel it is not right to mention these allegations in his absence.

THE SPEAKER: That is why I told you not to be specific. You should have just explained and told the public what is correct.

HON. ALPHA F. M. JABBIE: I am doing that, Mr Speaker.

HON. DANIEL B. KOROMA: Mr Speaker, since you are the arbiter and you have allowed him, it will also be wise if you will give the same opportunity to the Honourable Member any time he comes to the Chamber.

THE SPEAKER: I will do that, Honourable Member.

HON. ALPHA F. M. JABBIE: He said nobody from Kambia will be allowed to take this year's exams. Those allegations are completely false. We have on record four thousand, six hundred and sixty eight candidates that have been registered for 2024 WASSCE examination from thirty six schools in Kambia. Again, he said **80%** of the schools in Bombali will not be taking the exams. This allegation is completely false. He said that in Bombali District, we have 83 senior secondary schools and **80%**, which is 67 schools will not be taking the exams. We have 65 out of the 83 schools that will take the exams, with twelve thousand, two hundred and eighty candidates that have been registered. So, for him to say that **80%**, it is false. Majority of the schools affected are in the Northern and Western Regions. Of course, it has to be because in this country, we have more schools in the Northern and Western Regions than in the Eastern and Southern Regions.

HON. AARON A. KOROMA: You made a statement that caught my imagination. You were very emphatic on the issue of due process. You stood on S.O 23, but this issue is a topical one and I must admit that it is an issue that is affecting not only the S.L.P.P or A.P.C kids, but the people of this country. It is very important. The Standing Orders and the 1991 Constitution make provisions for issues like this. We can have the Minister to come to us through question time to give opportunity for the Member of Parliament who raised the issue to adequately substantiate his claims. I am sure follow up questions will be asked because this is an important issue. This is not a political matter at all. We have a better platform now to discuss it. We can have the Minister of Education to come to the Well. So, we cannot do it in contravention of the Standing Orders.

THE SPEAKER: Like what Honourable Aaron A. Koroma said, this particular issue is a public interest matter. So, if somebody has said something and somebody else wants to reply to whatever that was said, is that not in the interest of the public? The public would want to hear from both sides. The Public has already heard this issue, let them hear another aspect of it. So, that will be in the interest of the public. I do not see anything wrong with that.

HON. AARON A. KOROMA: Mr Speaker, with all due respect, you and I know that the Member of Parliament does not have the legal platform to give us credible information when it comes to this particular issue. We have the Minister of Education and even the West African Examination Council [WAEC] to provide credible data. WAEC is the institution that is doing the entries and the Ministry is overseeing the Education sector. So, it is but fitting to get the Minister of Education and maybe WAEC to provide some credible information. I am sure whatever they give us will be credible enough. I do not doubt what he has referenced, but I think the Minister will provide reliable information to us.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, can you please sit down? I want Hon. Aaron A. Koroma to know that when we appoint Chairmen of Committees, these Chairmen are shadow Ministers. If you have the Chairman of Education Committee in Parliament, technically he is a shadow Minister in Parliament. If you have a Chairman of Environment Committee, he is a shadow Minister in Parliament. So, if a concern has been raised and the Chairman of that Committee wants to give us relevant information, it is necessary that we listen to him.

HON. AARON A. KOROMA: Mr Speaker, it is not when he is reading from a document that is not being tabled in the Well. He is reading from a document that is not being tabled. We are not preview to that document.

THE SPEAKER: Alright, I can understand. That is why I said as the arbiter seated here, I am interested in what he has to say. That is why I told him to speak. Honourable Members, you know I like being very fair. If Hon. Jabbie had made allegations before this time and Hon. Abdul Karim Kargbo comes to this Well and wants to respond, I will give him time to respond so that. The public wants to hear both sides of the story; otherwise, the public is going to go with a one sided story. So, let us hear from Hon. Jabbie.

