

OAU DRIVE, TOWER HILL, FREETOWN

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

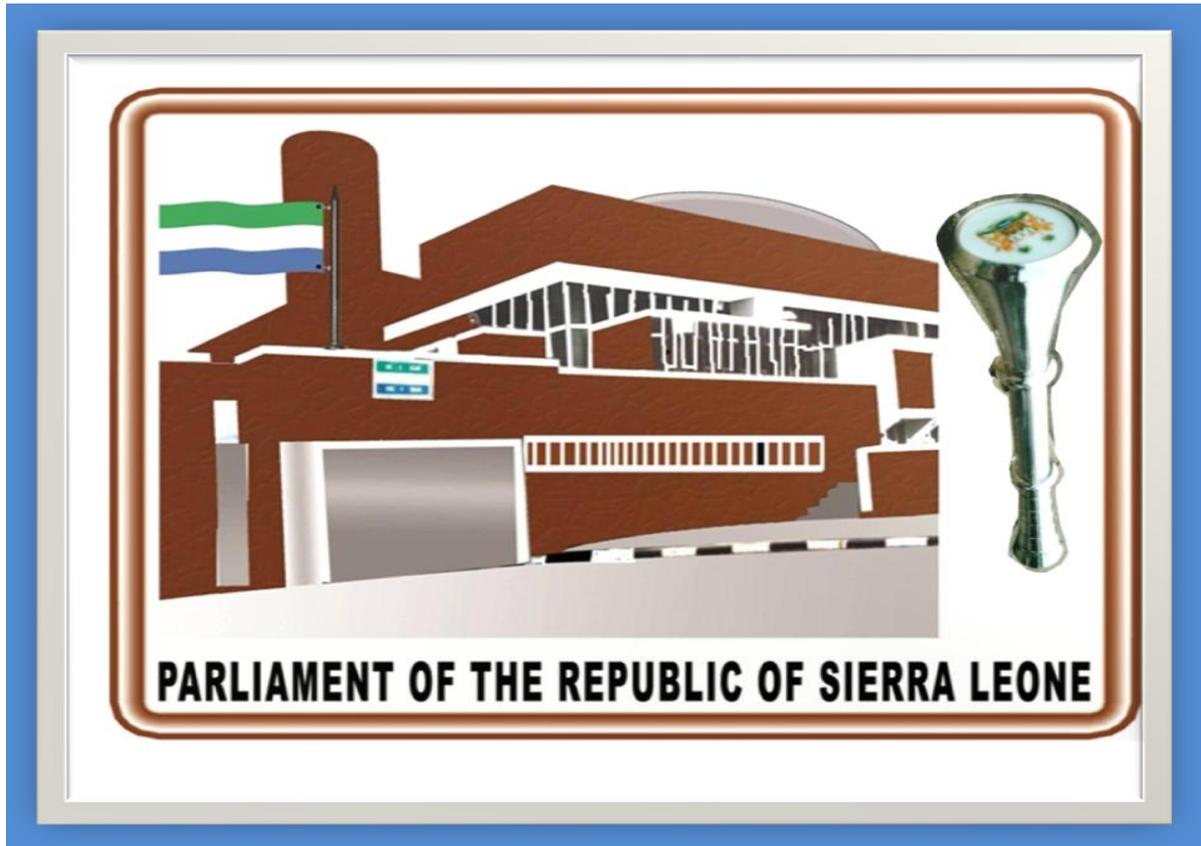
[HANSARD]

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

FIRST SESSION - SECOND MEETING

THURSDAY, 1ST NOVEMBER, 2018

SESSION – 2018/2019



OAU DRIVE, TOWER HILL, FREETOWN

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

[HANSARD]

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

VOLUME: II

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Second Meeting of the First Session of the Fifth Parliament
Of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone.

Proceedings of the Sitting of the House
Held on Thursday, 1st November, 2018.

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THE FINANCING AGREEMENT, SIERRA LEONE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AND THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION [IDA], DATED OCTOBER, 2ND 2019 THAT WAS LAID ON THE TABLE OF THIS HONOURABLE HOUSE.



THE CHAMBER OF PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

Official Hansard Report of the Proceedings of the House

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

Thursday, 1st November, 2018.

I. PRAYERS

[The Table Clerk, Mrs Bintu Weston, Read the Prayers]

[The House met at 1:25 p.m. in Parliament Building, Tower Hill, Freetown]

[The Speaker, Hon. Dr Chernor Abass Bundu, in the Chair]

The House was called to Order

II. CORRECTION OF VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY SITTING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 31ST OCTOBER, 2018.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, pending the arrival of the Leader of Government Business, we shall proceed with the record of Votes and Proceedings for the parliamentary sitting held on Wednesday, 31st October, 2018. As usually, we will skip the pages bearing the names of Honourable Members. If you have any problems, please refer them to the Clerk. Page 5. Page 5? Page 6? Page 7? Page 8? If there is no amendment or correction, could somebody move for the adoption of the record of Votes and Proceedings for the parliamentary sitting held on Wednesday, 31st October, 2018 as presented?

HON. ALUSINE KANNEH: I so move, Mr Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Any seconder?

HON. NENNEH LEBBBIE: I so second, Mr Speaker.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[Record of Votes and Proceedings for the parliamentary sitting held on Wednesday, 31st October, 2018 has been adopted]

III. PAPERS LAID

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

MR JACOB J. SAFFA *[Minister of Finance]*: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, permit me to lay on the Table of this noble House the following documents:

[a] Financing Agreement [Sierra Leone Skills Development Project] between the Republic of Sierra Leone and International Development Association, Credit No. 6309-SI, Dated 2nd October, 2018; and

[b] Government of Sierra Leone Fiscal Strategy Statement [FSS] for 2019 to 2023.

III. BILL

THE FINANCE ACT, 2019

INTRODUCTION AND FIRST READING

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

MR JACOB J. SAFFA [*Minister of Finance*]: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled, the Finance Act, 2019, being an Act to provide for the imposition and alteration of taxes to give effect to the financial proposal of Government and to provide for other related matters for the Financial Year, 2019, be read the first time.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[The Bill entitled Finance Act, 2019 has been read the first time]

[SECOND READING]

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled, the Finance Act, 2019, being an Act to provide for the imposition and alteration of taxes to give effect to the financial proposals of Government and to provide for other related matters for the Financial Year, 2019, be read the second time.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, one of the main challenges facing our Economy is low domestic revenue mobilisation, which is very critical. Thus, the focus of the 2019 Finance Bill is directed on Government's commitment to reducing leakages, enhance domestic revenue mobilisation for financing development and create transparency and accountability in economic management. The Finance Act, 2019, seeks to support Government's effort in revamping Sierra Leone's Economy for developing the Private sector, improving human capital development, improving governance and developing infrastructure. Its implementation will improve tax administration and compliance, reduce revenue and expenditure leakages and thereby improve expenditure management and enhance domestic revenue mobilisation.

Similarly, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the provisions in the Bill will also improve the efficiency of our tax system and uplift tax efforts, which are crucial for our benchmark in regional pairs and international standard. Specifically, the Finance Act, 2019, seeks to reduce leakages by rationalising and streamlining tax and duty exemptions, provide clarity on the interpretation and application of revenue laws relating to the definition and requirement to benefit from incentives in relation to

raw and packaging materials. The definition and requirement in the application of excise duty on luxury vehicle, the imposition of excise on tobacco product by removing its application from sales to Cost Insurance and Freight [CIF], increase disposable income of employees by reducing the PAYE marginal tax rate from **35%** to **30%**, re-define the platform for sustainable and adequate funding of operations of the National Revenue Authority [NRA], by providing for the automatic transfer of **2%** of actual revenue collected by the Authority for recurrent expenditure and **1%** for capital expenditure, providing incentives to promote the 'Made-in-Sierra Leone' Campaign by exempting Goods and Services Tax [GST] from suppliers of local Agricultural produce used exclusively for manufacturing industries, provide incentives by exempting withholding taxes on interest on loan to Agriculture, manufacturing other export promotion businesses in order to help improve access to finance and promote export, align laws relating to custom's 'declaration of currencies at boundaries' to international best practices on Anti-Money Laundry, by increasing the amount of currency to be declared to custom officials from **Le30Mln** to the greater of **Le87Mln** or **\$10,000** equivalent. Consolidate revenue by including other agencies namely; as Treasury Single Account, Review Rate, Fields and Charges of MDAs and Agencies for alignment with the current economic realities and regional comparison, establish the National Monitoring and Evaluation Agency in the Ministry responsible for Planning, with the mandate to manage and coordinate all monitoring and evaluation [M&E] activities across the public sector.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Finance Act, 2018, being an Act to provide for the imposition and alteration of taxes to give effect to the financial proposal of Government and to provide for other related matters for the financial year 2019, amends the following Laws:

- The Custom Tariff Act, 1978;
- The Excise Duty Act, 1982;
- The Income Tax Act, 2000;
- The National Revenue Authority Act, 2002;
- The National Commission for Privatisation Act, 2002;
- The Telecom Act, 2006;
- The Finance Act, 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2017;

- The Goods and Services Tax Act, 2009;
- The Road Maintenance Fund Administration Act, 2010;
- The Custom Act, 2011;
- The Anti-Money Laundry and Combating Act, 2012
- Public Procurement Act, 2016; and
- The Fiscal Management and Control Act, 2017

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled, the Finance Act, 2019, being an Act to provide for the imposition and alteration of taxes to give effect to the Financial Proposal of Government and to provide for the other related matters for the Financial Year, 2019, be read the second time.

