

*OAU DRIVE, TOWER HILL, FREETOWN*

# **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

**[HANSARD]**

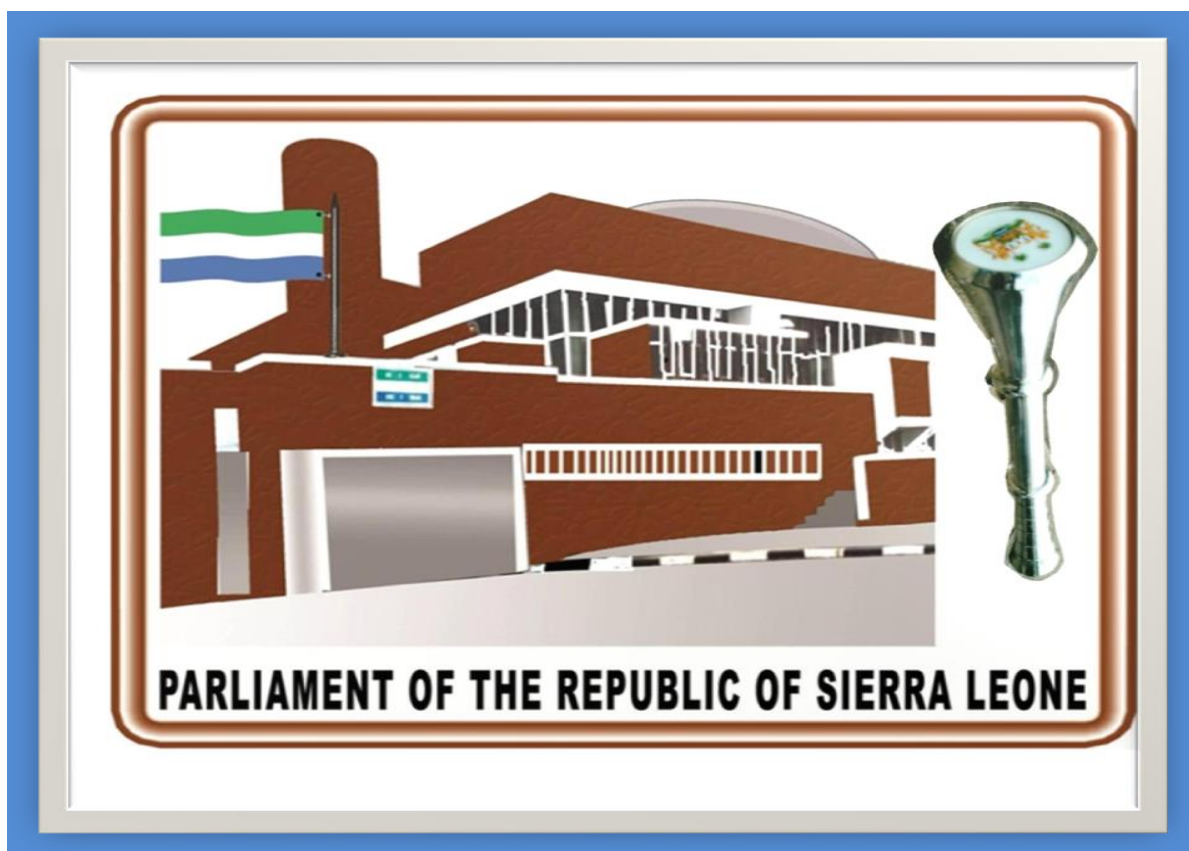
---

**OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT**

**SECOND SESSION – SECOND MEETING**

**TUESDAY, 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY, 2025**

*SESSION – 2024/2025*



*OAU DRIVE, TOWER HILL, FREETOWN*

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

**[HANSARD]**

---

**OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT**

**VOLUME: I**

**NUMBER: 60**

---

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

Proceedings of the Sitting of the House  
Held on Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2025

---

## **CONTENTS**

### **I. PRAYERS**

### **II. RECORD OF VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY SITTING HELD ON THURSDAY, 17<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2025.**

### **III. ANNOUNCEMENT BY MR SPEAKER**

### **IV. LAYING OF PAPER**

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

FINANCING AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAIN DEVELOPMENT IN SIERRA LEONE

### **V. GOVERNMENT MOTION**

A. THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

I. AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ON EXEMPTION FROM VISA REQUIREMENTS FOR HOLDERS OF DIPLOMATIC AND SERVICE PASSPORTS.

II. AGREEMENT UNDER THE UNITED NATIONS' CONVENTION ON THE LAWS OF THE SEA, ON THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF MARINE BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY OF AREAS BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTIONS.

B. THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

I. THE DEBT TO EQUITY SWAP AGREEMENT, FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE AGREEMENT OF 16<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 2012 BY AND BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE AND SIERRA MINERAL HOLDING LIMITED; AND

II. ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT OF THE ISLAMIC COOPERATION FOR THE INSURANCE OF INVESTMENTS AND EXPORT CREDITS.



*THE CHAMBER OF PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE*

## **Official Hansard Report of the Proceedings of the House**

---

### **SECOND SESSION – SECOND MEETING OF THE SIXTH PARLIAMENT OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC**

---

**THURSDAY, 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 2025**

#### **I. PRAYERS**

*[The Table Clerk, Alimamy Lincoln Bangura, read the prayer]*

*[The House met at 10:15 a.m. in Parliament Building, Tower Hill, Freetown]*

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

The House was called to Order

**II. CONSIDERATION OF THE RECORD OF VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS FOR  
THE PARLIAMENTARY SITTING HELD ON THURSDAY, 17<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2025**

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, we go through the record of Votes and Proceedings for the parliamentary sitting, held on Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2025. As usual, we shall skip pages 1-4 and start with Page 5. Do you have any comments or corrections to make on Page 5? Page 6? Page 7? Page 8? Page 9? Page 10? If there are no comments or corrections, can someone move for the adoption of the record of Votes and Proceedings for the parliamentary sittings held on Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2025 as presented?

**HON. JOSEPH WILLIAMS-LAMIN:** I so move, Honourable Speaker.

**THE SPEAKER:** Any seconder?

**HON. MOSES EDWIN:** I so second, Mr Speaker.

*[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]*

*[The record of Votes and Proceedings for the parliamentary sittings held on Thursday,  
17<sup>th</sup> July 2025 has been adopted as presented]*

**THE SPEAKER:** Honorable Members, I would like to recognise certain Honourable Members who were in the Well before my entry. Those who are Chairmen and deputies should not surprise [after the State Opening of Parliament] if they do not see your names as Chairman or deputies. This is because as Chairman of the Selection Committee, I am going to take into account attendance. You cannot be a Chairman and you do not come to Parliament in time. So, do not surprise at all and I would want you to say Mr Speaker hates me. I am going to take these attendances into account in selecting Chairmen and their deputies. You have been warned.

I recognise the diligence of the following Honorable Members:

Honorable Joseph Williams-Lamin

Honorable Alpha Foday Maddie Jabbie

Honorable Ibrahim Kabba

Honorable Umu Pyne

Honorable Ella Maria Gbla

Honorable Ali Bayoh

Honorable Musa Fofanah  
Honorable Sylvester Boima  
Honorable Amie Nyava moriba  
Honorable Alusine Bash Kamara  
Honorable Fatmata Serah Soukenah  
Honorable PC Desmond Kargobai  
Honorable Brahma Mansarey  
Honorable PC, Prince Bio Lansana  
Honorable Idris Sahid Kamara  
Honorable Princess Daramy  
Honorable PC Bai Shebora Sheba Gberekere,  
Honorable Musa Lahai  
Honorable Ishmael Yilla Sankoh  
Honorable Abraham Barrie  
Honorable Alfred Ayodele Thompson  
Honorable Abdullah E. Kamara  
Honorable Abu Bakar Fofanah  
Honorable Beatrice Maaya Kangbai  
Honorable Alice J Kumabeh  
Honorable Abdul Suliaman Marry Conteh,  
Honorable Tamba Kelly,  
Honorable Aaron Koroma  
Honorable Alex M Rogers  
Honorable Abdul Kargbo, Opposition Leader  
Honorable Adama Bangura  
Honorable Amara M. Kargbo  
Honorable Foyoh Tholley  
Honorable Moses Edwin  
Honorable Alpha Ben Mansaray  
Honorable Abdul Karim Kanu

**HON. IBRAHIM T. CONTEH:** Speaker, today, I sit as the Acting Leader of Government Business and the Deputy Speaker of the House. If you permit us, I want myself, the Chairman of Legislative Committee and the Leader of Opposition to approach you.

**THE SPEAKER:** Ok, please do.

**HON. IBRAHIM TAWA CONTEH:** Mr Speaker, I move that the Order Paper be amended thus: item IV remains as it is, but item V[A] becomes item V[B] and item V[B] becomes item V[A] and item VI[B] be expunged.

**HON. ABDUL K. KAMARA:** I so second, Mr Speaker.

*[Motion to amend the Order Paper has been carried]*

### **III. PAPER LAID**

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

**MR SHEKU AHMED FANTAMADI BANGURA *[Minister of Finance]*:** Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, with your leave, I beg to lay on the Table of this Honourable House the following paper:

Financing Agreement between the European Commission and the Government of Sierra Leone for Sustainable Food and Agricultural Value Chain Development in Sierra Leone

**THE SPEAKER:** I thank you very much, Mr Minister of Finance and you may wait, so that the one relating to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is laid before we come back to the Ministry of Finance. Honorable Leaders of the House, we have a brief meeting immediately after passing the Instrument relating to Foreign Affairs. We have a brief meeting with the Ministry of Finance in my Chambers. Thank you very much.

### **IV. GOVERNMENT MOTION**

A. THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

**ALHAJI TIMOTHY MUSA KABBA *[Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation]*:** Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, be it resolved that this Honourable House hereby ratify the following Agreements which were laid on the Table of the House on Tuesday, 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2025:

i. Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone on exemption from visa requirements for holders of Diplomatic and Service Passports.

ii. Agreement under the United Nations' Convention on the Laws of the Sea, on the Conservation and Sustainable use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdictions.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, Section 10[C] of Sierra Leone's Constitution puts the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Relations the expansion of Sierra Leone's Foreign Policy. Today, we live in a world that is interdependent, a world where all relations and relationships are on the string. Under the guidance of His Excellency the President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is opening new frontiers of relations and also

keeping old relations intact for the benefit of the people of our country. It is on this note that on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023 on the margins of the 78<sup>th</sup> High Level Session of the United Nations General Assembly that Sierra Leone and the Republic of Kazakhstan entered into this Agreement for the waiver of visa requirement for Diplomatic and Service Passport holders.

