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**PRESS RELEASE**

**CHIEF MINISTER PRESENTS PEACE AND NATIONAL COHESION BILL TO PARLIAMENT**

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Thursday 12th November 2020 commenced debate on the Bill entitled: “The Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion”, aimed at establishing a commission for promotion of peace, national cohesion and development in Sierra Leone.

The Bill is seeking to become an Act with a view to provide for the establishment of an Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion; to confer on the commission the power to take measures to prevent, manage and resolve conflict; to build, promote and maintain sustainable peace in Sierra Leone; and to provide for other related matters.

Presenting the Bill to the House, the Chief Minister, Prof. David John Francis highlighted the strategic objectives and importance of the Bill in light of conflict prevention, management and establishment of a peace commission. He encouraged MPs to take a leading role in the enactment and implementation of the Bill relative to conflict management and resolution in the country. The Chief Minister also said without peace, there will be no development adding that peace is necessary for the development and security of a society.

Contributing to the debate, the Chief Whip of Parliament, Hon. Dickson Rogers thanked President Bio and the Chief Minister for the positive initiative with the aim of addressing issues relating to peace. He also said that the Bill will not only create history, but it will put Sierra Leone on the map in respect of certain benchmarks relating to peaceful co-existence; whilst describing it as “non-controversial”. He averred that President Bio is trying to unify the country by

attempting to bridge a seeming tribal and political divide in the society. Speaking on causes and effects of conflicts, he spoke on the necessity for research in order to improve on prevention, mitigation, resolution and the maintenance peace. Concluding, he advised saying "let us stop indicating tribe and region when filling important documents".

On his part, Hon. Moses Andrew Edwin said that development will not prevail without peace, adding that it was timely for such a Bill to come to Parliament for passage into law without delay for the sake of posterity. Making reference to the content of the Bill, he spoke on its nature relative to peace, conflict prevention and development programmes that are in line awaiting implementation.

Speaking to the motion, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas suggested to the House to extend a special invitation to Civil Society Organizations and the Media pointing out that they should not only be serving and advocating for conflict management, but also moral guarantors of sustainable peace and development in the country. This suggestion holds sway and resonates with the spirit of enriching the debate.

Hon. Shiaka Sama, an Independent MP from Pujehun said he is happy to have such a Bill and has never encouraged violence and discrimination in his interactions with people and henceforth called on others to denounce tribalism and discrimination. He went on to throw light on Sierra Leone's political divide and proffered solutions in light of the establishment of the peace commission; citing ensuing conflict in his relating to land rights.

Hon. Rev. Horace E. Vincent referred to the Bill as "the best" and pointed out that in light of lasting peace and cohesiveness, President Bio has done the best through the establishment of a Peace Commission. He went on to say that the commission is going to be independent in light of its composition. "If this Bill is passed, it will bring a lasting and cohesive peace in the country", whilst thanking the Chief Minister for bringing such an important document to Parliament for consideration.

Hon. Musa Fofana said the Bill is a good one and asked that stakeholders are allowed to contribute bigly to its implementation. "I would want to see that every

political party is involved in the implementation of the Bill", adding that, they must be at the center. The involvement of the entire 16 geographic districts with regards to the Medium Term Development Plan is necessary for promoting the implementation of the said Bill, he said.

However, the APC declined on the debate on the grounds of late receipt of the Bill today, but promised to contribute on it in future.

The debate continues in due course.

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