[Question Proposed]

HON. FRANCIS A. KAISAMBA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to take this singular opportunity to thank the Minister and his team for bringing the Finance Act of 2019 to the attention of this Honourable House. As the Minister mentioned earlier, the Act aims to 'provide for the imposition and alteration of taxes to give effect to the financial proposals of the Government and to provide for other related matters for the Financial Year, 2019.' Usually, the import of Finance Act can be used as a tool for revenue mobilisation. Revenue Mobilisation is key in the development and governance of this country. It can equally help to legitimise the proposals in the budget statement. I was told that the 2019 budget will be presented to Parliament tomorrow and to the people of this country. The figures that will be presented in that particular estimate are just proposals. What will make them real and actualise our dreams is when the required resources are available. Therefore, we have to generate the required revenue and that cannot only happen if the required laws are there to enable the NRA and the Ministry of Finance or other institutions to generate the needed revenue. The presentation of the Finance Act to Parliament is very apt and it is an indication to show that the Ministry of Finance and this Government are serious about revenue mobilisation.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the issues around service delivery in this country is everywhere. It is huge problem and the resources are not readily available. I am told that since this Government came to power, we have not received extra donor

funding. However, negotiations are ongoing and what we rely on, as we speak, is domestic revenue generation. We want to thank the NRA because they have redoubled their effort to generate the required revenue for Government, so that it will provide the basic services for the people of this country, pay workers' salaries and fund the Free Quality Education Project. The available funds will also be used to fund companies that have not completed their contracts, especially roads that were awarded to them. These projects need funds and that is why Government has engaged in vigorous revenue mobilisation.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the importance of this Bill has been enumerated by the Minister and we have seen and believed that these are facts. We need revenue, for instance, to take care of the welfare of Parliament, but the required resources are unavailable. As Members of Parliament, it is our time to help the Government to be able to generate the required resources and therefore, we expect them equally to look into our affairs and the general welfare of citizens of this country. So, I will have to talk to Members of Parliament, representatives of the people of this country, to look critically at the Bill that has been presented to us and the proposals. The rationale for these amendments is in the best interest of the people of this country because it will maximise and improve revenue generation that will equally help Government to provide services for the people of this country. I want to encourage you to support this particular Bill, so that the required revenue is generated. We want to provide services that can move the development projects of this country.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, Sierra Leone as a Nation still lacks many things and that is why we have to move forward. We cannot continue to be stagnated. Yes, we rely on donor support, but the donors themselves need to see that we are serious about revenue generation and revenue mobilisation. This is because they will not continue to support us forever. There must be a cut-off point, so that you take responsibility of your own activities or pay for your own projects and programmes. So, this Bill is going to ensure that things come to reality. At the Committee Stage, we are going to look at most of the amendments that have been proposed to the attention of Members of Parliament. However, I want to state here almost all the

amendments proposed in this Bill are in the interest of revenue mobilisation and improving the lives of Sierra Leoneans. So, I wish you well and I hope we support this Bill. Thank you very much *[Applause]*.

HON. ABDUL K. KAMARA: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, when we have an opportunity to look at Finance Instruments, we have to put national interest above party and personal interests. I am concerned with the issue that has to do with the amendment of the National Public Procurement Authority [NPPA] Act of 2016. We have to look at this issue carefully. We have seen institutions that are being taken to the Ministry of Finance and I will say with no hesitation that such departments are not functioning properly. They are not up to standards. A critical case of study is the Auditor General's Department; and because this department is not functioning properly, the burden has been shifted to Internal Audit of the Auditor General's Department. If that department is working effectively, the volumes of Auditor General's Reports would have reduced drastically. Mr Speaker, having a Department of Procurement in the Ministry of Finance is my concern. I think the Ministry of Finance is overwhelmed with activities and managing several other departments. If we add this other burden to this Ministry, the existence of the National Public Procurement Authority [NPPA] will be compromised. The NPPA oversees procurement activities across the country.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my concern is that we should not kill institutions. What the Ministry is trying to do is to slowly terminate the existence of the NPPA, rather than strengthening it. The NPPA Act makes provisions for areas where it could amend things that are faulty, but shifting its work to other institution is not in its Act. Thank you very much *[Applause]*.

HON. LAHAI MARAH: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise on S. O. 26. As earlier started by the Chairman of the Finance Committee about the welfare of Members of Parliament, I want to move a Motion that in accordance with Section 74[4] of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act No. 6 of 1991, the conditions of service for Ordinary and Paramount Chief Members of Parliament be reviewed as follows:

SALARY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Vehicle Allowance **\$13,000**

MPs Facilitation Fees **Le18mln** per quarter
Rent Allowance Not below **\$12,000** and **Le100mln** Maximum
Sitting Fees **Le600, 000** per month
Fuel 45 litters per week

That this review becomes effective, 1st January, 2019 *[Applause]*.

Sign.....

Hon. Lahai Marah

THE SPEAKER: Any seconder to the Motion?

HON. IBRAHIM T. CONTEH: I so second, Mr Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, there is a pattern that is developing. It is new; it is unique; but it is very good *[Applause]*. That pattern started yesterday and it has continued again today where I am getting proposals on one side and seconded from the other side. That is the spirit *[Applause]*. It also demonstrates that the issue cuts across all the divides you can imagine. It cuts across the aisle and it is in the best interest of everybody, more particularly this House.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[The Private 's Member Motion by Honourable Lahai Marah has been carried]

THE SPEAKER: The debate will now proceed.

HON. LAHAI MARAH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I rise to debate on this particular document before us this morning. I have been in Parliament and this is my second term. We have debated Finance Bills in House. With your permission I want to ask the Leader of Government Business why pre-legislative hearing was not conducted. I am saying this because taxation needs further explanations and clarifications *[Applause]*. The Honourable Member has just talked about the pending conflict between the NPPA and this Bill. If we want to scrutinise this Bill now will be difficult not be Well. We have opportunities before coming here to agree or disagree. This would have enabled us to properly scrutinise this Bill before it is finally brought here. What is happening now is that this Bill was availed to us a day ago. In fact, some Members received their copies this morning. I received mine about 9 p.m. yesterday. It is in fact a photocopy document. What are we discussing? Are we here

to add value to this particular Bill or do we just want to pass it because we want to follow the law? While we are preparing for the budget reading tomorrow, we are here this morning with a bulky document. Mr Speaker, after the Chief Whip and I would have made our contributions, no other Member of Parliament will be allowed to say something on this Bill. So, I am appealing for a pre-legislative hearing for this particular document, so that we can understand the details in it. If that happens, we the Ordinary Members of Parliament will be happy to contribute and to raise issues in this document. I thank you *[Applause]*.

THE SPEAKER: I take note of the very powerful reasoning behind the submission of the last speaker. I think it is a point worth noting for the future *[Laughter]*. I say this with all seriousness and I want it to be treated as a warning that we should not get a repetition of what is happening this moment. I will be compelled to yield to any demand from this House for such Bill to be remitted first to the Legislative Committee before it is brought to this Well. Let us take this as an exception and that it will not happen again. I understand that in this particular instance, time is of the essence, but let it go out as a warning that we will not allow this kind of thing to become the norm. We will rather treat this as exception. That is the observation I will like to make at this point.

HON. HINDOLO M. GEVAO: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I am exceedingly happy with the Speaker's expression that we Members of Parliament should be given sufficient time to read and comprehend Bills that are brought before this House, so that we will have the opportunity to contribute aptly.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, having gone through this Bill briefly, I consider it to be a very good Bill. I wish we had the opportunity to really go through it before now. The object of this Bill is to adhere to our tax obligation for the benefit of the Government and the general populace. In earnest, this Bill seeks to amend certain provisions in the Finance Act; vis-à-vis, by either inserting or substituting certain words or clauses. I hold the view that if we pass this Bill, it will be good for this country.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, Section 9[C] talks about taxes on leases. There is another area which says, if you have an account and it comes to the attention of the

Commissioner General that you are not paying taxes on that account, the Commissioner General reserves the right to suspend that account until those taxes or something is done with regard the payment of taxes. This is a very good Bill because nations have developed from the payment of taxes. I hold the view that most of the areas where we are losing moneys as a nation are not on the individual tax evasion or tax avoidance of citizens. I will say tax evasion or tax avoidance is among multinational companies. These companies are not paying the requisite taxes and when that happens, the people bear the brunt. As representatives of the people, it is our mandate to ensure that the required taxes are paid and those who cannot earn as much as others are taken care of from these taxes.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, in other develop nations, are many facilities like ageing allowance, winter allowance, etc. and those facilities come from tax payers' money. This is because the rich should be able to contribute towards the impecunious. Sierra Leone is a where we have many impoverished people and if we are able to take care of those who cannot earn, we should be able to get people to pay taxes. I am of the view that tax avoidance and tax evasion is on the increase, but if we tighten those loose ends by passing this Bill, it will be a good thing for this country. I am pleading with all of us, irrespective of the emergency situation of this Bill, we work towards passing this Bill into law. I am convinced that this is going to be good for our country. I thank you very much.

HON. MUSTAPHA M. SELLU: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to thank my colleagues for debating this particular Bill this afternoon. As the Honourable Member rightly said, it is important for us to look at this Bill carefully, so that we work towards making it a very good law for this Nation. We should put the country above all other interest and this should be the top most concern of all Members of Parliament present here this afternoon. In that regard, since the inception of the 'New Direction' Government, it has been able to run the affairs of this country without reverting to borrowing from the Central Bank or depending on donor support. I am convinced that the vigorous revenue generation drive employed by this Government has yielded positively. We have been paying salaries without delays and the country has been running smoothly without

reverting to borrowing from Central Bank. I think that is a very good move by the Government and I want to thank the Government and the Ministry of Finance.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to look at some critical issues relating to revenue generation. Mr Speaker, donors like the European Union [EU] do not have what we call the conditionality, but performance indicators. One of the key indicators is the ability of a country to generate its own revenue internally. This is one of the key performance indicators. Also, prudent procurement measure is another key performance indicator the EU is looking for. I think this Government has been able to meet those criteria and this is why the EU has committed to providing this Government the sum of **Euro25mIn** as budgetary support. I think that is something laudable for us as a people.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, before the end of 2017, Sierra Leone benefited from such funds. I think it was below the threshold because threshold ranges from **Euro18MIn** to **Euro25MIn** and Sierra Leone did not meet that threshold in late 2017. I think some of the issues were based on the lack of meeting the performance indicators set by the EU. Though there are concerns raised by Members of Parliament. We have to look at those concerns in subsequent Bills coming to this House. Thus, I want to crave the indulgence of Members of Parliament to pass this Bill into law. If we look at the conditions of service, it is very good and cuts across the aisles. The tax decrease from **35%** to **30%** means salaries of Civil Servants and other employees. If we increase you go to Page 8 of this Bill and look at the various thresholds of the various categories of taxes, you will see something like **6mIn** to **12mIn** is **15%** and **12mIn** to **18mIn** is **20%**. So, we are still within the threshold of **20%** to **25%**, which is very good for us. If you calculate that on our monthly salaries, I think we are going to take home more than **Le600, 000** to **Le700, 000** additional to what we have been taking home. I think this is a very good for us because it cuts across.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to thank you for this opportunity and I call on my colleagues to speedily pass this particular Bill into law. I thank you very much.