Mr Speaker, Honorable Members, the Cabinet of the President graciously approved and authorised me to bring this Agreement to Parliament for its ratification, so that the people can benefit. If this Agreement is ratified, citizens of our two countries will travel freely on diplomatic and service passports and this will deepen our bilateral relations, create opportunities for the people of the two countries. This Agreement will be for the benefit of our two countries; it will increase trade and investments and also increase Sierra Leone's support in multilateral institutions by having a strong and deepened bilateral relation with Kazakhstan.

Mr Speaker, Honorable Members, I therefore move that this House ratify this Agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Sierra Leone on the Waiver of Visa requirement for Diplomatic and Service Passports. I thank you.

Mr Speaker, Honorable Members, with your leave, the second Agreement is under the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea, on the Conservation and Sustainable use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction. The convulsions of climate change are impacting our societies, especially Sierra Leone. The University of Notre Dame, highlighted the scale of most vulnerable countries in the world to the impact of climate change, Sierra Leone is among the twenty most vulnerable countries and the signs are everywhere. In our country, there is flooding; and few years ago, there was mudslide which decimated hundreds of our compatriots. Our riverine communities are being decimated by the impact of climate change. From 2016, we have seen waves of seaweeds, encroaching our beaches and affecting economic activities for river and communities, and for recreation in the West Coast of Sierra Leone. The impact of climate change is a reality felt by all of us; therefore, the United Nations, over the past 20 years, has engaged in intensive negotiations to produce an Agreement that will expand jurisdictions, expand the conservation and the regulation of the use of marine biology beyond national jurisdictions.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Honorable Members, this Agreement was placed in the United Nations Chamber last year on the margins of the 79<sup>th</sup> General Assembly for member states of the United Nations to append their signatures and ratify same. Sixty [60] countries appended their signatures for this Agreement in 2024. To date, over 90 countries have appended their signatures to this Agreement and 16 countries have



ratified same. When this Agreement is ratified, Sierra Leone will be the pioneer for sustainable conservation of marine biodiversity in West Africa.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, these two Agreements are presented for your attention and the combined 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child submitted by the Republic of Sierra Leone under Article 44 of the Convention of the United Nations on the Rights of the Child, I hereby move the Motion that this Honourable House consider the ratification of these Agreements. Thank you very much.

### *Question Proposed*

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, we have a very long day today. Therefore, I am going to take one from either side, beginning with Honourable Joseph Williams-Lamin.

**HON. JOSEPH WILLIAMS-LAMIN:** Thank you very much, Honorable Speaker. As the Minister said, no man is an island. Therefore, in the world we live in today, Sierra Leone cannot develop all by herself. She must be in partnership with other countries, but we also have to bear in mind that in relationship, as we tread along, we have to be extremely careful because we are talking about diplomatic relationship for economic reasons. I want to bring to the attention of this House that those who make use of the relationship with this new state that we have established a relationship with must tread carefully, so that we maintain the image we have rebranded. This is because we have seen the proliferation of the popular slogan, people want to get rich today by all means. Therefore, when they travel, they travel with substances or things that will destroy the image of this country. I want to humbly declare to this House that I have travelled outside this jurisdiction more than 150 times.

Mr Speaker, Honorable Members, I want to declare to this House that recently, I got a three classrooms building, donated by a former Peace Corps Volunteer to this country, who noticed from the announcement by Mr Speaker in respect of punctuality and attendance. That benefit will go to Tonkolili District, Mabuntu, to be specific. In 2018, 2020 and 2021, I visited former friends of the Peace Corps Volunteers I met in the mid-80s and that relationship has gone a very good way. Therefore, those who are intending to explore these avenues we have opened should do so cautiously or in a way that would continue to rebrand or maintain the image of this nation. Therefore, I want to encourage my colleagues to ratify these Agreements for the betterment of mama Salone. I thank you.

**HON. ABDUL K. KAMARA:** Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I think this is a wonderful day and we have a beautiful document this morning. I believe we have very good initiative as a country; and we have gone far ahead of most countries when it

comes to protecting the child and women's participation in politics. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs is bringing very good documents, we have not sold out the very good characters and policies we have made as a nation. You do not know this until you go out of this country and start talking about the things we have achieved as a nation and you would see other countries almost benchmarking us when it comes to policy formulations, women's empowerment and protecting the rights of children in Sierra Leone. I think it is high time we started going out and ensuring that we market ourselves using those achievements. We have to continue to make ourselves enviable at the international stage and the international world. We must not just be known for terrible things, such as Ebola, mudslide and the civil war. It is time for Sierra Leoneans to sell our country and make ourselves enviable in terms of economic growth, gender empowerment and children's security.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I think this Agreement is timely. We also want to ask other institutions that are going out to sign bilateral Agreements or International Agreements to bring them to this House for ratification. It is easy to sign, but when those Agreements are not ratified, they put us in a situation of those who have agreed, but have not domesticated them. I am sure this also disturbs most of our ratings internationally and it is not good for our nation. So, we ask, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to request other ministries that have signed Agreements to bring them to this House speedily for ratification. If you are sure that what you wanted to sign is not good, do not sign; but if you sign for something good, please domesticate. Thank you very much.

**HON. ABDUL KARGBO:** Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to look at the pros and cons of these Agreements, laid before this House today. I want to begin with the one that has to do with the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone on exemption from visa requirements for holders of Diplomatic and Service Passports. Well, I have seen so many of these Agreements, but seemingly we are not taking advantage of them as a nation. If there is an Agreement of this nature for holders of Diplomatic and Service Passport, I am convinced that it is an easy way for the government to go into direct contact with the Government of Kazakhstan, ensuring their frequent visits, so as to ensure how best we can be able to tap from the resources of both countries. This Agreement is not just for government officials to relax or holidaying family. No, that is not the reason; it is to ensure that we create a nexus between our country and the country in question, so that whenever there is a lacuna or there is a need, we can be able to seek support. We have done this with several other countries, but from every indication, we have not seen a corresponding return. I am of the firmest conviction that we should applaud the Minister for such an Agreement because it enhances faster diplomatic relations and also

removes delays involved in securing a visa. When there is a short term notice, we can be able to ensure that we capitalise on it for the betterment of our nation.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this Agreement reflects reciprocal respect between the two countries. We have done this for several other countries, but most of these countries we have done this for are flourishing while we are lagging behind. You have done this for Turkey, Russia, China and many other countries, but these countries are good in areas that we are lacking. How many visits have the holders of diplomatic or service passports paid to those countries to ensure that they solve problems we are faced with? How many Agreements or how many results have these MDAs brought to Parliament as a result of these very Agreements that we have ratified. So, this is to ensure that we tap into some of the advantages this country has that we do not have as a nation. In a nutshell, this will improve diplomatic efficiency and reciprocity, boost bilateral ties, and strengthen the political and diplomatic relations between the two nations. So, I want to crave the indulgence of the Minister to ensure that he liaises with other MDAs for them to do same. I could remember when the MPOX disease struck, we were struggling; but if we had similar Agreements with those countries, we should have visited them or sent the Minister of Health to those countries to solicit assistance for Sierra Leone.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, these Agreements are not happening by accident; they are deliberately designed to ensure that we benefit as a nation. This is why when Agreement of this nature comes to Parliament, we expeditiously ratify it because we know that we have to benefit as a country; we have to create these ties because we cannot live in isolation. This is a standard international practice in terms of visa exemption Agreements for holders of diplomatic and service passports. It is standard in international relations. So, I want to commend the Minister because he has done so well to ensure that he creates ties with other nations and see how best Sierra Leone can be able to tap from resources in other nations. However, in the midst of all that, I have said that this is positive and we applaud the Minister for this Agreement.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, there are some fears I would want to also bring to the attention of the Minister. The first one has to do with the security concern. Most times we do not have the risk screening process for those entering our country with visa exemptions and this will put our country in danger. Some will come with the intention that it is because of bilateral relationship, but they have ulterior motive. We know how the world is looking at Sierra Leone; we know the threats Sierra Leone has posed, especially when it comes to narcotics. We have to be serious in terms of ensuring that when somebody comes here with visa exemption, be it diplomatic or

service passport, that the person is screened properly. We do not want to see situations where people come here with another motive.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, one disadvantage is that we cannot screen people properly as a nation. We do not screen holders of diplomatic or service passports in these countries. That is the prerogative of their country; and that is the prerogative of the immigration of their own country. So, if the immigration is not too focused and they give diplomatic or service passports to drug lords, it will be an easy pass for them into this country. We should be very conscious; we should be monitoring the process, so as to prevent drug lords from entering the country. Another downside of this Agreement is the fact that there will be unequal benefits because Kazakhstan is a big country and it is exposed to a lot of other opportunities than Sierra Leone. As I said initially, the Minister did exceptionally well to ensure that he creates ties of this nature.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, due to the items we have today, I will go to the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on Laws of the Sea. However, let me look at some of the positive highlights of this very Agreement. It provides for Global Ocean Protection; i.e., the Agreement fills major gaps in international law by protecting biodiversity. We have all seen, on several occasions, that our biodiversity is exposed to whosoever and it was the World Bank that did a study; and in that study, if we diverted our economy to marine resources, we make more money than what we make in the mining sector. So, we must be able, as a nation, to create economic diversification, especially at a time when we are struggling to generate the much needed revenue.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this Agreement would help this nation by ensuring that marine resources in areas beyond national jurisdictions are sustainably managed and not over exploited, as we have seen before. There are boats in the sea you would not know the country they come from; you would not know who gave them the authority to fish or to use our marine resources. These are things we should be very careful of as a nation. I could remember there was a time when we had visitors, they came and made offer to us that if we went into agreement with them, just from what they would get from the marine resources, they will be giving **\$200mln** to us on annual basis. So, that shows the valuable resources we have in the sea. We should ensure proper monitoring and equitable sharing of marine genetics resources. It promotes fairness and equitable access to marine genetics resources. We have seen, on several occasions that we are not proactive. One thing about the economy of Sierra Leone is that when we focus on one thing, if we do not exploit it, we will not redirect our revenue. I could remember the time we had abundant of gold and that became the major source to mobilise resources. Now, we have minerals which are now the main revenue sources. So, if we diversify to the marine sector, it will make more money. Let