HON. ALPHA F. M. JABBIE: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. It was also said that majority of the schools affected are from the Northern and Western Regions. These are the regions that are having more schools in this country than the other regions. Most of the schools in this country are found in these regions than the East and South. Obviously, if there are going to be failures, we are going to expect more failures from the larger regions than the smaller ones; and likewise we expect more passes in the larger regions than the smaller ones. So, this is the case here. The other issue relates to the fact that **50%** of the potential candidates will not take the exams this year. This is completely false. He also said that this **50%** is equivalent to one hundred and seventy thousand candidates. This means that **100%** of the candidates are going to be more than three hundred and forty candidates. This statement was made on his first video and on his second or third video, he said two hundred and two thousand candidates have been submitted to the MBSSE for the exams. So, which one of these two figures can we rely on? I am sure the correct figure is one hundred and forty six thousand, one hundred and seventy nine candidates have been registered for the exams. The remaining candidates are patiently waiting for the portal to reopen or for an alternative to be given to them.

HON. UNPHA S.G. KOROMA: Mr Speaker Point of Order. We want the Honourable Member to give us figures and not vague answers. I have respect for him.

HON. ALPHA F. M. JABBIE: I have given you figures.

HON. UNPHA S. G. KOROMA: We want the figures.

THE SPEAKER: I do not want to reduce this matter to a debate.

HON. UNPHA S. G. KOROMA: But he has made it a debate.

THE SPEAKER: Let us listen to him. He is trying to respond. When the Honourable Member who made the allegations comes, I am going to give him an opportunity to respond to the public.

HON. UNPHA S. G. KOROMA: Mr Speaker, Hon. Abdul K. Koroma has not been the only Member of Parliament that spoke about this topic. I have spoken about it and I have figures for it. So, I want to know the numbers.

THE SPEAKER: Did you do any social media videos?

HON UNPHA S. G. KOROMA: I do not have videos, but I have spoken on it and I have done extensive research on it. So, I want him to give me the numbers.

HON. ALPHA F. M. JABBIE: Mr Speaker, I am responding to his own allegations.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Jabbie, please conclude.

HON. ALPHA F. M. JABBIE: Mr Speaker, that was the fifth allegation. We also have the sixth and seventh allegations. The sixth allegation is that the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education knows about all these problems relating to the 2024 WASSCE, but the Minister is doing anything to address same. This allegation is completely false. The Minister has been having lots of meetings. He has been moving up and down to make sure that the problems are resolved. At first, the time for entering the figures at WAEC expired in November, 2022 to July, 2023. The heads of schools were given that time to enter their figures, but when the time elapsed, WAEC closed the portal. The Minister had to step in to appeal to WAEC to reopen it and it was reopened for three weeks, but again not all of them met the deadline. The Minister held a meeting with all heads of schools at the Government Rokel Secondary School. In fact, all the Ministers and other stakeholders were there. They appealed again for them to be given another time to do the entries. They opened the portal again for two weeks and some still failed to do their entries. The last was done recently in March, 2024, when the portal was reopened for just two days. So, how could the Honourable Member say the Minister has not done anything? The Minister was actively involved. In fact, the Minister was in the office together with the CEO and the secretary on Easter Monday, trying to put things together. He also engaged WAEC International on two occasions to appeal to them to reopen the portal. He even got the Vice President of this country to appeal to the WAEC International to reopen the portal. So, the statement that the Minister is not doing anything, is completely false. He was even at S.L.B.C, Epic Radio and 98.1. This shows that the Minister was actively involved in trying to resolve this problem.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the last allegation he made was that Ghana's Portal is still open whilst Sierra Leone's Portal is closed. Yes, it is quite true that Ghana's Portal is still open. This is because Ghana is not taking the exams at the time that we are taking ours. Ghana is taking the exam in August and they have been doing that since Covid 19

broke out. However, this is the last year they will be taking the exams in August. By 2025, they will be joining us to take it at the same time. So, for this allegation, there is a reason for that. We are not taking the exams at the same time; Ghana is taking theirs in August.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

HON. ALPHA F. MADIE JABBIE: Mr Speaker, let me round off please.

THE SPEAKER: Hold on, a Leader is up.