HON. HASSAN A. SESAY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we are here to continue with an exercise we perform every year; i.e., approving the Finance of 2019. This means we are not new in this process. My colleague on the other side was talking about how much we will be taxed. There are certain areas that have drawn our attention. The issue relating to Procurement is something we have to handle carefully. Section 25, Pages 23-25 of the NPPA Act of 2016 talks about the NPPA's existence as an institution. In fact, I can still remember very clearly the pronouncement made by the President in terms of curbing wastage and excessive spending. Mr Speaker, except otherwise, but the Ministry of Finance is trying to create a parallel institution to the NPPA [*Applause*]. We are talking about wastage and if we are serious about it, then we have to do something. Probably this gives credence to what my colleague from Falaba was talking about; i.e., committing this Bill to the Legislative Committee for proper scrutiny. This will enable us understand the rationale behind creating a department of that nature in the Ministry of Finance. If we fail to understand or properly educated on this Bill, whatever debates we engage ourselves, it will not be fruitful. If we have had a pre-legislative engagement on this Bill, we might not be asking such questions.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I can see the establishment of a parallel institution to the NPPA [*Applause*]. This House approved the Head of the NPPA. Why are they talking about creating a National Procurement that will be under the Ministry of Finance? This is what I understand here. Mr Minister, this is what I understand. The Department is going to be supervised by the Ministry of Finance. Mr Speaker, I will read some aspect of it. Section 27 of the NPPA Act reads: **"Is amended by inserting the following new section immediately after Section 10 of 2016. There shall be a Procurement Directorate within the Ministry which shall be responsible for managing procurement personnel in the Public Sector."** Now, the question is, those Procurement Officers in the respective Ministries, Departments, and Agencies [MDAs] are answerable to whom? Is it the NPPA or the Ministry of Finance? This is why I said earlier that we are creating a parallel institution. I am not an Economist, but this is how I see the situation. Well, maybe the Minister would like to elucidate further, that is the understanding I have.

Again, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I know that anything that exceeds **Le 60mln**, you have National Competitive Bidding [NCB]. However, **\$200mln** in monetary terms is a lot of money. Well, **200mln** might sound like a pittance to certain people, but when you talk about **200mln** in Government's terms, it is a huge sum. I think we should leave it and that is why some of us are saying that it would have been necessary to discuss this Bill properly before we come to this Well. This would have enabled some of us who are not economists to ask some of these questions *[Applause]*. But from what we see now, we have little idea of the provisions in this Bill. So, need better education in this direction

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, if we approve this particular section, we would have added too much work to the Ministry of Finance. This Ministry is overwhelmed, as my colleague said earlier. The Ministry of Finance is already overloaded and we cannot afford to add more work to it. The Road Maintenance Fund Administration [RMFA] is also going to the Ministry of Finance. We are also adding more burden to the Ministry of Finance. This area also needs proper clarification. Section 10 [a&b] of the Local Government Act states: **"Coordinating the preparation of Ministries, Departments and Agencies annual procurement plan for review and approval by the Minister responsible for Local Government"** This is also one of the issues I was talking about. We are going to have more discussions, but I thought I should draw the attention of the Minister and his team to these areas, so that they could be revisited. Maybe for clarity, like I said earlier, I might not understand certain things which the Economists understand, but the rudimentary Economics I know has led me to give that analysis. With those few words. I thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: I really want to thank the Honourable Member for his very constructive observations. I hope when the Minister comes to respond to these queries, he will spend some time on these ones, so that we would be better enlightened, especially when we see an apparent conflict between an existing institution and the new institution been canvassed for in this Bill.

HON. SIDIE M. TUNIS: Mr Speaker, just to guide the debate. I want Honourable Members to refer to Section 27 [10a], the Section the Honourable Member referred

to. I want to inform this Honourable House that I have been advised by the Honourable Minister of Finance that this particular Section has now been expunged from this Bill [*Applause*].

THE SPEAKER: I take note of what you said. Honourable Members, that Section has not yet been expunged.

HON. SIDIE M. TUNIS: I am giving a notice that the Honourable Minister has already advised me to expunge Section 27 [10a, b, c, d].

THE SPEAKER: That is a very wise decision on the part of the Minister [*Applause*]. I hope when we reach to the Committee Stage, it will be put into effect. I see no other Member wishing to take the Floor. In the interest of speed, I do not think frankly there is any need for us to be laboured the points, especially those already made. I want to invite the Leader of the Opposition.

HON. CHERNOR R.M. BAH [*Leader of the Opposition*]: Thank you very much Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, you cannot talk about the national Budget without mentioning the Finance Bill. I want to thank the Minister and his team for bringing the Finance Bill before the 31st December, 2018. It shows that they are working towards revenue mobilisation. I have listened to the debate. I am sure this Bill is so important. This is a document we should not play with; and as I said the other day, I have been in this House for over ten years now and the importance of the Finance Bill is something we cannot overemphasise.

On that note, Mr Speaker, I want to endorse the comments so far, but to also encourage colleagues to work towards considering the importance of this Bill. Mr Speaker, I am looking forward to the next stage.

THE SPEAKER: I really want to thank you for your very objective comments. You have been overly objective on this particular occasion. I have some misgivings about certain things that I have read and I must confess to the House. Some Members of Parliament have given their comments which are genuine. I know we are pressed for time and we need to move forward, but any Bill that comes before this House that makes proposals for Amendments or deleting provisions of existing laws, frankly requires ample time for Members to study and make reference to the Bills that are to

be amended. I hope this is the last warning because all of these add up to seeing Parliament as just a simple rubber stamp Parliament. This Parliament is certainly not one of those rubber stamp Parliaments. I would not sit here and allow this Parliament to be a rubber stamp. I do not want Members of Parliament or this Parliament to be taken for granted by anybody *[Applause]*. Today, maybe this is the last time we shall make an exception and let this go out as a warning to the relevant Authorities concerned.

HON. SIDIE M. TUNIS *[Leader of Government Business]*: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my contribution is very short. I want to call on the Honourable Minister to note Section 14 [1-4] of this Bill and to know that it does not affect contracts that have been signed before today. Contracts that have been signed before will still continue to enjoy their original agreements *[Applause]*. This is because all the amendments should not affect those contractors who have signed contracts before today.

With those few words, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I call on this Honourable House to support this Bill as it is going to create more revenue for government and put more moneys in the pockets of public servants. Thank you very much *[Applause]*

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[The Bill entitled, The Finance Act 2019, being an Act to provide for the imposition and alteration of taxes to give effect to the financial proposals of the government and to provide for other related matters for the Financial Year, 2019 has been read the second time]

[THE HOUSE RESOLVED INTO COMMITTEE STAGE]

MR JACOB J. SAFFA *[Minister of Finance]*: Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, I move that Part 1, Clauses 1 to 23 stand part of the Bill.

[Part 1, Clauses 1 to 23 Proposed]

HON. SIDIE M. TUNIS *[Leader of Government Business]*: Mr Chairman, Section 14 [4.2] talks about 'any contract.' It should be 'any new contract' *[Laughter]*. This has been confirmed by the Honourable Minister.

THE CHAIRMAN: Honourable Leader, I need to be properly guided. I see no provision in this Bill that speaks of any retroactive application, instead this Bill will take effect as from the date it is passed by this House and is given the Assent of the President. So, it is proactive and not retroactive and I would have thought the Amendment you seek to make is therefore taken into account.

HON. SIDIE M. TUNIS: This is for emphasis and clarity. I want the word 'new' to be inserted.

HON. HASSAN A. SESAY: Mr Speaker, in relation to Section 14, I want to ask for better clarification. Now, let us say the contract has been signed by a Contractor before now, but this Bill will come into effect after the presidential assent. Mr Chairman, does that mean they will continue to enjoy the benefit after the Bill has come into effect? I thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: That clarification can only come from the Minister himself.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, it is obvious that contracts that have been signed before now are not affected by this provision. We are talking about new contracts. The fact of the matter is that we are not saying we cannot give concessions, but when we give concessions, it has to be in the contract value, so that if the contract cost **Le5mln** and the duty waiver is **Le1mln**, we will ask the MDAs to give the cost to Ministry of Finance, which is **Le6mln**, so that the Contractor pays the duty waver. It is an in and out business. We do not want the government to lose, but to prevent abuse. For contracts that have already been given concessions, we have to find a way of managing them. Going forward, any new contracts have to brass up with the duty waver, so that the MDAs have the responsibility to pay their duty waver. The Ministry of Finance will provide the resources for them to do that. Thank you.