us take it very seriously and let us monitor our waters, and also ensure that we do not expose it to the adversities it has been exposed to.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this Agreement supports climate and environmental goals. It may contribute to the global effort to combat climate change, reserve our ecosystem and reach the 30 by 30 biodiversity target; i.e., to protect **30%** of the Planet Ocean by 2030. It also enhances marine governance. We note our marine sector is not protected, but this Agreement establishes Marine Protected Areas, which they call the MPAs. Once we have that beyond national jurisdictions, with a binding standard and oversight mechanisms, it will ensure that proper monitoring is done. It empowers developing countries who, amidst all of these positive things that I have stated about this very Agreement.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, please permit me to look at some of the critical aspects and I want the attention of the Minister and this House as a whole. It has some sovereignty concerns. This may evolve the state sovereignty by allowing international bodies to make decision affecting resources in areas close to the country's exclusive economic zone. This means other countries will have to determine what we do in our own exclusive economic zone, which also minimises our sovereignty. Also, it is binding decision on marine protected areas to be perceived as limiting national freedom. This suggests that when decisions are taken, the government will be left with no alternative, but to follow strictly those decisions, even when they do not align with our national policies or what government intends to do. The government will be left with no alternative, but to simply abide to it. There is also the issue of bureaucracy and it is costly. It creates additional layer of international bureaucracy and compliance obligation, which may be burdensome for all states with limited institutional capacity. As a nation, we must be prepared for the bureaucracies that are involved.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, let me quickly look at the last report, which is the combined Sixth and Seventh Periodic Report on the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child submitted by the Republic of Sierra Leone, under Article 44 of the Convention. Like I did for the other Agreements, I am also going to give some of the supporting points, especially the advantages and go to some of the concerns. The first one demonstrates our commitment to international obligations. Sierra Leone is part of the globe and Sierra Leone is compelled to domesticate international treaties in order to ensure that we conform to international best practice and to also ensure that we prove to be part of this global village. You know, by submitting the report, Sierra Leone affirms her commitments to the Child Rights Act to the international accountability under the UNCIC. So, this also is in compliance with Article 44 and it is a sign of transparency, good governance and international cooperation. To me, when Sierra

Leone is making strides, especially in international cooperation, it behooves us to give the accolade to the government. I have said this on several occasions that we are in Opposition, but we are not opponents to the development of this nation. That is why conveniently, we praise the government when the need arises and we critique the government where necessary.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, there is a progress in the legal and policies framework in the report, likely highlight legislative reforms, such as the Child Rights Act of 2007. It is also in the anti-trafficking law, the Free Quality Education Initiative and the National Child Protection Strategy. These are all efforts Sierra Leone has made as a nation and it is in this report. So, I want to commend the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and by extension the Minister for this laudable venture. This is one way we could inform the world about the progress we are making as a nation, especially the laws or treaties we are domesticating. It shows the effort of aligning domestic laws with international standards on children's welfare, protection and participation. Our children are not in isolation with other children in the world. This shows how best Sierra Leone is doing in terms of ensuring that we create a convenient world for our children. The report also has the advancement that we have made in education and health. The child immunisation, nutrition, the maternal health and the services that reflect are all parts of the report. It also has the child protection mechanism strengthening in the report.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I also want to look at the challenges in the report. The persistent implementation gaps, especially the Child Protection and the Child Act. The implementation is very weak. In fact, we have poor enforcement attitude. I can assure you, even though we ratified Agreement here or enacted laws, yet there is child marriage in the provinces, child labour and child trafficking. So, we have to ensure that these practices align with the laws that we make here. In a nutshell, these three documents are all fantastic for the progress of our nation. The visa exemption, the Agreement in respect of the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea, on the Conservation and Sustainable use of Marine Biological Diversity of areas beyond National Jurisdiction, and the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> periodic reports on the United Nations Convention. I want to plead with my colleagues to expeditiously ratify these Agreements for the betterment of our nation. I thank you.

**THE SPEAKER:** Acting Leader of Government Business and Deputy Speaker.

**HON. IBRAHIM T. CONTEH:** Mr Speaker, I want to thank you and the Minister of Foreign Affairs for his timely submission of this document to the House. Before now, this House has realised that most times Agreements are either entered into or ratified, they are not brought to this House for ratification, maybe after ten [10] years. On this Order Paper, I realised that one of the Agreements we are going to ratify from the

Ministry of Finance was signed in January, 2018 and it is only coming to this House in July, 2025. These are serious issues and we must pay attention to them because when the Executive, by the powers given to the President and by extension Members of his Cabinet, enters into any Agreements as per Section 40, Sub-section 4, such Agreements are not valid until they are ratified by Parliament. They are not valid until Parliament gives it its blessing. It behooves MDAs on whose behalf Agreements are entered into to also remind their ministers to bring them to Parliament. This is because as a member country to some of these organisations, particularly the United Nations, it is good that when we enter into such Agreements, they are brought to this House for their expeditious ratifications, so that we can benefit from such Agreements.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, on the Conservation and Sustainable use of Marine Biological Diversity of areas beyond National Jurisdiction is a good one because if you looked at certain Articles in this Agreement, you would realise that it firstly protects the party's military exploration of their marine resources and their waters. This shows that the member states and the United Nations take security seriously and it is a priority for member states to protect their waters. So, in as much as our security apparatus have free access to explore and protect our marine biology, I think it is a good Agreement. I will commend the Minister on that. It also takes into cognizance the fact that locals whose locality is outside the party's jurisdiction are taken into consideration in terms of their consent and participation. This is very good and it is the kind of Agreement we expect to see because we want our people to be protected and our roles to be properly defined, so that whatever action is taken, it is taken in good faith.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the establishment of a clearing house for parties to discuss and to exchange documents where they want to explore beyond the parties jurisdictional waters is also good. If you have been in banking before and currently, what they have done is to automate the clearing house; but before now, when we were in banking, we had to take our briefcase to the central bank and we exchange our cheques. This is a medium through which banks and in this case, parties exchange information or pass on sensitive information to each other in terms of exploration and protection of their marine biology outside their jurisdictional waters. But what is of concern to me is the enforcement of some of the multilateral Agreements that we have entered into, particularly the Ramsar Agreement. We are a party to the Ramsar Agreement and we have seen the continuous depletion of our mangroves. It is alarming and it may interest this House to note that the mangrove is one of breed of plants that generates a lot of carbon reduction medium. Now that we are depleting our mangroves, it means we are exposing ourselves and this nation to climate's adverse effects.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I grew up in the slums and that is why I know exactly how the mangroves have been protecting us. For those of us who are early slum dwellers would tell you that we used the mangroves to protect our environment. This is because if you have lived in the swamp areas, you would know that one of our biggest challenges is toilet facility, but the mangroves helped to protect and keep our secrets, Nowadays, the mangroves are being depleted and this is affecting both our secrets and the marine biology of our country. I think we must pay attention to it very seriously. Mr Minister, I want to say it is commendable that we are signing up to the Agreement that has just been brought, so that together with other parties, work on the enforcement. This is because when you enter into an Agreement, you have to ensure proper implementation. When new policies and new Instruments are introduced, you try to clear the backlogs. Mr Speaker, now that we are entering into the Agreement as early as possible, I think it is something that is beneficial for our country, as for the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I see ourselves as a nation that has made so much progress. Quite recently, this House legislated the prohibition of child marriage. Before now, we have seen Presidents before President Bio taking positive steps or conscious steps to ensure that they protect the children of this country. When President Ahmed Tejan Kabba of blessed memory was President of Sierra Leone, he made sure that children from the North accessed school without paying because if you find out where Sierra Leone was, those of us coming from the North are deprived mostly from having access to education. However, he made that possible. When President Ernest Bai Koroma came, he pushed through the free healthcare project. These are all steps taken by this country to ensure that we protect our children. Today, President Bio has not only introduced the free quality education, but he has consciously brought legislations to this House. He has taken steps to ensure that the free quality education is enhanced. In the Medium Term National Development, the President is pushing for the children, especially the free quality healthcare programme to move beyond under five, so that it can be a holistic protection of children from conception to secondary school. This means you have protected the child in all angles; and by the time the child graduates from the free health programme, the child will be conscious enough to decipher what it takes and what it does not take. That is why our children are vulnerable to consuming anything that is brought to them by their peers. So, I think it is a laudable venture and the report speaks exactly to what Sierra Leone has done and what Sierra Leone intends to do. Mr Minister, I know you are respected. It was said by the President that you are respected among your peers and I know you are a man of multiple talents. You are one of the few Sierra Leoneans who can speak almost every local language in this country. You are also one of the few Sierra Leoneans who can venture into speaking



international languages. If I am not mistaking, you can speak Portuguese, Russian, French and German. It shows the level at which our Minister of Foreign Affairs is and the respect that is accorded to him whenever he is among his peers.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, for the Agreement with Kazakhstan, I see that Kazakhstan is a landlocked country; but if you looked at our diplomatic arrangement, we have given free visas, but we have had a visa free Agreement with China for holders of diplomatic and service passports. We have had same with Russia. So, it is obvious that at the middle of the two, North and East, we have Kazakhstan in the middle, wherein we can also access Kazakhstan through the middle. However, if you looked at Kazakhstan as a country, you looked at their geographical location and their scale performance, you would realise that most of the aspirations of President Bio are things that Kazakhstan is vast in. They are vast in agriculture and even in renewable energy. So, if we wanted to make strides as a country to bring investors to learn from other countries, I think these are the countries we should try and establish diplomatic relations with. What I would encourage the Minister to do is to engage, as soon as this Agreement is ratified by this House, your partners, so that they can extend the period. I am sure thirty [30] days may not be sufficient for holders of service or diplomatic passports who are interested in opening or understanding the business dynamics of Kazakhstan. Yes, I know they give us scholarships and those scholarships have helped not only developing the human capital of our country, but also bringing new knowledge to impact the vision of His Excellency the President.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my colleague on the other side was worried about drugs and drug peddling. I think diplomatic and service passports are one of the highest security instruments and no country can consciously give out their most secured instruments to a drug lord. No country is free from drugs, not even the all-powerful United States of America. All of these things come from other countries. I do not want to know parties here, but it is part of the global village. The global village does not operate in isolation; we are in it and we have to be part of it. There are things we can stop and there are those we have to manage. However, I do not think any country in its right senses would give securities to a drug lord because there is a visa exemption between these countries. We should encourage them to bring their best hands. Their best hands can bring real investments.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the world has changed completely; the world is a new place now; tariffs are here and trade barriers are there. As a country, we must try to break through and get new diplomatic frontiers because if we do not establish new diplomatic frontiers, we would be tied in and would only be subject to those whose control we have been under for the last 60 years. So, I gave the Minister of Foreign