HON. AARON A. KOROMA: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Indeed, I must admit that you have really taken this issue to be very important. It is indeed a very important issue. This is because it will be unfortunate for any Member of Parliament to take this issue personal. It has nothing to do with A.P.C or S.L.P.P. This issue should be dealt with just like the way we are dealing with the issue of KUSH. I remembered I watched a video released by the Honourable Chairman of Education, where he stated that a hundred and seventy three thousand kids were entered and now he is saying one hundred and forty six. If you go to the Ministry's Website, the number of pupils that took the WASSCE exams last year was two hundred and forty six thousands. So, if that number dropped from two hundred and forty six thousand to one hundred and forty six thousand. The drop is very huge and it is a concern. That is why we are expecting us to take this our political thoughts out of this issue. Let us have the Minister and all other players concern to come and properly educate us. We want to allay the fears of our people we are representing. As I speak, there are three figures playing here; hundred and seventy three as disclosed by the Chairman of Education Committee, of which I have the video. There is another forty three which he has just disclosed now. If you go to the Ministry's Website, two hundred and forty six thousand took the WASSSCE last year. We expect that number to increase this year. So, if it is something different, let them come and educate us. We want to know the reason for the drop.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Honourable Members, I think this issue has been handled effectively by Hon. Jabbie. It has also been handled effectively by Hon. Aaron Koroma. There is nothing you can say that these two people have not already said. Maybe, I will listen to Hon. Mohamed Bangura and Hon. Hawa Saiffa.

HON. MOHAMED BANGURA: Mr Speaker, this issue is very important. Now, after the explanation by Hon. Jabbie, let us hear from Honourable Abdul Karim Kamara. Through the office of the Speaker, we have to summon the Minister of Education.

HON. ROSALINE H. SIAFA: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the President's agenda is to support education. That was his first agenda and we thank him for that. Honestly, two wrongs cannot make a right. We have been dealing with this issue because we want to protect our children. If we leave them, some of them will go into prostitution, and some will feel discourage and eventually become dropouts. So, what I want us to do S.O 2 Government na Kombra. As parliamentarians, we are here to represent our people. We have to talk to the President and the Minister of Education, for them to intervene, so that the portal is reopen. They have done it once, but it was not reflected on those that did not start the entry on time. That was why they were left out; but for the sake of the children, let us do that for them. This is because it will be good for them to partake in the exam. Also, I would want us to punish the school authorities or the heads of schools for sabotaging the government. We should punish them, Mr Speaker, instead of punishing our children.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I want you all to take a look at S.O. 14[J]. We are going to invite the Minister to be present here at the next adjourned date to make a statement on this particular matter. We want him to come here and make a statement on this particular issue because this issue is extremely important. I am so personate about this matter. That is why I wanted to hear from Hon. Jabbie, so that we will make a decision. Let us bring him here on the next adjourned date, so that he will address us on this issue. That is why when I saw some Members wanted to politicise this issue, I felt sad. For me, this is not about politics, at all. This has nothing to do with politics as far as I am concerned. Mr Clerk, invite the Minister of Basic Education to be here at the next adjourned date.

HON. DANIEL B. KOROMA: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker. Of course, I agree with all the previous speakers, especially Hon. Hawa Siafa. She stated a nationalistic perspective in this Parliament. Mr Speaker, what I wanted to add to her statement is that I believe education is still the flagship programme of this government. It is not a past event.

It is still the flagship. So, it cannot be under your watch, even if it is **10%**, ten pupils fail to take their N. P. S. E, BECE or WASSCE exams. It cannot be under your watch for that to happen because of the negligence of the heads of schools or WAEC or the Minister. As far as I am concerned, the pupils are innocent, but on the contrary, they are the victims. That cannot happen under our watch. We will support you to invite the Minister and to take immediate action, so that those pupils take their exams.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, when the Minister comes here to tell us that the principals or heads of schools and the Board Members are to be blamed, we will ensure that their salaries are seized for a certain number of months. We are going to tell the Minister to give us the list of these heads and we will ensure that their salaries for certain number of months are withheld. Thank you very much.

TABLE CLERK: The Office of the Clerk of Parliament wishes to inform Honourable Members of Parliament and the general that there will be a pre-legislative hearing on Monday, 15th April, 2024 in Committee Room one, Parliament Building, at 11:00 a.m. on the Bill entitled, 'The Criminal Procedure, Act 2023.' I thank you.

Adjournment

The House rose at 11:50 a.m., and was adjourned to Tuesday, 16th April, 2024 at 10:00 a.m.