



PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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15th June, 2024

PRESS RELEASE



FEMALE CAUCUS ENDS LEADERSHIP RETREAT

The Sierra Leone Female Parliamentary Caucus (SLeFPaC) led by Hon. Bernadette Wuyata Songa on Thursday, 13/06/2024, concluded a two-day retreat at the Place Hotel at Tokeh in the Western Rural District.

Earlier in her welcome address, the Deputy Director of Department for Programs, Research and Partnership (DepReP), Mary Koroma said the purpose of the retreat was to build the capacity of Female Parliamentarians, in order to be effective and efficient in Parliamentary functions and leadership.

The Deputy Director used the opportunity to recall the efforts of the 5th Parliament and its Leadership for enacting the 30% female representation laws. While acknowledging the efforts of other stakeholders, she spoke about the importance of women's emancipation and participation in politics and other spheres, especially in Parliament. The Deputy Director revealed the common goals of the Parliamentary Female Caucus and their relevance in society. "The importance of female parliamentarians can not be overemphasized," she maintained, and also made comparative references to other countries.

President of the Sierra Leone Parliamentary Female Caucus, Hon. Bernadette Wuyata Songa in her declaration of purpose, categorically stated that they were desperate to identify their common goals and emphasized their unity to achieving what they are stooping to conquer. The dynamic female MP underscored that the retreat is intended to achieve capacity building for their Members and went on to reflect on their struggle to participate in parliamentary debates and other activities.

The Caucus President stressed that the purpose of the workshop was to build the capacities of Female Parliamentarians, in order to become efficient and effective in participating in all parliamentary activities. "We are going to outshine the Male MPs," she maintained and vehemently advised colleague Female MPs to be attentive and focus during the course of the retreat.

Speaking on behalf of the Leader of Government, Hon. Abdul Suleiman Marray-Conteh reaffirmed the commitment of the leadership towards women's participation and representation. He emphasized the support and enduring effort of the last Parliament on the passage of good laws, especially the Gender

Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act and related laws. He advised Members of the Caucus to be the role model among the women populace in the country.

In his statement, Leader of Opposition, Hon. Abdul Kargbo described the retreat as critical and important in Sierra Leone. The MP acknowledged the invaluable efforts of all important personalities, including donor partners and Leadership of the Female Caucus, for organizing the retreat.

Hon. Kargbo reiterated that the retreat would build the capacity of the female participants and encouraged them to unite irrespective of their political ideologies. The Caucus he said is essential for the political landscape and went on to say, it would unite women political agenda and participation.

He reminded the Caucus to think about women suffering from various human rights abuses. In that regard, he advised the Caucus to use the retreat as a platform to capacitate themselves and be able to provide freedom for vulnerable women out there.

The opposition leader emphatically condemned all forms of violence and abuses against women and called the attention of the Caucus to liberate them. He spoke about women participation in politics and their independence in achieving equal opportunities.

He urged Members of the Caucus to stand firm and overturn repeated circumstances of male chauvinism in politics and other participation.

"This retreat is a call to action," he maintained and went on to underscore the essence of women. "Don't underestimate your relevance and importance," he concluded.

Speaking on behalf of the Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, the Deputy Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs Boaki Bindi Hindowa described the retreat as strategic event and went on to assure the Female Caucus that they would work in synergy. The Youthful Minister reaffirmed on behalf of his ministry their continuous commitment towards promoting the Caucus. He also acknowledged

the efforts of the Leadership of Parliament in that direction and used the opportunity to appeal for the passage of Child Rights Bill. The Deputy Minister underscored the President's support for women and also commended the donor support towards same.

The National Director of World Vision International Sierra Leone, a non-governmental organization, Sagane Thiaw, acknowledged the efforts of all important personalities for promoting women's empowerment and participation. He stressed his organization's mission, vision, and objective, in light of promoting women and children. The National Director reflected on their support to humanity in Sierra Leone, especially when it comes to women and children. He used the opportunity to invite the Caucus to an in-house campaign to end child malnutrition and hunger slated to be launched soon. He spoke about the consequences of hunger and malnutrition and asked the Caucus to partner with them in the campaign.

The World Vision National Director underscored their support in Sierra Leone over the years and went on to reveal that they were promoting women peace and security as well as gender related matters.

He informed participants that their project implementation aimed at ensuring that more women participate in decision making. He reiterated that the Caucus is very important in promoting women's peace, security, and gender amongst others. He also made a relevant commitment towards promoting the Caucus in the implementation of the GEWE Act.

Madam Baindu Massaquoi from UNWOMEN commended the Caucus and expressed appreciation over the retreat.

She reiterated the efforts of UNWOMEN in promoting women's empowerment, equality, and other gender sensitive matters across the world. She said they were happy to support the Caucus for the retreat. She assured the Caucus on the implementation of the GEWE Act and other related gender matters. She reaffirmed to the Caucus, their continuous support, especially for the implementation of the GEVWE act, and called on other partners to come forward and emulate same.

Zeina Hilal, a representative from IPU in Geneva, delivered her statement via webinar and expressed honour and appreciation over the retreat. She recalled their long-term relationship with Parliament and reassured their support to the Parliamentary Female Caucus on gender sensitive matters. She spoke about their position on gender equality and sensitivity across the world. She reiterated their continuous support towards the Parliament of Sierra Leone.

Madam Zeina underscored gender politics in many spheres and amongst women and dilated on the unity among women through the Caucus to achieve equal opportunities for all.

She highlighted their support and focus on various areas relating to women participation in politics, gender equality in Parliament, women representation in the Sierra Leone Parliament, and their inclusivity in other walks of life.

Program Officer, Sierra Leone Parliamentary Network Africa, Florence Dzibordi Yaa Gbolu

predicated her statement on accountability and transparency. She acknowledged the effort made by Sierra Leone in supporting and promoting women's participation and representation in politics and went on to reassure their support to the Parliamentary Female Caucus.

Officially launching the retreat on behalf of the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Acting Clerk and Deputy Clerk of Parliament, Gilbert Bosco Nhabay comparatively analyzed the positive achievement of the Parliament of Sierra Leone to many other in terms of female representation. He assured the female parliamentarians of the Leadership's continuous support and promotion. He encouraged the Caucus to maintain their unity and common goals. He expressed hope of shaping the future of female Caucus and women politics.

The Acting Clerk made a commitment for a very strong advocacy that the Caucus would be supported by the Leadership and Parliament and also assured his alignment and capacity building and strengthening of the Caucus.

The retreat was climaxed by the development of a strategic plan for the Caucus, which will serve as an operational guideline.

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