Affairs kudos for trying to break through and get new diplomatic frontiers. Even in Sierra Leone, if you asked Sierra Leoneans, even among us, the country one may want to go, they say UK or US. Nobody thinks outside those countries and they are good places. That is why when they slammed restrictions on us by certain countries, we are worried. However, I am not worried anymore because my first visit in the United States was after my 35<sup>th</sup> birthday. So, even if I do not go there anymore, it does not mean anything. It was half my life because a man's life expectation is three scores and ten. So, if I entered the United States for the first time at the age of 38, even if I do not go there again, I have seen everything. I can now go to Kenya, Qatar and other places. As a Government, I see this Agreement as a good thing, making new diplomatic ties and I would encourage you to try as much as possible, so that we can relate to those other countries. Mr Speaker, these are the countries and institutions you can get the best from because at the end of the day, they want to build their reputation; they want to come to the forefront; they want to be international players; and as they become international players, we have seen ourselves as part of the international dynamics.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Minister has led us to the UN Security Council and he is currently the Chief International Diplomat for ECOWAS. These are all steps taken by our country to move beyond where we have been. The President is the Chairman of the Authority of Heads of States and Governance for ECOWAS. So, I would encourage my colleagues to expeditiously and speedily ratify this Agreement. Thank you, Mr Speaker,

**THE SPEAKER:** Yes, Mr Minister.

**ALHAJI TIMOTHY MUSA KABBA:** Thank you, Mr Speaker and Honourable Members. I thank you all for your precious comments. I thank the Deputy Speaker and Acting Leader of Government Business for your gracious comments and I am very pleased that you were able to speak to the security nature of diplomatic and service passports. Like the Deputy Speaker said, these are highly securitised documents issued under the Vienna Convention that establishes diplomatic relations between nations. I am very sure that this waiver would only enhance our bilateral relations, the movement of goods and services between the two countries. I am very sure it would not be used for those nefarious purposes such as drugs trafficking or other transnational organised crimes. I also want to allay this House's fears that the BBNJ, as the name implies, it is beyond national jurisdiction, so that the established marine environment will not be tampered with. I mean the world's ocean is protected by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the BBNJ takes queue from the UNCLOS of 1982. So, this Agreement will serve as a conduit for the infringement on our marine territorial integrity.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this Agreement tends to provide opportunity for the United Nations, the world's premium organisation that continues to promote humanity, human rights, security and international humanitarian assistance to affected people; i.e., the UN Convention on the Protection, Regulation and Sustainable use of Marine Biodiversity. It tends to regulate and protect marine biology and marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. It will not have any issue on the marine sovereignty of our country. The Minority Leader mentioned that some of these Agreements facilitate and support humanitarian assistance from the countries we have bilateral relations with. I want to inform the House and the Minority Leader that at the outset of the outbreak of MPOX, His Excellency the President instructed that we reach out to our partners. We reached out to the government and people of the United Arab Emirates, who graciously supplied loads of vaccines for the people and the Government of Sierra Leone to fight against MPOX. So, we are utilising these relations we have with our bilateral partners.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, like the precious speakers cautioned, we would also speak with other MDAs that have signed Agreements on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone for us to bring them to this gracious House for ratification and onward domestication for implementation. I want to thank you profoundly, Mr Speaker and Honourable Members for your contributions and insight instruction and guidance. I want to crave your indulgence to recognise Kazakhstan's Honorary Consul to the Republic of Sierra Leone, Mr Andrea Hobbs. Mr Hobbs, as a representative of Kazakhstan, contributed to this Agreement by his continuous visit to Kazakhstan and connecting the two Ministries of Foreign Affairs of these two countries. I want to thank him and I have expressed similar positive sentiments to my counterpart, His Excellency, Mr Marat, the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Thank you very much.

On this note, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that these Agreements between the government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and Republic of Kazakhstan on exemption from visa requirements for holders of diplomatic and service passports, and the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea, on the Conservation and Sustainable use of Marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, and the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports on the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child submitted by the Republic of Sierra Leone under Article 44 of the Convention be ratified. I thank you

*[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]*

*[Government Motion by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation has been ratified]*

**HON. JULIANA FATORMA:** I want you all to join me to thank the Honourable Minister for giving us a forty horsepower Yamaha Machine for my community. I have complained to this House about the crocodiles in my Constituency. Thank God the Minister boldly gave us a 40 horsepower for my community to help drive away these alligators. Thank you, Mr Minister and God bless you.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Mr Minister. Honourable Leaders, please let us meet briefly in my Chambers.

*[The House stood down at 11:35 a.m., and resumed at 12:00 noon]*

## **V. GOVERNMENT MOTION**

### **THE MINISTER OF FINANCE**

**MR SHEKU AHMED FANTAMADI BANGURA [Minister of Finance]:** Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, be it resolved that this Honourable House hereby ratify the following Agreements which were laid on the Table of the House on Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> July and Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025, respectively:

A. The Debt to Equity SWAP Agreement, First Amendment to the Agreement of 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2012 by and between the Government of Sierra Leone and Sierra Mineral Holding Limited; and

B. Articles of Agreement of the Islamic Cooperation for the Insurance of Investments and Export Credits.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to draw your attention to sub-section 4 of Section 5 and sub-section 1 of Section 6 of the Tax and Exemption Act passed by this Parliament in 2023, which mandates the Minister of Finance to negotiate tax exemptions on behalf of the state and after Cabinet approval, to submit to Parliament for ratification, which is consistent also with Section 110, of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. It provides for a waiver of variation of any tax imposed by an Act of Parliament shall also be subjected to parliamentary approval and by resolution on that behalf before it is effected. Honourable Members are aware of the operations of Sierra Holding, which is a Bauxite mining company that is located between Bo and Moyamba Districts and that lies in the same belt with well-known global box head deposits. We entered into an Agreement with them for the development and operations of the mines sector way back in 2005. The terms of that Agreement were subsequently revised in July 2012 that provides for exploration and mining rights for over a twenty year period, with the rights for renewal in accordance with applicable laws. During the last couple of years, this Company has been in operation and exporting sizable metric tons of bauxite annually, guaranteeing bauxite products with huge vessels are exported out of this country, and has been contributing to our national development, generating revenue for

the government's operations, but also creating employments for our people and providing opportunities in many other direct ways for businesses in the country.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, in recent times, whether during Covid-19 in particular or the crisis we have been experiencing in Europe and other parts of the world, the Company faced series of challenges with their off takers internationally that compelled them to downsize their operations and requested government for some reprieve. Prior to March 2020, the Company faced serious financial constraints and therefore requested the government to actually provide some kind of relief. As it is right now, this Company accumulated a lot of debt obligations to government in the form of tax or in terms of tax liability, which they requested government to undertake what we called equity to debt swap arrangements. Debt to equity swap means that all the tax liabilities and obligations they owed to the government, including future taxes, be transferred or be converted into Government participation in lieu of shareholding interest in the Company. I think this is a very valuable proposal they have put forward. In this regard, the Company presented a valuation report conducted by an Independent Valuer to our technical team in the Ministry of Finance, NRA, NMA and the Ministry of Mines to ascertain the tax obligations owed and also to ensure the true value of the property that is there.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the report revealed a total of about **\$13mln** and this amount included obligations of taxes that were owed, but also those owed up to the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2024. These tax obligations were assessed for a period of two years and with a series of discussions and negotiations held between the government and the Company, we reached an understanding on this fiscal proposal, which is for the government to take a **10%** equity shareholding interest in the Company, in lieu of the obligations they owed to the government in the form of taxes. In that regard, we negotiated some of the obligations or some of the tax reprieve that are being provided to them in order to ensure that not only **10%** equity stake, but to provide flexibility for their operations during this difficult period and to offer them two years tax relief. In lieu of that, we have made an adjustment to the existing Agreement, which we have brought before this Parliament. This Agreement is requesting for few tax exemptions for the ratification of this House.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to go through the proposals that are in the Agreement. The first one has to do with rent. We are proposing that payments of fleets and surface rents shall be subject to the same clauses as at the previous one and consistent as at the previous 2012 agreement and consistent with applicable law. Royalty will be consistent with applicable laws; license fee will be done according to applicable laws; two years exemption in respect of Corporate Income Tax; for

withholding taxes, this will be consistent for non-resident contractors and will be consistent with applicable laws. Withholding taxes on service providers will stay the same as per applicable laws; withholding tax on dividend as per applicable laws; withholding taxes on interest will request an exemption of two years; withholding taxes on interest on non-residents, we are requesting for exemption of two years; withholding tax affiliates will stay as per applicable and Agreement management fee and as per applicable law and Agreement; import duty on spares and lubricants. Here we are requesting for fuel adjustments from **5%** to **1%** for two years. We exempt them for lubricants or charges on fuel. This will go according to applicable laws.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, PAYE stays as per applicable laws; payroll will stay as per applicable laws; import duties on plant, machinery and equipment, non-capital goods and mining consumables will provide an exemption for them as far as per existing laws; for goods and services, except for purchases from supermarkets, hotels and restaurants, but we leave them for the period of two years; import inspection fee will stay as per applicable laws; environmental license fee will stay as per applicable laws; Community Development Fund stays as per applicable laws; for loss carry forward, there is silence on that, which means the applicable law applies; fiscal stabilisation is included in the law; surface rents will stay as per applicable laws; monitoring fees as per applicable laws; freight levies will have to negotiate with third parties that are providing services currently for which the government has contracted them. These are the provisions that we are presenting to Parliament for ratification.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, in terms of justifications for the immediate benefits of this project, this is to ensure that we are able to increase economic activities, but also ensure that we attract investments in the bauxite sector, which activities are actually slowed down in Sierra Leone for last couple of years. This is a major bauxite exporting entity, except the CTC that has emerged. However, the Sierra Mineral Holding is one of the biggest bauxite deposits; it will be able to ensure that investments continue to sustain employments in the country; it ensures that they bring increased level of income and productivity in the area. The equity stake is increasing revenue for the government, which we currently do not have in many of our mines prior to this period. Also, with the new ownership structure, which is **100%** Sierra Leonean ownership of this Company, the government is however taking **10%**, which is a positive development we must support.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the second paper has to do with the ratification of the Islamic Cooperation for Insurance of Investments and Export Credit is an entity of the Islamic Development Bank to which we are a member and it is part of the OIC. At the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Islamic Development Bank, Sierra Leone, as a member