HON. HASSAN A. SESAY: Mr Chairman, Page 22, Clause 21[b] reads: **"In the case of a body corporate to a fine of the Le87mln or \$10mln or an Order to revoke the license of the corporate body."** Recently, Mr Chairman, there was a situation wherein a Lebanese was caught at the Lungi International Air Port with a huge amount of money in foreign currencies. In this Finance Act, we see a fine of **\$10,000**. My concern here is with the huge amount of money that was caught in

somebody's possession. In my view **\$10,000** fine is pittance as compared to the huge amount in possession of somebody. The question is, are there bank traces to show that this money came from a bank? I do not know, but somebody needs to tell me something that is not very clear. I do not know whether it will make too much sense to fine somebody **\$10,000**. Maybe the Minister would want to clarify this issue, but a fine of **\$10,000** for such crime is not commensurate at all. Criminals will decide to commit more crimes because they will be charged pittance. The criminal will be fine because he/she still has something after paying **\$10,000**. I do not know if I am missing something, but there is no element of confiscating the money in this Bill Act.

THE CHAIRMAN: In other words, Honourable Member, what you want to know is that in addition to the fine that is specified in that provision, do we have any other penalty like forfeiture of the entire amount discovered?

HON. HASSAN A. SESAY: I asked that question because I needed clarity on some of those issues, so that we would know the consequences attached to a particular crime.

THE CHAIRMAN: No. I think if I understand you rightly, let us give a very clear example. Somebody is caught with a Million Dollars trying to escape with that amount, is he subject to only a fine of **\$10,000** or does he suffer an additional penalty? That is the question that needs clarification.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, the Anti-Money Laundering Act and other related laws of this land will address those issues. What the Finance Bill is seeking to address is that, **Le30mln**, which by estimation is less than **\$5,000** as of now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your explanation, Mr Minister, but I still consider the question raised by the Honourable Member to be valid. For the reason that if Honourable Members had had sufficient time to study this Bill, they would have made reference to the relevant Act so that they would not be asking such questions here. I do not know whether on this specific issue the Minister wants to make additional comments.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: As I said, there are other laws like the Customs Act of 2011 with relevant provision for confiscation.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[Part 1, Clauses 1 to 23 form part of the Bill as amended]

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, I move that part 2, clauses 24-26 stand part of the Bill and that Clause 27 be accordingly expunged.

[Question Proposed]

HON. LAHAI MARAH: I refer you to Page 24, Paragraph 26[4], under 'International Competitive Bidding.' I think the abbreviation should be 'ICB' instead of 'IBC.' Mr Chairman, under Clause 26[2], it says: "**Request for quotations shall be used when the estimated value of the Procurement is as follows; [1] in the case of contracts for the procurement of goods to the tune of Le200mln.**" Mr Chairman, it used to be **Le60mln**. I want the Minister to explain the increase? To me, this is a situation wherein you ask the public for various prizes of goods, so that you can select the best. If that is correct, I want to believe **Le60mln** is fairly enough. We should not increase it to **Le200mln**. The President wants to draw the curtains in terms of fighting corruption. We want to fight corruption and one of the ways to fight corruption is to minimise seepages. We have to regulate the procurement laws. I am the Deputy Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Therefore, the old schedule in the NPPA should remain because it is more relevant and useful in that regard.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, it is true because we want to close those leakages, but at the same time we do not want to slow Government business. The Procurement Act of 2004 has had a threshold of **Le60mln** by then. Fifteen years later, we cannot maintain the same **Le60mln**. For instance, if you fly from Sierra Leone to Australia on a Business Class, you cannot go and buy the ticket like that. The return air ticket from here to Australia will be more than **Le60mln**. So, I want to allow the MDAs to do things very fast. We have other mechanisms to crosscheck.

THE CHAIRMAN: But do not sight me as an example I have not applied.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Well you are the highest placed Government official here and that besides, you are coming from Australia. So, we are trying to ensure that Government Business is expedited in a swift manner. We are not a procuring entity, but we procure for the Ministry of Finance. The MDAs are responsible to procure for themselves. There are lots of concerns from them and we want to address some of these concerns. We thought those thresholds are very minimal.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, when you come to No.4 of the ICB, the amount for the ICB is very low to the extent that you allow international companies to come and compete with Sierra Leoneans. It does not promote Local Content at all. That is the issue. Increasing the amount from **Le60mln** to **Le200mln** is to enable Government Business to go ahead with the hope that other mechanisms will be put in place to make sure a provision for oversight is captured. I appreciate the concerns, but that is the situation. I am open to any other suggestions from this Honourable House.

HON. LAHAI MARAH: Mr Chairman, in as much as I agree with the Minister, I am the Deputy Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and I sit on the Auditor General's Report. One of the recurring issues in that Report is the one relating to procurement activities, especially in the area of 'Request for Quotations' [RFQs]. The MDAs do not usually go through the normal procurement procedures. We attended a workshop on accountability, organised by EU. I asked whether it is possible for us to compromise accountability in order to save funds. One of the organisers said no, we cannot. He said the law is the law and it should be followed to the latter. The Minister was correct when he said the work of Government had to be expedited swiftly. However, Members of Parliament would want to see that corruption is minimised to the barest minimum. If that is the case, we must ensure that our laws are followed. We do not want to see a situation wherein the amount is almost quadrupled to create more loopholes.

Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, I believe if this Bill is passed with these figures, it will create more loopholes for corruption. It will give more work to the auditors and PAC.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think you made a very good observation. Let us allow the Minister to think about it. Let us proceed Honourable Members. You still have time, but if you want to answer the question, please go ahead.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, I sincerely understand the position of the Honourable Member and I think we are all heading in the same direction. We are moving from **Le60mln** to **Le200mln**, but if this House decides otherwise, that will be okay. However, I want to appeal to this House for us to increase from **Le60mln**. This amount is very small and it has the tendency to strangulate MDAs. I have no objections in terms of changing the figures, but I will appeal that we change it from **Le60mln**, maybe to **Le100mln**. We can change the figures, Honourable Members.

THE CHAIRMAN: Let me give an opportunity to the other Members.

HON. FRANCIS S. BENDU: Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, the idea the Minister is postulating is fine, but I want to believe there are many other options available for Procurement Officers which would enable them execute their functions very well without going through this process. To me, the essence of having a procurement plan is to prevent such issues. There are also tools available with procurement officers that they could be used to solve this problem, rather than increasing this amount to **Le200mln**. For example, they can sign a contract with any institution to minimise time wastage and also to save cost. This is because the essence of competitive bidding is to save cost for the organisation. So, I hold the view that even the **Le60mln** should be reduced little bit. This is because if the President is fighting to close leakages, **Le200mln** is an opportunity to widen the net for workers. I will suggest the sum of **Le100mln**.

THE CHAIRMAN: Honourable Members, I think this is one area where some balance in the act has to come into play. On the one hand, you do not want to open the floodgates to more and more corruption by setting the ceiling high, but at the same time you want to expedite government work to make sure it continues. So, between the two extremes, let us find some middle ground where we can agree.

MR JACOB S. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, as I said earlier, the concerns of the Honourable Members are very genuine. I have no objections to adjust the proposal. In that case, we will now have [a] **Le200mln**, [b] **Le100mln** and [c] **Le100mln**.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Minister, please go over that again.

MR JACOB S. SAFFA: In the case of contract for the procurement of goods are [a] **Le100Mln** [b] **Le200mIn**, and [c] **Le100mIn** accordingly. For No.4, I want to appeal that it stays as it is. No.3 has to change and No. 2[a, b, c.] can be changed accordingly.

[Suspension of S.O. 5 [2] being 12:00 noon]

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[Part 2, Clauses 24 to 26 form part of the Bill as amended]

[Clause 27 of the Bill has been expunged]

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, I move that Part 3, Clauses 28 to 41 stand part of the Bill.

Part 3, Clauses 28 to 41 Proposed

HON. AARON A. KOROMA: Mr Chairman, Page 26, Clause 31, under 'Establishment of a National Monitoring and Evaluation Agency.' I think we should change the word 'Agency' to 'Department.' This is because 'Agency' means 'body cooperate' which should be brought to Parliament with a Bill *[Applause]*. I think we should have it as a 'Department' or 'Unit,' rather than using the word 'Agency.'

THE CHAIRMAN: So, you prefer 'Department' or 'Unit'?

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[Part 3, Clauses 28 to 41 form part of the Bill as amended.]

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, I move that the Schedules stand part of the Bill.

[The Schedules Proposed]

HON. PAUL S. SAM: Mr Chairman, Page 48 talks about quarries. According to this Bill, our artisanal granite miners will be paying **Le900.000**. This is too much because our deprived women and boys do not have jobs and they depend on this activity. That amount is too much for them.

Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, we also have mining companies that crush stones. So, they should also be taxed because it is not stated in this Bill. They use the materials for their construction purpose. We need to reduce the **Le900.000** to help our deprived women who are crushing granite to send their children to school.

THE CHAIRMAN: Honourable member, what are you proposing?

HON. PAUL S. SAM: Mr Chairman, I propose that this amount be reduced from **Le900TH.**

THE CHAIRMAN: Reduce to what?

HON PAUL S. SAM: From **Le900.000** to **Le200.000**. I also want the amount for the mining companies to be stated here.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: This amount is not for individuals. It is for businesses engaged in quarry activities. That is so informal we do not even bother to tax them. In fact, they will not even afford the **Le200.000**. So, we cannot tax them at all. We are talking of companies businesses engaged in quarry activities.

HON. PAUL S. SAM: We have different prices here. We have the price for those machines that are crushing stones. This one is referring to the artisanal miners who are using their hands. Please go to Page 48.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Minister, drawing from my own personal experience as a former miner, I am still considering whether to continue or not *[Laughter]*. I think there is a considerable difference between quarry operations where blasting is not allowed, and mini-crushers used for crushing; and where artisanal mining and stone breaking are done by hands. That is the difference.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, after further consultations, we can expunge this part *[Applause]*.

THE CHAIRMAN: Which part, Mr Minister? Let us be specific here. Are you referring to the part dealing with the 'hands?'

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: I want Quarry operations where artisanal mining of granite stones by hand is deleted.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

HON. MOHAMED KANNEH: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. I refer the House to Page 41, which has to do with 'Registration of Contractors.'

THE CHAIRMAN: You are taking us back, Honourable Member.

HON. MOHAMED KANNEH: But we have not approved this aspect yet, Mr Chairman. We have been talking about joblessness in this country. A lot of young people have decided to establish businesses and they want to register as contractors. Do not forget, in this same document, we have approved withholding taxes which used to be **5.5%**, but it has been increased to **20%** for every contract. Now, if we ask them to pay **Le900.000**, I think that is very high. I am suggesting that we start from the top, which is **Le6mln** for premium classes and reduce it to **Le3mln**. We have to reduce the **Le3mln** for class one to **Le1.2mln**, financial class 2 is to **Le800.000**, Financial class 3 to **Le600.000** and financial class four to **Le500.000** that is my submission, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Where would you put the young men you refer to, whose interest you were trying to protect and promote? Which class will you put them?

HON. MOHAMED KANNEH: Mr Chairman, class four. That is how they graduate from financial class four to class three, class two and class one before they get to premium.

THE CHAIRMAN: Honourable Member, what are you suggesting?

HON. MOHAMED KANNEH: I am suggesting **Le500.000**

THE CHAIRMAN: For class three?

HON. MOHAMED KANNEH: Class three is **Le800.000**. It is revenue generation, but we have to give opportunity to people to register more businesses. If you have more registered businesses, you will make more profit. Remember, we have just talked about the increase in withholding tax from **5.5%** to **20%**. This is my submission, Mr Chairman.

HON. HASSAN A SESAY: Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, the Honourable Member was talking about reducing the fee for classes one, two, three and four. I think what the Honourable Member was referring to is 'service contracts.' I think these figures are realistic figures. Let us understand that if somebody is involved in any business, there is need for some capital to be invested in that business. We are talking about revenue generation and I want to believe these figures are realistic, considering the kind of business people would

want to involve in. So, if you can afford it, it means you are ready to do business, but if you cannot afford it, you should not go into business. Those who have the capital to invest will embark on it. We have to understand that we have had people who were portfolio businessmen with few documents in their bags. Let us try to get rid of those ones and encourage real business people to invest. This is because we do not want 'lander dealers,' but serious business people. I want to agree with the Minister to leave this one, but if there is need, we will revisit them. I think it is realistic in my opinion.

HON. IBRAHIM T. CONTEH: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I think there is a direct correlation between Page 26 and the other pages my colleague was referring to that have to do with the registration of business. I think the Ministry has done justice with regards to the proposed increase. I think it can only be complemented if we increase the registration fee to enhance taxes, but to also ensure that those businesses that will bid for such contracts MDAs are really legitimate businesses. They can carry out and execute such businesses *[Applause]*.

HON. MOSES A. EDWIN: Mr Chairman Page 49, under sale of Muslim Divorce Certificate *[Laughter]*. I am not intending to divorce, but I want to know about the safety and security of our sisters and mothers in their marital homes. Mr Minister, you proposed **Le50.000** for the sale of Muslim Divorce Certificate. This will allow our brothers to take the exit door very easily. Some of our brothers usually go into unwanted marriages and at the end, they leave our sisters and mothers. So, this amount should be increased, so that it will not be easy for our brothers and fathers to divorce our sisters and mothers. I want to suggest **Le2mln**. This will discourage them from any act that has the tendency to divorce their wives. This amount will not allow them to play games with our sisters and mothers.

HON. CHERNOR R.M. BAH: Mr Chairman, I am confused than I was. My in-law has left this House with the impression that it is only men that request for divorce certificates. This is not true because there are instances wherein the women request for divorce certificates. So, this is two sided, but in legal practice, we make the access to certificate easy. It is part of the legal practice and Mr Chairman knows that very well. When you make certification a difficult process, people will start to circumvent and that will go against the very tenet for which this law is required. So, I think this is a reasonable amount

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I do not know whether the word 'Sale' is appropriate here. It is a 'Fee.'

HON. CHERNOR R.M BAH: Probably, yes. It is 'fee.'

THE CHAIRMAN: It is a fee that is been referred to.

HON. CHERNOR R.M. BAH: It is, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: It is not a commodity you are selling. So, it is a fee. The word 'sale' is inappropriate.

HON. CHERNOR R.M BAH: It is fee to get access to the certificate.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

HON. CHERNOR R.M BAH: You are not buying it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Leader of the Opposition, you are suggesting that the word 'Sale' be replaced with the word 'Fee'.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Thank you, Mr Leader of the Opposition. I think I agree with the Chairman that we use the word 'fee' for both Muslim and Christian marriage certificates instead of 'sale.' These are coming from other institutions, but I will still appeal that we keep the amount as stated in this Bill, which was also endorsed by the Opposition Leader. I will replace it with the word 'fee.'

HON. PAUL S. SAM: Pages 50 and 51, under Change of Address, which is **Le60.000** If you go to farmland, it talks about **Le10.000**. If you go to my village and ask one of our brothers who is a farmer to pay **Le10.000**, it is a pittance, but they may also give him another nomenclature that has the tendency to thwart government's effort to increase tax. So, let us look at the issue of farmland. I request that we expunge it.

HON. BILLOH SHAW: Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, under trademarks, I did not see anything that captures copy write. There is nothing on copy write and copy write is very important. You cannot have a trademark without copy write. I think copy write must be inserted, so that everything will be okay.

HON. ABU KEMOKAI: I am looking at Page 53, where we have consultant and research. As far as I am concerned, the proposed fee is very small. Sometimes when you want to seek the attention of firms, consultants and research institutions, they demand so much

depending on the research you want them to conduct or the firm that is conducting the research. If we charge them **Le2mln** after demanding so much, I am concerned. We have to be fair with other institutions. So, I propose **Le10mln**.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: I think we need to get something clear. Consultants pay withholding taxes. The **5%** of the consultancy fee always remains with the firm. For most international organisations, that amount is deducted and paid to the NRA. This one is for registration of businesses and I think the idea makes it easy for people to register businesses. There is no guarantee that when you register businesses at **Le2mln**, you are going to have consultancy by tomorrow.

HON. ABU KEMOKAI: Also, the registration has to determine the capacity of the firm.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Well, the point I am making is that for you to register as a consultant, I will appeal that we keep it at **Le2mln** because you are not even sure when you are going to get your next consultancy. In terms of contribution and consultancy to the Economy, they contribute hugely through taxes. For every consultancy, **5%** is retained by the agencies. Again, as I said earlier, we need to improve in the area of doing business.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Minister, I want to draw your attention to Page 53, Clauses 14 and 15. For casinos, lottery and betting companies, you proposed **Le2mln**, considering the deleterious impact that they make on society?

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: For what, Mr Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: For casinos.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Clause 14?

THE CHAIRMAN: Lottery and betting companies. I think that is pittance.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, this noble House reserves the right to set the rate. As a matter of fact, these rates are coming from the affected MDAs based on what they have. So, I can understand your position. I have no objections to any amendment you would like to make.

THE CHAIRMAN: It is too small.

HON. CHRISTOPHER K. VANDY: Mr Chairman, clause 13 on Page 53. I can see educational institutions. I want that to be clear because we have different types of

educational institutions. We even have government assisted and government owned institutions. Let us not forget that there are some educational institutions where people are so poor in the villages that they cannot afford to pay for their children. Some of those educational institutions were established to help those children. So, we want clarification on this one. The amount proposed is **Le500.000** Let us assume that they are government assisted or government owned schools, are they going to pay the **Le500.000** We have community schools where the teachers are not even on salaries. The community people usually work for those teachers in their farms.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, I think we need to get back to the heading. We are talking about work permit on Page 52. Work permit means if you are working in the mining sector, you are working in the casinos or working in an institution, but you are from a country which is not an ECOWAS country, you must have a work permit. So, we need to bear that in mind. I think we are misunderstanding it. In some countries, it is even up to **\$500**, but it is abysmally low in this country. This is why we see foreigners as shop keepers all over the country.

HON. MAADA A. LEBBY: Mr Chairman, Page 53, Clause 21, under 'Water Drilling.' These companies come to Sierra Leone and sometimes request **\$10.000** per borehole. I think the Minister needs to reconsider the figures.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Again, Mr Chairman, if somebody engages in water drilling activity, we are talking about the workers. If they come to Sierra Leone and employ Sierra Leoneans, they should not pay that amount. The amount is meant for foreign workers and the companies usually pay tax to government.

HON. ALUSINE KANNEH: Mr Chairman, for the casinos, I want us to agree on **Le 10mln** for non-ECOWAS citizens and the same amount for Lottery companies for non-ECOWAS citizens. For the ECOWAS citizens, I suggest **Le2mln** for both casinos and Lottery companies.

HON. MAADA A. KANJA: Mr Chairman, I want to look at the health services; i.e., hospitals and clinics on Page 53, Clause 19. We have health facilities that are neither hospitals nor clinics, like Marie Stops Sierra Leone and MSF Sierra Leone. They have ECOWAS and non-ECOWAS citizens. I am still talking about Work Permit. Nothing is said about health centres and these should be included. We have hospitals, clinics, but failed to

include those working in health centres. People who are working in those health centres should also be added. They neither belong to clinics nor hospitals category. They should be included *[Applause]*.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Minister, a proposal has been made with regard to Paragraphs 14 and 15 for casinos and lottery companies. The Honourable Member suggested that for Non-ECOWAS citizens it should be **Le10mln** and for ECOWAS citizens **Le 2mln**. What do you say to that?

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Well, if the intent is to discourage foreigners from coming and managing our casinos, that is fine, but some operations in casinos by international standards are managed by categories of people who understand casino businesses. Well, **Le10mln** is good in terms of raising revenue, but I will suggest that we bring it down probably to **Le 5mln**.

HON. HASSAN A. SESAY: Mr Chairman, I think in the area of taking jobs from our people, it is a terrible argument. However, I also agree because there are businesses that can only be operated by people who understand how the business operate. If we try to discourage them by imposing heavy tax on them then probably even the small revenue we would want to raise from them will not be available any more.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, they will train our own citizens.

HON. HASSAN A. SESAY: They will train them?