of both ISDB and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, what we formally expressed interest in becoming a member of the Islamic Cooperation for insurance of investments and export promotion, we are a member of the ISDB. This is one of the entities of the ISDB. ISDB is basically the insurance guarantee component of it. There is also a private sector entity, but this entity supports private sector investments in countries and our accession here is a very strategic one. I think it is very urgent, in the sense that, it will help us to boost our investments climate and ensures that we expand the opportunity for trade and trade investments in Sierra Leone. It is a decision to align with our own national priority, which is basically to enhance our financial resilience and to attract foreign direct investments, and strengthen our trade competitiveness as a country.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we specifically believe that once it is ratified by Parliament, membership will provide investments and trade risk mitigation solutions, including private entities that may want to attract investments into Sierra Leone. We also want to ensure that other stakeholders, be it financial institutions or other investors, will be given a boost to have a guarantee for the resources they may be investing in the country. There are several other benefits to be derived. First, support for export led growth in the sense that export credit insurance normally helps export promotion agencies to support domestic firms in expanding into international markets. It also provides sovereign risk insurance, where the government can secure political risk insurance to attract FDI into strategic sectors, like energy, mining, infrastructure and manufacturing. It may help in debt sustainability because IEC backed sovereign loans guaranteed will reduce the borrowing costs, but also enable access to more affordable development financing. You can use this guarantee to bring down the cost of certain loans we are taking. It can facilitate public/private partnership in the sense that the risk mitigation tool may help our government to unlock private sector investments in large scale projects, be it infrastructure, telecom, transportation, energy or the opportunity for trade credit insurance.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, exporters are aware that they can be protected against the risk of non-payment by foreign buyers, allowing businesses to expand into new markets with confidence. We see a lot of benefits such as the supply chain protection for companies and also facilitating our access to Islamic financing instruments into the country and political risk insurance as well. It is on that note that I move that be it resolved that this Honourable House hereby ratify the following Agreements which were laid on the Table of the House on Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> July and Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025 respectively:

- i. The Debt to Equity Swap Agreement [First Amendment] the Agreement of 16<sup>th</sup> July 2012 between the Government of Sierra Leone and Sierra Mineral Holdings 1 Ltd.

- ii. The Article of Agreement of the Islamic Corporation for Insurance of Investments and Exports Credit.

*[Question Proposed]*

**HON. AARON A. KOROMA:** Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the two Agreements before us are largely non-controversial, especially the one that has to do with the 'Debt Equity Swap Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and Sierra Mineral Holdings. This is also good for doing business. It shows that when you are in contractual agreement with the government of Sierra Leone, in the event you face difficulties, you have a government that comes to your aid to understand the challenges you are facing as a businessman or as an investor. That is exactly what this whole Agreement is all about. I am happy that the government has resorted to not just waving the taxes as we have been doing. This is because we know how much we have been losing as a nation on tax waivers. We are losing so much to a point that government is getting little or nothing in return. So, having a mechanism whereby government will now say, Okay, what you have to pay to us, instead of us giving it to you at a low benefit to the nation, you will now convert it to equity. In other words, we now have **10%** shares into your investments. I am sure it will go a long way, even if it will not benefit us in the short term, but in the long term, it will have some financial benefits in our nation's purse.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this happened with Sierra Rutile, when the government also entered into a similar Agreement. At some points, **13mln** was paid to government and that is a very good mechanism, but I would have loved the Minister to include the Valuation Report of what was exactly owed to the Government of Sierra Leone. This is because as a Parliament, we should have the opportunity to know how the various taxes owed to the government were evaluated or assessed. He also mentioned that this Agreement takes into consideration future taxes and when you put all of them together, what has been owed already and the future taxes could cost the government. In other words, if this is not properly looked at, the Government might even lose more than the **10%** equity. Therefore, for this particular Agreement, I want the Minister to submit the Valuation Report later or provide a succinct explanation to Parliament as to how he can seize the opportunity of having a look at the Valuation Report that shows how much the Company owed the government. This will help us to understand why government has now resorted into entering a debt equity arrangement and to also do a projection or analysis of what government thinks it will get in return. There are also things that Government may want to substitute with the **10%** shares.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I also have a little concern about tax holidays. This one is not tied to anything and I am not sure if it falls under the **10%** competition of



shareholding because the **10%**, as per the Minister's submission, takes into account what the Company owes the government and also future taxes. So, within those two years period, many things will happen. I would have loved a situation wherein instead of giving a blanket tax holiday, what is expected to have been paid within those two years should have been computed and add to what should be determined to be our equity in the Company. We know that even if the Government do not benefit from that system now, government is continuity because it will come to a time when it will be huge revenue for this nation.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I am sure the other Agreement is also non-controversial. It has no immediate financial burden on the state; it only talks about membership for which Sierra Leone has so much to benefit from. We know that the issue of sovereign guarantee has been a problem for many nations. In the government balance sheet, it stands as a liability; but if you have a credible institution that provides insurance and in the event your contract is terminated, you would have somebody that will provide a cover for you and that will, to a very large extent, provides or gives government the opportunity to even attract more credible investments. I want to commend the Minister for this Agreement because it will attract investments that will boost employments, increase revenue and stimulate economic growth in the country.

On that note, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to say that on our side, the two Agreements are non-controversial and I want to commend the Minister and ask this Honourable House to speedily ratify them. Thank you very much.

**THE SPEAKER:** Leader of government business, and Deputy Speaker.

**HON. IBRAHIM T. CONTEH:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. With the exception of the First Parliament until the sixth Parliament, it is only one person that had privilege to serve as Deputy Speaker and Leader of Government Business at the same time. I think what we are seeing is progression. I said earlier today, while I was talking about the United Nations Protocols, that Agreements signed by Ministers, on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone, should be brought to this House as early as possible, so as to ensure that we give them the force of law for onward implementation. If you go through this particular document, you would realise that even the letters are addressed to the then Minister of Finance. So, I want to commend the Minister for taking his time to go through the documents in his archives and brought this one because it is for the financial benefits of our country. We should not shy away from the fact that the world is going through difficult times.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, country like ours is largely surviving mostly on support from other countries, be it grants or otherwise. This is why we should take instrument like this one very seriously. For me, I see it as an additional opportunity,

particularly for insurance and insurance companies or partnership with this corporation. This is because it makes provision for insurers and reinsurers to work with them in terms of insurance. If you went through the financial systems in Sierra Leone, you would realise that it is only the banks that insure against risks. They insure their cash or accounts, cash you can see through buildings or contents and everything. However, it is sad to note that the Minister of Finance will raise money and will buy good vehicles for people in positions of power to meet their offices, but these vehicles are insured in the third party's name; and if anything happened to the vehicle, it will be the end of the vehicle. You get nothing out of it. The last time I engaged, during in the Public Accounts Committee hearings, the Managing Director [MD] of Guma Valley Water Company and I asked him whether or not the water bowsers were comprehensively insured. He said no, they were third party insured. So, whatever happens to the water bowsers, it will be the end.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, if the Minister sees reason that we have been part of the ISDB for a very long time and this is an important infrastructure of the ISDB, we are not part of it, it means if you went through the dashboard or went through the schedule attached to it, you would see the analysis of sierra Leone performance. You would realise that you are not doing anything minus grants and loans, even the loans you are receiving. This is because we are not part of the insurable risk of the corporation and we do not benefit that much. I am sure this would give us leverage; it would give us competitive advantage to acquire more opportunities, be it grants or loans and insure those facilities against the corporation's own insurance. Mr Speaker, if at the end of the day your insurance risk performance is zero, there are reimbursements. This is a very good for Sierra Leone. It is a very good thing that the Ministry has thought it wise to bring it to this House, so that we can ratify it and make it workable.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to commend the Minister and to say that as a House, we are always supportive of things that are supporting our country because at the end of the day, whatever happens, it comes back to us. It is our responsibility, as a Parliament, under Section 40, Sub-section 4 or Sections 110, 112, 115 and 118 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. Whatever it is, Mr Speaker, it is our responsibility. This brings me to the debt equity swap arrangement. I think it is not outside the law. If you looked at Section 54 of the Public Financial Management Act, you would realise that there is a provision called deductions and it is not only limited within government, it is part of protecting government assets and this is our asset. If you looked at Section 7 of the 1991 Constitution, the protection of our natural resources is critically part of the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance and Government, but one part of it is the governing policy.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Sierra Minerals Holding Company has been in operation for a very long time and we realised that it was one of the most successful companies in this country. People will tell you every day that the war in Russia and Ukraine has zero impact. No! That is not true. It is because of the war in Ukraine and Russia. That is why Sierra Minerals Holding Company could not function anymore because their major off taker was Russia. Now, we have seen a group of Sierra Leoneans who are bold enough to say, we are going to look for other off takers; we want to get into this business, and we must incentivise them because there is nothing for them at the beginning. That is why when my colleague spoke about tax holidays, I also noted that point, but I realised that if we suffocate their operational expenditure, we suffocate their capital expenditure, then they would be left with nothing. The investment is zero because they would not have the investment capacity to go and invest. So, for the government to get **10%**, it must give leverages and those leverages have to do with giving them tax holidays, so that they can mobilise capital, invest and give returns. This is because if you did not have returns from investments, even if we have **10%**, it is nothing. There is no return on investments. For me, giving them tax holidays for two years is very good.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to draw the attention of the Minister of Finance to certain issues. I have said this in this Chamber before and I will continue to remind you whenever I have the opportunity, Mr Minister, that we are losing a lot when it comes to the area of Sierra Minerals Holding Company. The port of meeting is strategically located; it is shorter to access vessels, containers and cargos from that port to the landlocked Mali than from Senegal or wherever they are getting their cargos. So, I believe this House should encourage you to go and look for investments, so that we can expand the port and construct roads. This will enable us to shift, at least **20%** or more of the cargos that go to Senegal and Mali. The question is what will it do for us? Well, it would not only increase our revenue, it would also increase and boost jobs. This is because it would create haulage companies; it would create mechanic workshops; it would create apprenticeship and all these would provide employment opportunities for Sierra Leoneans. I want to encourage you because when they mine at Sierra Minerals Holding Company, they utilise the port. If you can look for credible investors who can expand and pave that road from Falaba going across Guinea, it is shorter and it will put Sierra Leone in a position where you become the transshipment hub for landlocked countries like Mali and Benin. This is due to the fact that it is farther to go to Senegal [where they are going now], than to come to the port of meeting and get to their final destination.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I think the calculation from Senegal to Mali is seven days and the distance from Sierra Leone, meeting port to Mali, the landlocked is about