THE CHAIRMAN: They will train our own nationals.

HON. HASSAN A. SESAY: Mr Chairman, they will train our nationals, but they will rather train them badly to make sure that they fail, so that we could go in search of them. So, in as much we want to retain them, we should also try to have a reasonable amount. I think the suggestion made by the Minister is rational from my own point of view.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you want to Vote on the figures with regard to the casinos and lottery companies?

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[Motion for the reduction in price of Casinos and lotteries has been carried]

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, for sake of clarification, Paragraphs 14 and 15 have been amended to be **Le 5mln** for non-ECOWAS citizens and **Le 2mln** for ECOWAS for both casinos and lotteries.

HON. ALUSINE KANNEH: Mr Chairman, 'car dealers' for non-ECOWAS citizens is **Le 5mln** and ECOWAS citizens is **Le 2mln**.

Mr JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, I agree [*Applause*].

THE CHAIRMAN: So, what are the new figures?

HON. ALUSINE KANNEH: Mr Chairman, the new figures are **Le 5mln** for non-ECOWAS citizens and **Le 2mln** for ECOWAS citizens. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall we move on.

MRS FATMATA BINTU WESTON: Page 54?

HON. ABDUL K. KAMARA: Mr Chairman, Page 53, Paragraph 20, which deals with 'private security companies.' Mr Chairman, the amount is too small because most of these companies have rendered our local companies out of business. This is because our people prefer foreign companies than even our local companies. Most of our local security agencies do not operate again. Most of these companies are coming from their own countries and they have made their own names. They are here again to compete with our brothers. So, I suggest **Le 10mln** for non-ECOWAS and **Le5mln** for ECOWAS citizens.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, I want us to take a look at the structure of these security companies. I do not think they have many foreigners working for them. Honestly, they have very few foreigners working for them and most of the workers are our citizens. So, the increase is of no relevance.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, move on.

HON. AARON A. KOROMA: Mr Chairman, Page 54. I think this an opportunity for us to drive those Indians and other nationalities who are coming into this country to open shops, which I believe our local Sierra Leoneans can do better. I refer the House to the first column of the schedule for volunteers, missionaries and CBOs. What is in the document is **Le500.000** for non-ECOWAS and **Le500.000** for ECOWAS. What is the difference between an ECOWAS and non-ECOWAS citizen? I am sure there should be a distinction in

the amount. I recommend **Le750.000** for non-ECOWAS citizens and **Le500.000** for ECOWAS citizens. Mr Chairman, I had a privilege conversation with somebody and he told me that most of the projects coming into this country are accompanied by expatriates who take almost **30%** to **40%** of those funds. It is going to them in the form of remuneration for which most of the jobs they are doing in this country could be done by our brothers and sisters. They could even perform better. I think this should be an opportunity to make adjustments. In as much as we are not discouraging them, but if the NGOs know the cost they will incur when they bring an employee, I think they will think twice. I am sure this will discourage them from bringing experts from other countries; thereby encouraging them to recruit our brothers and sisters. They will boost the employment opportunities for the people of this Nation.

On that note, Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, if you leave it at **Le1, 250.000**, it will conflict with the Local Content Law, which provides for local organisations to have succession plan. If they pay **Le1, 250.000**, there will be no need to have a plan. If they employ permanent staff, I suggest **Le8mln** for Non-ECOWAS citizens and **Le2, 500.000** for ECOWAS citizens. Again, we have other categories that usually come for six months, but they usually bring huge number of expatriates. The local content policy provides that they must have a succession plan. We believe within six months, if an organisation is serious, whatever expatriate is being brought, the local employee could have learnt within six months and take charge of the job. So, I recommend for a slight increase from **Le1mln** to **Le2mln** for non-ECOWAS and **Le1mln** for ECOWAS citizens. The focus is to ensure that our locals are given priority when it comes to job creation and job acquisition, rather than underpaying our brothers and sisters.

Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, I want to reveal here that most of these organisations, will recruit, for instance, Honourable Lahai Marah, Honourable Aaron A. Koroma and an expatriate as managers, but when you look at the salary gaps between the foreigner and the locals, it is so huge. To me, it is not good for this Nation. So, this should be an opportunity for us to curb out this challenge. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, please go over what you are proposing, Honourable Member.

HON. AARON A. KOROMA: First, there should be a difference between ECOWAS and Non-ECOWAS citizens. For Non-ECOWAS citizens, I propose **Le1mln**. I have been

reasonable because majority of them come here on voluntary bases and some for health or educational reasons. So, if we increase it too high, they will be discouraged. I was only trying to create a difference between Non-ECOWAS and ECOWAS citizens. Let us say **Le1mln** for Non-ECOWAS and **Le500.000** for ECOWAS citizens.

THE CHAIRMAN: What is your second category?

HON. AARON KOROMA: My second category is **Le8mln** or **Le10mln** for Non-ECOWAS citizens **Le2.5mln** for ECOWAS citizens. For short term contract, I recommended **Le2mln** for Non-ECOWAS citizens because of the expertise they might possess when they are recruited and **Le1mln** for ECOWAS citizens.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Minister, what do you have to say?

Mr JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, I can understand where the Honourable Member is coming from, but I will tell you for Non-ECOWAS citizens coming to work for an NGO, 'Save the Children' for instance, they pay over **\$1,000** and when these NGOs put that into consideration, they may decide not to come to Sierra Leone, especially when that NGO always has the option to go elsewhere. So, some of them may be operating in Asia and other places, but they want to come to West Africa. They have to make a decision whether they should come or not. So, if the cost of work permit for international staff is too expensive, they may decide not to come to Sierra Leone. So, we have the option to wait and lose those NGOs or we bring it down. I agree we can raise it up to some level, but **Le10mln** is over a thousand dollar. If the agency has to pay for five or ten workers, that could be too high and they cannot pass the burden to the employees. It has to be paid by the agencies and most of those NGOs do not have funding that takes care of expenses of those types. Most of their funding is projected and that is why we have to reduce it.

THE CHAIRMAN: So, give a figure.

Mr JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Chairman, it could be **Le5Mln** or **Le2mln** for full time.

THE CHAIRMAN: What about the first category that talks about the volunteers? Do you accept the **Le 1mln**?

Mr JACOB J. SAFFA: For volunteers, I am in the line with what the Honourable Member said because these are volunteers. Maybe just to show the difference, we can increase it to **Le600.000** for Non-ECOWAS. When the Ebola struck, we had a lot of volunteers who

came to this country. If you tax too much, that could be another issue. I suggest that we increase it to **Le600.000** for volunteers.

THE CHAIRMAN: Please go to the third category?

Mr JACOB J. SAFFA: I think the third category is okay. So, full time staff, I have no objection for the proposed Le **5mln** for Non-ECOWAS citizens and **Le 2mln** for ECOWAS citizens

HON. CHERNOR R. M. BAH: I have an issue with the one regarding the Non-ECOWAS citizens. I do not have an issue, but when it comes to ECOWAS, we are a signatory to the Protocol on Free Movement of People and it includes employment. So, this is something we cannot touch. We have to respect the Protocol.

Mr JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Leader, I respect that but even The Gambia, we pay Work Permit.

HON. CHERNOR R. M. BAH: I am not saying they do not pay Work Permit, but we do so as per the Protocol. This is what I am saying, Mr Minister.

THE CHAIRMAN: The Protocol does not specify the amount?

HON. CHERNOR R. M. BAH: Mr Chairman, it does.

THE CHAIRMAN: Now?

HON. CHERNOR R. M. BAH: Well, NGOs do not pay anything. In other words, if you volunteer, you do not pay. So, it is better we accept these minimal figures rather than increasing them. We are not talking about businesses, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: I want to know if the Protocol actually specifies the amount for ECOWAS citizens to pay in various ECOWAS countries.

HON. CHERNOR R. M. BAH: My point here is for NGOs. We are talking about Non-Governmental Organisations wherein nurses will leave Sierra Leone and go to Guinea or Liberia to work for a Mission and come back without charging them extortionately. Now that we have a minimal start, it is better we maintain that figure.

THE CHAIRMAN: In essence, you are suggesting that it should be a small amount.

HON. CHERNOR R. M. BAH: No, Mr Chairman. I am saying we can accept the figures as they are, but increasing them would not be a wise decision.

THE CHAIRMAN: We should maintain the proposed **Le 1mln** for ECOWAS citizens.

HON. CHERNOR R. M. BAH: Yes, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Minister, you have more than compensated yourself with the increase from **Le1.25 to Le 5mln**.

Mr JACOB J. SAFFA: For Non-ECOWAS citizens?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Are you suggesting that we leave it at **Le1mln** in line with the ECOWAS Protocol?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, you leave at **Le1mln**.

Mr JACOB J. SAFFA: I am fine with that, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Very well.

HON. ALUSINE KANNEH: Mr Chairman, I have just consulted the team from the Ministry of Finance and they said immigration is a serious institution; and as far as Resident Permit is concerned, I am referring to Resident Permit for Non-ECOWAS. So, I believe we have to amend that area of Resident Permit as far as immigration is concerned. Thank you.

HON. MOSES A. EDWIN: I want to thank the Honourable Member that spoke before the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. His contribution has drawn my attention to the Work Permit, under Clause 7, which deals with the security and safety of our brothers and sisters who are working in various shops owned by foreigners. Let us look at Page 52, Clause 7, under General Merchandise, shop owners, partner employees, etc. I think we need to amend that area, so as to put our brothers and sisters on the advantage.

THE CHAIRMAN: Honourable Member, let us take it one at a time. We are dealing with Residence Permit.

HON. MOSES A. EDWIN: I am talking about Work Permit sir *[Interruption]*.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, let us deal with the Residence Permit first.

HON. MOSES A. EDWIN: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: For Non-ECOWAS citizens. What are you suggesting? Very well, whilst you are thinking about that, I will stand down the House for few minutes.

[The House was stood down at 03:55 and resumed at 4:25]

HON. ABDUL K. KAMARA: Mr Chairman, sorry for taking the House back. This is very important and it is for the good of this Nation. Let us go to Page 25. Mr Chairman, the amendment on Page 25 talks about procurement above **Le1mln**. If you go through the document, you will notice that it contradicts the amendment we made in the NCBs. In a situation where you have procurement above the threshold of **Le4mln**, this could be reduced to below **Le1bln**.

THE CHAIRMAN: Let me get the response of the Minister.

MR JACOB JUSU SAFFA: Again, nothing stops the NPPA to conduct post procurement review as the process progresses, but what we want is to minimise, considering the size and capacity of the NPPA. If you have to be part of every stage in the process, a lot of delays would be experienced. As I speak, there have been delays in the procurement of the text books because of the processes involved. So, what we are saying is to build the capacity of all the procurement officers and tell them exactly what to do. This will give the opportunity to make a procurement review above **Le1bln**. You can subject them to every other stage, but this is just to get the Government business moves fast. That is what we want to do without compromising accountability.

Mr Chairman, as I said earlier, we are not a large procurement entity. Procurement activities come from the MDAs. In as much as we want to reduce the loopholes, we also want to make sure that Government machinery moves as quickly as possible. As I speak, we have allocated resources to some Ministries that have not been able to complete their procurement because every stage in their respective procurement has to go through the NPPA; and remember, the NPPA is a regulator. It is like the Audit Service Sierra Leone. We have the NPPA as a regulatory agency. It is like saying; nobody should spend in the line Ministry without going to Auditor General. That is exactly what we are saying here. That is why they have the internal. I understand your concern, but we thought that for big procurement, you should allow the process to proceed.

Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, the procurement laws or guidelines will be adhered to the latter. In similar circumstances, where we find it necessary to stop procurement and ask questions, we can do that, but not every stage of the procurement has to go to NPPA. Remember, the whole objective of the Procurement Act is to decentralise procurement activities.

THE CHAIRMAN: Honourable Member, you still have the Floor.

HON. ABDUL K. KAMARA: I am sure the Minister was explaining to this House, but I am not convinced based on the following factors: Leakages do not necessarily mean huge procurement activity. What we are saying is that if we do not follow procurement procedures and make laws that contradict other laws, it is a concern. I agree with him when he said that the NPPA does not have the man power, but the Government could empower the NPPA. I want to state here that below Le1bIn could cost this Nation a huge amount of money that could result in leakages. What we are saying is that the Finance Act geared towards generating revenue. This proposed amendment will lead to leakages, Mr Chairman. I ask that we get it out or else we are heading for other troubles. Let us empower the NPPA as an institution. Of course it is a regulatory body, but we have to empower the NPPA to do what it is supposed to do as spelt in the Act.

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the NPPA is a Regulatory Agency. It is not part of the procurement process of the MDAs. Procurement processes rests with the MDAs. If every stage in the procurement process is referred to the NPPA, giving the volumes of transaction in Government, it will not augur well. We are at the end of the process. We have done allocation for Supplementary Budget. As I mentioned earlier, for huge amounts, you can refer for review. This is the provision we are trying to make, so as to enable smaller procurement to be done, but at the same time reserving the authority of the NPPA to conduct procurement review, as in the case of the Auditor General. It is like saying Auditor General has to come to every Ministry to check how moneys allocated to those MDAs are utilised.

Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, procurement plans are prepared and what the NPPA needs to do is to train the relevant staff in terms of processes. If you have any reason to think something is wrong somewhere, he may blow the whistle, but to transfer every

transaction to the NPPA, I am worried because it will slow down government's businesses. This is why certain things cannot be done even in Parliament on time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Minister, I want further clarification. What that provision seems to be saying is that the procurement agency, as a regulator, is at liberty to come in at any time between the tender stage or tender preparation and the evaluation process. Is that what you are saying?

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: No, Mr Chairman. The status quo is that every stage, even during the bidding process, every stage in the procurement process is referred to the NPPA for clearance. You cannot be a regulator and a player at the same time. If the NPPA is part of the process, then what is the role of the regulator now?

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine and when they step in are they listened to?

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Of course, they are listened to, but they slow down Government operations. The Ministry of Finance is not a beneficiary of these feedbacks. We are very mindful about it, but we are working towards building the capacity of the Procurement Officers, so that they will know exactly what to do, and allow the process to go. The NPPA can come alter and conduct a procurement review, which you have the right to do as in the case of Audit Service. It is like telling Audit Service that every penny and MDA spends, should be referred to them.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[The Scheduled has formed part of the Bill as Amended]

[THE HOUSE RESUMES]

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled, the Finance Act, 2019 having gone through the Committee of the whole House with some amendments be read the third time and passed into law.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[The Bill entitled, 'The Finance Act, 2019 being an Act to provide for the imposition and alteration of taxes to give effect to the financial proposal of the Government and to provide for other related matters for the Financial Year 2019 has been read the third time and passed into Law]

V. GOVERNMENT`S MOTION

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

MR JACOB J. SAFFA: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, be it resolved THAT THIS HONOURABLE HOUSE RATIFY THE FINANCING AGREEMENT, SIERRA LEONE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AND THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION [IDA], DATED OCTOBER, 2ND 2019 THAT WAS LAID ON THE TABLE OF THIS HONOURABLE HOUSE THIS AFTERNOON.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the main objective of this Project is to increase access skills training and build the foundation for skills development system in Sierra Leone. It will focus on increasing access to quality skills provision that will contribute to improving Sierra Leone's economic competitiveness and the promotion of sustainable and inclusive development through the training of our youths. The proposed project has two main parts as follows:

Part I: Skills Development. This part consists of the establishment and operationalisation of the skills development fund to increase access to skills of grading programme through two windows. Window one targets selected training institutions that wished to improve the relevance and quality of their training programmes and to introduce short courses for out of school unemployed and under employed youths with a focus on girls. It aims to improve access to demand responsive, technical and vocational educational training programmes, focusing on formal TVET and informal TVET, through upgrading the curricular, purchasing learning resources, training of instructors, providing industrial attachment, training arrangement, providing carrier counselling and internship and conducting training needs assessment and tracer studies. Model two targets businesses in the productive sectors, Agriculture, Fisheries, Mining construction and Tourism that need to address the skills gap to expand their production and market, or to upgrade their production process to climb higher up the value chain, including co-financing short and medium terms training and upgrading the skills of current and potential employees.

Part II: Capacity Building and System Strengthening. This component aims at building a foundation for a demand skills development system through an integrated

skills information system requiring technical vocational educational training providers to report on students, training programmes, training faculty and provides skills development fund guarantees to conduct tracer studies of their graduates. A pilot certification of trivet programme conducted by National Certificate Training and Vocational Awards, [NCTVA] to improve the credibility and relevance of certification by involving industries and business houses in the process, and project coordination, including technical assistance, training and operational course for project planning, coordination, monitoring and reporting of project progress.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, under Institutional and implementation arrangement, this project will be overseen by Skills Development Steering Committee. The SDLC, because it is a World Bank project, it will be chaired by Ministry of Finance and will comprise professional heads from relevant Ministries and provide core sectorial strategic oversight of project implementation. There will be Skills Development Fund Grant Committee appointed by the Ministry in consultation with the Minister of Technical and Higher Education to oversee the activities of the fund. The project is housed in the Ministry of Technical Higher Education. The skills development fund will be managed by the skill development secretariat who will be contracted through competition. The School Development Fund Secretariat will be headed by Skills Development Fund Manager for overall administrative supervision and logistics requirement to operate the skill development fund, and it will be housed in the Ministry of Technical and higher Education. As in the case of all World Bank projects, the project fiducial management and the Ministry of Finance will be responsible for fiducial arrangement of both components.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, skills development is a lifelong process that proceeds in stages with each stage building on the previous one. Although Sierra Leone presents compromising opportunities for private sector growth and investment, key market factor enabling the ability of farms to maximise their potentials and hinder farm productivity. The poor supply of quality skills serves as a major constrain preventing farms from modernising and improving product quality. The skills development project is therefore strategically relevant in addressing not only the poor supply of quality skills, but also skills gap. The skills gap assessment

conducted by the African Development Bank suggests that the work force in Sierra Leone lacks both fundamental and technical skills and that the high cost of training is often prohibiting, especially the small and medium domestic enterprises. Addressing this constraint will require both private and public sector investments in the supply and demand for skills and is therefore urgent.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the beneficiaries of the project will include young job seekers, employees and employers of informal and formal business in productive sectors, industries, students and staff of public and private technical vocational and educational training providers, and relevant Government agencies engaged in skills development, evidence that the proposed intervention is needed and will work.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, despite the colossal amount spent on education, skills development remains to be a challenge in Sierra Leone which needs to be addressed in both the short and the long run to enable sustainable economic growth and development. The finance is very much needed as it will address and cover the skills gap in the education sector. During the appraisal of the proposed project all relevant stakeholders were consulted including Ministry of Finance, private sector, Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, Ministry of planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Works and Public Assets, Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the NCTVA, TIVET and the Chambers of Commerce.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the resources for this project is a credit in the amount of **\$20mln**. The principal amount of the credit shall be paid in accordance with the repayment schedule set forth in the Agreement with an interest of **0.75%**. The maximum commitment charge is **1¹/₂%** per annum on the withdraw credit balance. The service charge is **3/4 of 1%** and on the withdraw credit balance.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, given the importance of this project I seek the approval of this Honourable House to ratify the Financing Agreement, between the Republic of Sierra Leone and the International Development Association dated 2nd October, 2018 that was laid on the Table of this Honourable House this morning. I thank you all.