four to five days, forty-eight hours gap is a lot of time for a businessman. We know you are ingenious, but I want to say that your ingenuity has kept this economy afloat. We must acknowledge it. You must not be crying every day and we want to encourage you to be more ingenious and proactive. I know you are working on the 'G' to 'G.' This House is here to support because that will bring our economy to a position where it can function and can be able to support itself without debts. So, we want you to also look at this and bring your ingenious ideas into it and see how we can leverage on our geographic location or how we can use our natural resources to access additional revenue and make this economy better. I think this is a good Agreement because of the **10%** shares.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my colleague was saying that the assets listing is not submitted to us, but I think it is a responsibility designated in the 2012 Agreement to Ministry of Mines and the NMA, for them to put the listing together because the Company will not negotiate if they are not seeing a listing from the government, and they have not had an Agreement as to what is the cumulative value of that listing. So, I want to assure him that the listing may have been sighted and it should have been the basis for the negotiation of the **10%**. I am sure if that had not been the case, they are Sierra Leoneans and they are bold enough to support their country, they would not have gone into blind investments.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to encourage this House to speedily ratify these Agreements, so that the Minister can go and work on the implementation and our country can be a country all of us can proud. Thank you very much.

**THE SPEAKER:** Yes, Mr Minister. Please respond to the various comments being made.

**SHEKU AHMED FANTAMADI BANGURA:** Thank you very much, Members of this Honourable House. The Valuation Report was predominantly to determine the value of the Company and its assets, and to be able to assess what would be the percentage shares of the tax obligation they owed to us. This was done and it was presented to the government, but was subjected to technical review. Definitely, it will be provided to the Parliament. In terms of the tax and future taxes, it has a timeline. We negotiated the Agreement in October 2024 and we assessed all the prior obligations up to October 2024 and then determined future tax obligations of this Company to the government for two years. That is what we meant by future taxes for the two years. We took that value and put it together to come up to a total value of **\$13mln**, which is the total obligation plus the future taxes and that amounted to the **10%** equity participation in the Company. That was how we did the determination. I thought I should provide clarification to this issue.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we are not going into any time beyond the two years that will be approved by Parliament. So, once this is approved, it is this period we are asking for and even the tax reprieve we are requesting for the two year period, they are clearly defined. They will pay many other taxes as per applicable laws and we would still get more money. We are just trying to give them the reprieve to be able to kick start the operations as we are participating in it, so that they will be able to bring positive value. So, where we know it will be very painful to bring down the operations or it will be painful to ensure that we bring positive revenue, those are the areas we are giving them tax breaks. For example, for two years, we will allow them, so that they can do proper business. Withholding tax on interest for two years exemption; withholding tax on non-residents is two years exemption; for import duties on fuel and lubricants, we reduced the value from **5%** to **1%** for two years. There are also exemptions on lubricants, plants, machinery and equipment, which is what we normally do. For GST, we give them reprieve for purchases they do domestically in our markets, hotels and restaurants. That is the only thing we are requesting for, but for all other taxes, this Company will comply with them. We are going to ensure that when they start making profits, we have **10%** of that profit, plus the other taxes that will be paid to government. So, that is really the clarification I wanted to provide.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I took note of the meeting port and to look at the opportunities for investing in our port capabilities. I agree with you that for the ports, we are sitting on billions of metric tons of bulk minerals. The way to transform a country's GDP is by ensuring that your export capacity is multiplied multiple folds. That basically can hold all other variables constant. If you want to grow the country, you increase your export capacity, total exports by bulk minerals in this country right now put all the mining companies together that are exporting oxide, iron ore and the like. It is about 20 million tons per year. If you can multiply that 10 by 20 fold, if you have a port capacity that can receive big vessels, we have a deep sea port opportunity in Sierra Leone. Our systems are very robust, whether it is the Solima or Banana Island ports, if all of these are developed, we will be able to ensure that our mining companies that are operating will not only benefit, but they have the capacity to be able to attract big ships that can export 100 folds. They will be able to export 200 million tons per year because they can produce it. That is clearly a very genuine constraint you have identified. I think it is something we have to think about deeply as a country, how we can attract investors to come and help us develop those ports. So, I take that as a genuine advice and observation which the Ministry and other ministries will look into and see how we are going to develop them.

On that note, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, be it resolved that this Honourable House, hereby ratify the following Agreements which were laid on the Table of the House on Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> July and Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2025 respectively:

- i. The Debt to Equity Swap Agreement [First Amendment] the Agreement of 16<sup>th</sup> July 2012 between the Government of Sierra Leone and Sierra Mineral Holdings 1 Ltd.
- ii. The Article of Agreement of the Islamic Corporation for Insurance of Investments and Exports Credit.

*[Question Proposed, Put and Agree to]*

*[Motion by the Minister of Finance has been carried]*

## **VI. BILL**

THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 2025

INTRODUCTION AND FIRST READING

THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORT AND AVIATION

**ALHAJI FANDAY TURAY ESQ** *[Minister of Transport and Aviation]*: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled 'the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025, be read first time.

*[Question Proposed, Put and Agree to]*

*[The Bill entitled, 'the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025 has been read the first time]*

[SECOND READING]

**ALHAJI FANDAY TURAY ESQ.:** Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled 'the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025 be read the second time. Mr Speaker, I have the honour, as the Acting Minister of Transport and Aviation to present to this Honourable House, 'the Shipping Act, 2025, which is an amendment to the Sierra Leone Shipping Act of 2003. The Sierra Leone Maritime Administration [SLMA] was established in 2000 for the registration of ships and other vessels. The safety and welfare of maritime personnel and the protection of the marine environment is amongst its mandates, the SLMA is the national competent body recognised by the International Maritime Organisation [IMO] for the interpretation and implementation of maritime conventions, protocols, guidelines and amendments promulgated to regulate the shipping industry. The Merchant Shipping Act of 2003 is a comprehensive legislation on maritime matters. The Act consolidates conventions and regulations relating generally to the registration and regulation of ships, the safety of life at sea and the protection of the marine environment. The MSA also provides for mining requirements, conditions for

engagement and welfare of sea farers, their wages, living conditions and occupational safety. The MSA of 2003 incorporates major conventions of the IMO, such as the Convention on Safety of Life at Sea SOLAS, the Prevention of Collusion Convention, the Road Line Convention, the Tonnage Convention, the Maritime Savage and Wreck Removal Conventions and their related protocols. The Merchant shipping Act also includes some provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other conventions, such as liability for environmental pollution damage, maritime savage and casualty investigation.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the maritime industry is a dynamic sector and new conventions developed on a regular basis to make amendment for emerging issues in the shipping sector. For instance, on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020, a Regulation funded by the IMO to capture for content in fuel use by shipping came into force. According to the IMO on content regulation, no ship shall use fuel with Sulphur greater than **0.5%**. This and other several other regulations developed after 2018 are not captured in the MSF or MSC of 2003. Furthermore, fines and fees enshrined in the MSC of 2003 have become obsolete, completely outdated. This does not only have negative impact on the regulatory powers of the SLMA, but also denies the administration of much needed resources to expand and create jobs and acquire maritime assets and undertake maritime infrastructure projects. Additionally, there were no Regulations in the Merchant Shipping Act, 2003 and the absence of Regulations can be easily amended, making it difficult for the administration to speedily address emerging issues.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I now present to you the issues that necessitated the amendment of the 2003 SMA Act:

- i. The maritime industry is a dynamic one, with new conventions, amendments and protocols to existing conventions being developed. Therefore, for the Sierra Leone Maritime Administration to effectively regulate shipping activities in Sierra Leone, the Merchant Shipping Act must incorporate these changes into its national laws for their implementation.
- ii. Lack of Regulations. The Merchant Shipping Act of 2003 has limited and no Regulations to regulate shipping activities in Sierra Leone; therefore, revising the MSA of 2003 with the inclusion of Regulations would enable the administration to effectively carry out its mandate regarding the safety of lives at sea, the protection of the marine environment and the welfare of sea farers.
- iii. Limited revenue generation. Since the Merchant Shipping Act came into force in 2003, there has been depreciation in the Leones. This has led to a significant loss of revenue for the administration as fees and fines are charged in Leones. Therefore, review of the 2003 Merchant Shipping Act of 2023 and 2018 to uphold these changes and make it comparable to some regional charges will increase revenue for

the administration and creates room for expansion, hence the potential for job creation.