[Question Proposed]

HON. FRANCIS A. KAISAMBA: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. We have just listened to the Minister and he has given us a detailed explanation of the Agreement he signed on behalf of the Government and people of Sierra Leone. We want to thank him and his team. This is just in line with the priority Government has given to Education in this country. Technical and Vocational education is a very important sector in the educational system that has been neglected. It is key and that is what is lacking in Sierra Leone. All we want, as individuals or citizen, is white colour jobs. We want to sit in offices, but the middle man power has been neglected somehow. I could remember vividly after the civil war, the DDR programme at the re-settlement level had some projects to train ex-combatants and give them some tools. Those tools were given to them and of course most of those tools were sold. Technical and Vocational Institutions were established, but they have dwindled. We have very few Technical and Vocational institutions in the country. So, for the Minister and Government to have signed such an Agreement that put premium on skills development or demand skills development and to create the foundation for skills development is very important.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I may not even want to repeat all that have been said by the Minister because my colleagues know the issues. We are not necessarily rubberstamping, but this is a very simple Agreement. We have heard the Minister and I am sure we have read this Agreement and we have comprehended its contents. The Free Quality Education Project is ongoing and Government thought it fit that vocational and technical sectors are key. Mr Speaker, not everybody will have to go to the university; even the 6-3-3-4 Educational System makes provisions for technical vocational institutions.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this Agreement is basically meant to strengthen or support this important sector. It is a laudable venture and we must commend the Minister and his team. As the people's representatives, it is but fitting that we support this Agreement. As the Minister said, this Agreement has two parts; i.e., Skills Development Fund and Capacity Building, and Systems Strengthening the implementation arrangement and the institutions responsible to monitor these finances. This is very important because there must be checks and balances. The beneficiaries are the people of across the country across the various Constituencies and wards.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Minister has gone further to explain the key beneficiaries; for example, the young job seekers, which is one of the problems we have now in this country. There are lots of young people roaming on the streets of every

township. They do not have jobs and majority of them have not been to any technical or vocational institutions. So, we have to encourage them, once these institutions are established, for them to go and learn something, so that they can create employment for themselves.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Agreement talks about important industries that will spring up; therefore, I think this is a very good Agreement. The Minister has explained the amount of money involved. The percentage is quite minimal and we are paying over a long period of time. I think we can pay that without even knowing, but the benefits that will come to us as a country will be fantastic. For instance, the trainings that will be given to our middle man power will be immense and will be able to close the gap that has existed for so long. Countries like Guinea and Liberia have these opportunities, but they are not available in Sierra Leone. We have not even concentrated too much on training of that particular sector. I think this Agreement is seeking to take that challenge off. So, I thank you very much and I hope you will not take too long on this Agreement because it is simple, explicit and it will benefit all of us. I thank you.

HON. DR MAHMOUD M. KALOKOH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Definitely, I was happy when the presentation was eloquently done by the Minister, particularly some of the areas he highlighted. As a Nation, we need to embark on improving the appropriate technology. An appropriate technology caters for the middle level manpower and until we improve that aspect, we are not yet ready for the development. The Financing Agreement is simply telling us that it is a service-delivery document and we want to see that this Agreement is duly extended to the rural communities.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I was also glad when the documents mentioned upgrading the curriculum, which is very key. Upgrading the curricular will tailor programmes that will enable the youths to gain vital skills. However, in the area of capacity building, let me look at the NCTVA. We all know NCTVA graduated from Institutes of Education, but you may be surprised to learn that it is as a result of weak capacity. For instance, some students have graduated since 2001 and seventeen years down the line, they have still not received their certificates. So, on the area of capacity building, we should embark on monitoring the process. Our monitoring mechanisms are very weak and that is why every Jack and Jill does what

he/she feels. This will not take this country forward. If we want to move forward we will like to see Sierra Leone match-up with some of the international standards or best practices. So, I see this documents as an answer to that and I am therefore asking my colleagues to ratify this document. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. I will take two more Members.

HON. REBECCA Y. KAMARA: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to take this opportunity to thank the Minister of Finance for being proactive in seeking for opportunities for our youths. He is here seeking the approval of this House something that is going to benefit our youths. We have seen many projects coming to Sierra Leone for young people, but we still have thousands of young people languishing on the streets of Sierra Leone. If this Agreement is ratified, it is going to improve the lives of our people and it is our responsibility to ensure that it affects the lives of our people positively. We have to ensure our people are capacitated. This Agreement has to be made useful to our people. We do not want to see a situation wherein the trainees cannot perform as expected. We have to ensure that those who are going to be trained perform exceptionally well. We always condemn the idea of bringing foreigners to do certain jobs, but are we training the young people to use modernised equipment? Have we helped to develop the skills of our youths? There are people who call themselves operators, but cannot perform and those companies usually bring expatriates to do certain jobs. So, it is a very big slap on the face of those who are saying our youths are not trained.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, if this Agreement is ratified, we have to monitor the implementation process in order to ensure that the beneficiaries are drawn from every part of this country. People from the North, South, East and West must benefit from this gesture. We have to ensure that every part of this country benefits and that the beneficiaries must prove themselves. We have signed and ratified many Agreements in this country, but they have gone down the drains. There is nothing to show.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we have responsibilities to perform as individuals and as groups. This project should affect every district and constituency. Our brothers and sisters must benefit and we must ensure that we monitor the process.

I am advising the Minister that the overhead expenditure should not be more than what is to be expended on skills. We want this Agreement to affect the lives of our youths. I am saying this because sometimes the overhead expenditure or administrative costs are too high. This is why at the end of the day, they start complaining about inadequate funding. So, let the overhead expenditure be lower than what is to be expended on the skills.

On this note, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, if we are sincere with ourselves and to the 'New Direction,' and we want it to be a very successful, we have to put all hands on deck. All of us will have to ensure that this project becomes successful and positively impact the lives of our youths, both men and women. I want to encourage all and sundry to monitor the implementation of this project. It should not be left in the hands of the Minister and team, but all of us should take part and ensure that it reaches the right beneficiaries. It should not be limited to certain groups of people or certain communities, but the entire country. We want everybody to benefit from this gesture. I want to thank the Minister very much and to implore this Honourable House to speedily approve this particular Agreement. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: I thank the Honourable Member for her contribution.

HON. HASSAN A. SESAY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Agreement is not a controversial one and the rationale for the 6-3-3-4 is to fill the gaps in the middle level manpower, which is lacking in our country. All of us are guilty of that because some of us have been trained as lawyers, medical doctors, teachers, etc. but the middle level manpower has been lacking. This was why the 6-3-3-4 System of Education was introduced. The Minister will agree with me that before now, there have been efforts to build technical-vocational institutions to support this particular aspect of training we are talking about now. This particular Agreement is going to narrow this gap that has existed for a very long time. I think we do not have a reason to ask whether this is good or bad. It is good for the country and for the young people. It is going to fill the skills gap that has existed for a very long time. We have been saying that good carpenters come from Guinea or good mechanics come from Guinea and other places. Let us train our youths and empower them to the fullest. We have to improve those who have already acquired skills. They should

become entrepreneurs. I think these are the areas we must emphasise if we want this Economy to grow. I am saying this because this is one of the components that boost the Economy. This Agreement will lead to economic growth because that is part of development.

Having said that, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I think we must hastily ratify this Agreement, so that the resources will be provided and make sure that they get to the targeted beneficiaries. I thank you, Mr Speaker [*Applause*].

HON. SIDIE M. TUNIS: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Agreement we have before us is a clear demonstration of the President's commitment to education and to the youths of this country. This Agreement is very good and it is going to create jobs, especially in the areas of Agriculture, Fisheries and Tourism. The fact that the resources we are going to get out of it are going to develop the middle-level manpower, it is going to create wealth for the people of this country. Therefore, I will not waste your time, but to call on this Honourable House to support this Agreement. I want to thank the Minister who has been with us for the whole day in this Well. I thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Mr Minister, you can now respond.

MR JACOB JUSU SAFFA: Mr Speaker, I want to thank this Honourable House for the bi-partisan position on this Financing Agreement. Let me assure this House that every district is going to benefit from this project. We must train our youths in employable skills and to make them marketable. Also, I want to respond to the Honourable Member who spoke about the NCTVA. I perfectly agree with him and that is one of the essences and the certification itself is brought in line with global practice.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, on the issue of monitoring and evaluation, this Agreement passed through the Board of the World Bank and Cabinet and it is now to be ratified by this Parliament. This means it is going to be launched next month in one of the technical institutions, probably Trade Centre in Magburaka Boys School or OIC or wherever. I would particularly want to implore Members of the Committee on Education to follow this project to the latter. As Minister of Finance, I would create all the opportunities for you to follow this project to the latter. This is because it is

important to monitor this project. I will raise additional resources to support this process.

Honestly, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the unemployment problem we have in this country is so huge that even the **\$20mln** is not enough. However, we have to start somewhere. It pleases the President to initiate this alongside the Free Quality Education.

On that note, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I thank you very much for your various contributions. I have nothing to say except to laud you for the bi-partisan position taken on this Agreement. Thank you *[Applause]*. Mr Speaker, be it resolved that this Honourable House ratify the following agreement which was laid on the Table of this House on Thursday, 1st November, 2018 entitled:

Financing Agreement, Sierra Leone Skills Development Project between the Republic of Sierra Leone and the International Development Association Credit No. 6309/SL, dated 2nd October, 2018.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[Government Motion by the Minister of Finance has been ratified]

THE SPEAKER: Mr Minister, with the kind permission of the House, you are relieved and congratulations. We hope to see you tomorrow. On a more serious note, I want to implore all of you to be in attendance tomorrow. The Budget debate will state tomorrow. I am expecting all Honourable Members who are not on official duty and who do not have any excuse on health grounds and who have received the wherewithal to be here. I can assure you the wherewithal is on its way and in fact has arrived at its various destinations *[Laughter]*. So, there is little occasion for jubilation. You have to compensate that by your prompt attendance tomorrow, properly attired as Honourable Soriba *[Laughter]*. I expect full participation in the debate on the Budget for the year 2019. I would be here promptly at 10:00a.m and if you are not, woe betides you.

ADJOURNMENT

[The House rose at 5:05 p.m. and was adjourned to Friday, 2nd November, 2018 at 10:00 am]