- iv. Lack of powers to fine and impound. The Merchant Shipping Act of 2003 limits the SLMA in terms of fines and impoundment of vessels. For many gray areas which were exploited by the ship operators, the administration lacked the legal backing to eliminate these gray areas. Therefore, it was very crucial for the Merchant Shipping Act of 2003 to be revised to eliminate these ambiguities for a better implementation of the Act.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the revised Merchant Shipping Act, 2025 has eradicated some of the shortfalls in the 2003 Act and includes new developments in the maritime sector since 2003. I now highlight the new Conventions, Protocols and amendments that have been included in the National Shipping Act of 2025:

- i. The Maritime Labour Convention. Before 2006, there was no consolidated international Instrument to regulate maritime labour. The MSC was adopted in 2006 by the IMO and the ILO to consolidate and replace over 60 maritime labour standards by the IMO since entering into force in 2013. The MSC had undergone important amendments aimed at improving the rights and protection of seafarers, such as conditions of employment, recruitment and placement, accommodation and food, and hours of work. The inclusion of the LC in the Merchant Shipping Act of 2025 will benefit Sierra Leonean seafarers, as well as Sierra Leone flagships; this will improve the image of the Sierra Leone flag internationally.
- ii. Development of new Regulations. As earlier stated, the MSC of 2003 was devoid of Regulations to effectively regulate Sierra Leone flagships. As emerging issues evolved, it became difficult to enforce these provisions on ships flying the Sierra Leone flag. Thus, the MSA of 2025 has encapsulated these changes which would improve on the safety, security and environmental standards of civilian flagships.
- iii. Increase in ship registration and other fees. The Merchant Shipping Act of 2025 has developed three Regulations for fees payable for the registration and licenses of ships comparable to regional charges. The administration will also derive much needed revenue from foreign registered ships operating in our waters, as new license regimes will be developed.
- iv. Improvement of maritime research and rescue and maritime security. After the bombing of the World Trade Center Tower in New York in 2001, maritime security became a major concern for the IMO, the International ship and port facility security ISPs school was introduced into the solar convention for the purpose of enhancing maritime security worldwide. Some of these provisions have been included in the new Merchant Ship Act of 2025.



- v. Prevention of collusion convention. Changes to the prevention of collusion convention to improve on the safety of navigation and to prevent collusion and new guidelines relating to autonomous ships and electronic navigation were introduced after 2003. Provisions to implement the Conventions are included in the MSC of 2025.
- vi. Red Removal Convention. The waters of Sierra Leone are inundated with ship wreck, which does not only pose danger to the safety of navigation, but their removal can also provide such needed resources for the government of Sierra Leone. The MSA of 2025 has provision to develop Regulations for the safe removal of wreck.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the enactment of the MSA Act of 2025 by this Honourable House will bring immense benefits to the Maritime Administration in terms of its legal and regulatory mandate, revised fees and charges and the position of fines on default vessels under the supervision of the Ministry of Transport and Aviation. This will invariably increase the administration's contribution to the consolidated revenue. The MSA of 2025 would also discourage stranded vessels from flying the Sierra Leone flag, improve the safety of vessels operating in our maritime zones, prevention of marine resource pollution and create much needed jobs for Sierra Leoneans under better working conditions. This repository contributes to meeting the government of His Excellency the President, Brigadier retired Dr Julius Maada Bio, new sustainable development goals; SDG 8, decent work and economic growth; SDG 13, climate change; SDG 14, life below water; and SDG 16, justice and strong institutions.

On that note, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025 be read the second time

*Question Proposed*

**HON. ABDUL K. KAMARA:** Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, as a nation that has spent tremendous time and energy in the mining sector and agriculture, I think it is important for us to diversify our economic margins; and in doing so, one area that is still virgin is the marine sector. Mr Speaker, growing up in the central part of Freetown, plenty Sierra Leoneans will tell you, S.O[2] 'me na sea man.' It was one of the most attractive trades in our country. Today, we find it almost difficult for our citizens to engage in such trade and making it very attractive for the youths due to the laws we enact in this Parliament. The laws we enact here should be advantageous in the area of employment. I said this morning that if we keep signing international Agreements, but we do not domesticate them, the effect is of two flanks: first, it reduces our potentials to raise revenue from international organisations who wants to fund third world countries; and second, it reduces the rate of doing business in those sectors in our country; and one such sector is the maritime sector. I must say kudos to the

administrators of both the Ministry and the Maritime Administration for bringing this Agreement in the form of a Bill. It tells you that we are progressing as a nation; it tells you that we now have somebody who thinks beyond himself and is worried about improving the status of the Sierra Leone through the marine sector. As a country, we can raise revenue anywhere. I think it is something we need to pay attention to because as I sit here, I advocate every day for good schools, good healthcare and even our welfare. However, we cannot do this if we do not have a very strong economy. Therefore, we must take this very serious because what we do today is not just empowering the sector.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I could remember the days of NATCOM before it became NaTCA. You were one of very few Sierra Leoneans who brought progressive legislations to this House; and today, we can boast of those developments. When you went to the Maritime Administration, we were expecting nothing less. We are having a Treaty that was signed in 2002. This means we will be seeing more progressive legislations from this sector, but without taking much of your time, emerging issues in the marine sector calls for reforms of our laws as regularly as possible because the issues are not fixed as they continue to erupt, so also the laws we make here. Therefore, we must be timely to ensure that we come to terms with the growing legislations within that sector; otherwise we have a marine sector in Sierra Leone that is two decades away from other marine sectors around the world. When that happens, it means we have deprived ourselves from the much needed revenue. This Act will make provisions to attract our young people to go into this sector. In Sierra Leone today, the most attractive areas that the young people would want to go is either the medical field or the legal profession. For those who are paying attention, they want to be politicians because they want to drive good cars like mine.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we want to have a situation where you will diversify the minds of our young people and let them understand that the marine sector is a growing sector that creates international jobs for our people. If we do not do this, it means we will only be given to the world without getting back the much needed revenue. Imagine us training people born in areas like Lumely, where the Honourable Deputy Speaker is representing; you may train more females and stop them from standing by the beaches. I am saying that people born in those areas naturally could be good people and we can target them to ensure that we change their lives by training them to become viable citizens. If we do this, it means it also calls for collaboration with countries that have good institutions that are training our men. So, as we enact these laws, Mr Minister, one thing we also need to pay attention to is having the institution that train our own young people back home. Most times when I use the ferry, I sit very close to the captain. He is a black young guy, piloting the ferry with confidence. I think

we can have more of them. I am sure one thing that has always discouraged them is the terms and conditions and the labour laws around that sector. We have most of our uncles who died counting the moneys they were supposed to be paid as ship workers.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we are addressing an old age problem that frustrated our fathers and our uncles to death. So, this is a progressive legislation because it seems to address the labour laws around the marine sector, giving confidence to young people that if you venture into this sector, you have that kind of enviable environment to succeed and to do your trade. This is very important for us. We will not spend much time on this Bill because, as we speak, we are already behind time and behind schedule. You would agree with me that other countries have gone far ahead of us. So, it is my humble appeal this afternoon that as a House, we do justice to this Bill in order to enable us catch up with other countries in terms of ratifying international Agreements and also in terms of making the marine sector attractive for our young people. Again, we must also not keep these laws after being enacted, but to commence the implementation process.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I would want the Maritime Administration to ensure that they educate the citizens through workshops; and if possible, include the youths in those fishing communities or islands, so that they know that they have a new career where they can venture in. In Sierra Leone, we have many engineers, but some are still struggling because they are so many and the field of practical is very constraining. We can also have workshops for them in order to teach them about new techniques and new emerging areas in the marine sector. We cannot grow, as a nation, if we depend on one source of income. We have over exhausted the mining sector already; and as a nation, we need to diversify our economy. I keep saying here that agriculture, tourism and mining are the new sources of revenue around the world, where people diversify their economy. Most African countries are doing well because they have not left these sectors unattended. I thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

*[House stood down at 1:04 p.m., and resumed at 1:15 p.m.]*

**HON. JOSEPH WILLIAMS-LAMIN:** Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members, we are doing our job as representatives of the people of this country. We are here repealing and replacing the Merchant Shipping Act of 2003 to consolidate and to improve the law relating to the registration of shipping and maintenance of safety at seas and the maritime environment, and to provide for other related matters. The 22 years old documents we are going to review aims at addressing certain challenges. Some of the issues have been highlighted by previous speakers, especially the Acting Leader of Government Business who also doubles as the Deputy Speaker of this House. He spoke about the port and we have been talking about it in our oversight

engagements. When we went to Kabala, we saw the very decent road we are constructing from Kabala to the other parts of the country. We went as far as the Chiefdom, so that we can make another port in Sierra Leone. We often say that one farm is not enough for us in Sierra Leone. In order to get the required revenue, we need another environment where we could do a dry port and put in place laws. If that is so, I want to draw the attention of this House to Clause 189[1&2]. It states that whatever we do, we should take into cognizance the laws governing certain aspects of our institutions. Sometimes when people come to certain places, they think they are above the law. This is a deduction from the wages, and this area is talking about Clause 189[1&2]. It states that if 'a master or owner of people fails to comply with Paragraph 'A' of Sub-section 1 commits an offence and is liable to conviction to a fine not exceeding **\$2,000** or equivalence. Sometimes people think they can do things and go without penalty. It is very important for us to note that there is a guardian, helping this authority that when you commit an offence, you are liable to a fine.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we go quickly to Clause 294, duration and validity of the qualified cargo ships that comes to our waters. It is important that they have a timeline certificate they issue to those who come to our harbour or our waters. With your leave, Clause 194 states: **"A qualified cargo ship safety certificate shall remain enforced for five years and/or a shorter period, as may be specified in it, but without prejudice to the power of the Executive Director."** It is very important that we have the timeline in respect of the certificates they issue to these ships that come to our waters, so that when you come to an environment or you come to somebody's place, you have to comply irrespective of who you are. We know that these gigantic machines are very expensive, but at the same time when they come to our country, you have to comply with us by following the rules of the game.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to thank the Minister and team for putting this document together. When I came this morning, I saw the document and it is 306 pages document. I made a comment to some of the people I met here. I said is this what we have to go through? I have changed my glasses twice since I entered Parliament because you have to go through lots of documents every day, maybe two or three documents, so that you will be able to add your voice to some of the information in these documents. Upon doing that, people say we are here to beat tables or desks, but this is not the case because we have to make our contributions. This is a very good document. It has been a point of reference for those authorities.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Deputy Speaker referenced the PFM Act and I follow his footsteps. I have been reading that document a lot. It is a point of reference. One of the appointees, in the Committee Room 1, was asked a very difficult question.

The question was, 'what do you do if you are faced with that situation? The nominee said he would reference the PFM Act. So, I also want the Minister and his team to ensure that people who will be dealing with the Merchant Shipping Act to be referencing that Act to make proper use of it. If you are tough, make reference to it; do not just put it on the shelf somewhere, although it is a very voluminous document, but make proper use of it as you navigate your way through. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

**HON. AARON A. KOROMA:** Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we have a Bill before us that appears to be voluminous. When we were at the pre-legislative hearings yesterday, I remembered the Chairman of the Legislative Committee said this is the most voluminous Bill he has ever dealt with, even though the Deputy Leader of Government Business [1] was quick to respond. He said we have enacted a particular Act, which was the Company's Act that was more voluminous than this one. I want to allay the fears of Members of Parliament that in as much as it appears to be voluminous, I can say when you read this in tandem with the 2003 Act, it is clear that almost **90%** of what is in the 2003 Act is embedded in this new Bill. So, almost the whole Bill before us only tends to make sure that the shipping sector becomes competitive and it is in line with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century shipping sector.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I am happy that the Acting Leader of Government Business who doubles as the Deputy Speaker was very clear and emphatic when he was making reference to the delays by successive government ministers to make sure that when once Treaties, Conventions or Agreements are signed, they should bring them to this Well for ratification. This is costing the nation so much. During yesterday's pre-legislative hearings, the professional head from the Authority mentioned a lot of Conventions we have never ratified. We have ratified some of them, but we have not been able to domesticate them at all. In their own words, that itself is contributing to the high freight cost, leading to the high costs of goods and services. This is because you can only benefit from reciprocity of system after you would have domesticated a Treaty you have signed and ratified. I am sure this has been a challenge. They took us through a lot of Treaties yesterday, such as the Pilotage Convention, the Seafarer and Welfare, which was a Convention signed way back in 1978. We also have the Safety and Life at Sea of 1978 Protocol; we have the Flag and Natural Character; we have the Tonnage Convention of 1969; we have Direct Removal Convention of 1989; and we have the Carrier of Passengers in Ship of 1971. These are all old age Conventions and Treaties we have signed, but Ministers or Presidents have not been able to bring them here for ratification.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this Bill tends to make sure that they bring to speed or to take into consideration the existence of some of these Conventions to make sure that we have a law that speaks to those Conventions we have already signed. As we speak, even when ships come to this country, we do not have an insurance system that covers them and they depend on international insurance system. Owing to this arrangement, they are subjected to paying insurance cost at an international level and thereby making our freight cost very high. This is why we are experiencing high cost of goods and services. This Bill is going to ensure that we liberalise the sector, so that they can be locally insured, thereby providing an insurance cover for them when once they are here. The 2003 Act took into consideration ships that wrecked in our waters. Before now, the law took into consideration forfeiture, but it did assume that a ship, after it has wrecked for 10 to 15 years, has no value to us. However, when you look at the Bill, it leaves the veil of incorporation and this means instead of just dealing with the ship owner or the ship itself, a fine of **\$3,000** should be imposed for concealing Sierra Leone character. Before this time, the crime for ships that concealed character was just forfeiture of the ship. For now, you do not only forfeit the ship, but you will now have laws that the country benefits from crimes committed by ship captains.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to look at the Blue Economy. Almost all progressive nations are now navigating themselves to boost their economies. We have lots of potentials in our Blue Economy. I am sure that is why, for smart economies, they do not have minerals; they only depend on their water sector; how they can make sure that they make their shipping sector attractive, thereby boosting their revenue base. This Bill has taken into consideration most of these things. My only fear is that I have gone through the Bill and it is a fact that we are in a competitive world and Sierra Leone is not the only destination for ships in the sub-region. We also have countries that are attractive or countries that can attract bigger ships. So, if you make the cost of compliance in our Regulations too high, it has an effect because other ship owners would look for other areas where they can have lower cost of compliance. I want to call on the attention of this House to look into these fines or some of the new measures the Ministry is proposing when we come to the Committee Stage. We have to ensure healthy competition, so that it will not deter ship owners or users of our territorial waters from coming to Sierra Leone.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, all of us know that when the costs increase, we know what happens. Of course, it has an effect on the freight cost. I am not surprised and just like the Opposition Whip said, I value people who always pay emphasis on building institutions rather than building themselves. We have seen Ministers who have brought Agreements or Bills here and thought that passing those laws meant to empower themselves. Most of the times after those Bills were enacted into laws, those

Ministers never last for a month; they got sacked or transferred to other Ministry. Mr Kaitibie did well at NATCOM and again he thought that it cannot function effectively without having a very progressive law. To me, it is very good to have progressive laws because they give you the latitude to generate the much needed revenue for this nation. I want to commend you and the Ministry of Transport; and of course, the Deputy Minister. He has already been a friend of the last Parliament because he has always been facing this Parliament on almost all Agreements, Treaties or Bills that have to do with the Ministry of Transport. So, I want to thank you very much for the foresight. I am sure it is people centered because it caters for even the seafarers who normally depend on foreign laws in the event they are disadvantaged. Well, we now have local laws to protect the jobs they do in the event ship owners maltreat them.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to ask that we consider the passage of this Bill, even though it is voluminous and I think the needful should be done by committing it to the Legislative Committee for proper scrutiny. This will enable us to take on board some of the concerns we have raised, especially the ones that have to do with the fines because in as much as we want to be competitive, let us make sure that our competitiveness will not be a disadvantage to us. We must make sure that whatever fines we levy, we should know the effect on the cost of compliance and that might be a deterrent to more ships coming into Sierra Leone.

On that point, Mr Speaker, I want to support the passage of Bill and to thank this House.

**THE SPEAKER:** The Leader of Government Business

**HON. ABDUL S. MARRY-CONTEH:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. The task given to me might seem huge, but with the kind of presentation already been made by the previous speakers, I think I have a simple task to wrap up this debate. I will do that with some style and substance. I will almost say the same things that have been said, but maybe with different phrases. It is clear that what we have in front of us is a twenty-two year old legislation with 550 Clauses in 306 pages. Indeed, it is very voluminous, but the manner in which the story of this Bill has been told will make it very simple to enact this Bill into law. It is clear that this is a progressive legislation which aims at revamping or liberalising the marine sector; and above all, it will help in diversifying the Economy of this country.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the amendment will take into consideration certain areas. Of course, the definition and harmonisation of terms take into consideration seafarers, engagement and welfare, as it has already been mentioned. It pays close attention to maritime survey; and at the end of the day, it strengthen cross border law enforcement. There is a fear expressed by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, but I

strongly believe that the Bill that has been put together would help provide a competitive edge for us as a country. We will be able to attract more investments in this particular sector. Of course, efforts are being made to sanitise this sector, especially by looking at the fines.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, let me go specifically to some of the things that will come out as outcomes or benefits after this Bill would have been enacted into law. What this Bill geared towards is aligning what we currently have with international best practice. Of course, you talk about some Conventions that are yet to be legislated and those that have already been legislated. I do not know whether it was just a coincidence, but I think it could be a positive coincidence because one of the issues being dealt with this morning by the Minister of Foreign Affairs somehow connected to this particular Bill we are going to enact into law. In fact, what is going to be taken care of in this Bill [and as emphasised by the previous speakers], is the area of the fines. This is in Clause 189[1&2]. My colleague here spoke about the fines and some of the fines did not exceed **\$2,000** or its equivalence in Leones. It will be revisited, as always. What do we do when it comes to fines? We have our own phrases we use, such as not less than, but that is something we have to look at because it is about ensuring that the fines are updated in order to prevent substandard shipping.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we are going to strengthen the enforcement and compliance aspects of this particular sector after the Bill would have been enacted into law. Of course, at the end of the day, we will have many safeguards or many protective measures for the marine environment. It will also ensure the promotion of safety of lives at sea; and above all, if everything is done as planned or things are done as planned, it will upgrade the international credibility of our country. If I have the task to wrap up this debate, I think I will toe the line to say that this Bill is very bulky or voluminous, but it is not controversial at all. It will help in diversifying the Economy of this country; it will revamp the maritime sector; liberalises the sector; gives us competitive edge over others, as well as putting up a kind of unique status that will identify us as pacesetters within the marine sector. At this juncture, I think this Bill must go through the necessary steps; and if we succeed in doing that, we would enact a law that would stand the test of time. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker for your attention.

**THE SPEAKER:** Yes, Mr Minister.

**ALHAJI FANDAY TURAY ESQ:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. You have indeed made this debate insightful. In other words, contrary to what a Member of Parliament said here, some of us who are familiar with your work here know very well that you read all these documents and that is why you are able to debate when these



documents are brought here. I want to thank you for those insightful comments and I must confess here that I have taken copious note of the issues you have raised. I hope, in collaboration with the Legislative Committee, to look at some of these areas and see where we can make the necessary amendments, especially the area that has to do with the fines.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, a Member commented that we should at least collaborate with other advanced maritime organisations. I want to assure this House that we have already started it. For example, in 2022, we signed an MoU through the Maritime Administration, with the Egyptian Maritime Academy in Egypt. They have the oldest maritime in the entire world; i.e., the Port of Alexandria is 5000 years old as compared to what we have here. Again, Sierra Leone is a member of the regional Maritime University in Ghana. As we speak, this year alone, we had about seven Sierra Leoneans who have graduated from that University and that is only happening because we are making the maritime sector attractive to young Sierra Leoneans, like what the Member of Parliament alluded to earlier. We want to make this sector attractive, so that Sierra Leoneans will now look at the maritime industry as lucrative and attractive industry to go into. Yes, the Blue Economy is the new vogue, especially for island countries and coastal countries like ours. That is why we spare no effort in making sure that we passed the necessary Regulations and enacted laws to make this sector attractive. In all the comments made, I did not hear anything negative or controversial. Like we have all alluded to, the maritime sector is a new way to diversify the Economy, and we stand ready and willing as a Ministry, together with our Agency.

On that note, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled, 'The Sierra Leone Merchant Shipping Act, 2025, be read second time.

*[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]*

*[The Bill entitled, 'the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025 being an Act to repeal and replace the Merchant Shipping Act, No. 3 of 2003 to Consolidate and Improve the Law relating to the Registration of Ships, the Regulation of Shipping, the Maintenance of Safety at Sea and the Marine Environment and to provide for other related Matters has been read the second time]*

**HON. JOSEPH WILLIAMS-LAMIN:** Mr Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled, 'The Sierra Leone Merchant Shipping Act, 2025, be committed to the Legislative Committee for proper scrutiny.

**THE SPEAKER:** Any seconder?

**HON. AARON A. KOROMA:**

*[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]*

*The Bill entitled, 'the Sierra Leone Merchant Shipping Act, 2025 has been committed to the Legislative Committee]*

**ADJOURNMENT**

*[The House rose at 1:46 p.m., and was adjourned to Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> July, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.]*