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**PRESS RELEASE**

FIFTH ALLOTTED DAY:

PARLIAMENT CONCLUDES DEBATE ON THE NATIONAL BUDGET 2023

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Friday 2/12/2022 concluded the debate on the 2023 National Budget as was presented by the Minister of Finance, Dr. Denis K. Vandi

The Bill seeks to authorize expenditure from the consolidated fund for the services of Sierra Leone for the year 2023 and other related matters, with the theme: "Addressing the needs of the vulnerable in the context of multiple crises".

In his submission to the debate, Hon. Dr. Roland Kargbo denounced too much blame on the global crisis and said that the Budget is not classical. He elaborated on many economic risks and advised the Minister to focus on economic diversification for some sectors. He emphasized on agricultural investments to ameliorate the economy. The MP expressed worries over environmental deforestation and raised many other concerns about economic development.

However, he commended the Government for the payment of the social safety net, but raised certain concerns on the implementation, and went on to recognize donor partners for their support towards the development of the country, but called for accountability over implementations of the funding.

An Independent MP from the Kailahun District, Hon. Quintin Salia-Konneh expressed disappointment over some Members of Parliament who are decrying the Budget and

went on to commend the Government for the proactive strides towards the service of the economy, amidst the global crisis. He expressed appreciation over the employment of essential service workers, rural electrification, and support for education amongst others. He urged colleague MPs on the opposition benches to appreciate the Government for the several achievements in the socio-economic development of the State.

On his part, Hon. Abdul Kargbo raised alarm over inconsistent figures on the Ministry of Finance website and its variance in the Budget.

The MP comparatively analyzed inflation and growth in the West Africa Sub-Region and blamed the Government for the economic hardship.

Hon. Dominic Tshombe explained the positive aspects of the Budget for vulnerable people and went on to analyze the global risk factors as well as the Government mitigating measures including total duty exception. He spoke about transformation in education and added that the Budget is concentrated on the vulnerable.

Deputy Whip of Opposition, Hon. Catherine Zainab Tarawallie opposed the Ministry for double allocation of money to an entity that had ceased to exist. She Called for an investigation into the matter. Speaking on the importance of farming, the MP called on colleagues to invest in agriculture and support the Government in diversification. She informed Parliament that there is no work going on at Tomabum, Rumbell agricultural fields. "The operations are not true" she informed and went on to say, the money voucher expected from the Ministry to support farmers is not working and asked the Ministry of Finance to investigate the agro-dealers. She appealed to the Government to establish a special Children's Budget, that will address the welfare of children. The Deputy Whip concluded and described the Budget as "operation pay yourself".

Deputy Chief Whip of Parliament, Hon. Alusine Kanneh clarified and debunked the immediate previous debater for her contributions. He informed that the Tomabum is in full agricultural productivity. The MP substantiated the electrification of Koindu City

and other rural solar electrification, and called on the attention of the Minister to investigate road contractors for poor jobs. The Budget he said is good and encouraged colleague MPs to commend the Government for the development in the Tourism Sector and other sectors. He opposed the contractor that is re-gravelly a certain road in his District.

Hon. Abdul Latif Sesay informed that President Bio has not fulfilled some of the promises he made when he was in opposition and went on to decry the Government for inflation and escalating prices of foodstuffs. He informed that the Budget is going to add more pressure on the people and denounced Government for creating unworthy jobs for the youths.

Hon. Hindolo Ngavao said the Budget has encapsulated growth and lauded the Government for the economy. He divulged the global economic risks and outlined Government mitigating measures to address the deficit. According to him, the Government's Budget for education is huge and would indirectly benefit many households across the country. Agricultural support to farmers, he said is yielding dividends as food production has increased, in many parts including Kailahun District. He informed that electricity blackout is hardly envisaged now. He used the opportunity to thank Government for wages and salaries including gratuities as slated in the Budget.

Leader of C4C, Hon. Saa Emerson Lamina admonished colleague MPs on the main opposition seats to stop criticizing negatively. He heaped praises on the Minister for putting together the National Budget and styled the Budget as the "Citizens Kombra Budget". He described President Bio as a friendly person. " I have never seen a President received Parliament so friendly as President Bio" he disclosed.

The MP said the Budget is proper and pro-poor and went on to do a comparative analysis of global and internal risk measures. In light of comparative and contrast analysis, he decried the previous Government for mismanagement of the economy and heaped praises on the current Government for prudent budgeting allocation to education, improvement in electricity, fishery, accountability, and Governance. He did

not hesitate to denounce the APC for several political malaise. He commended the fiscal decentralization policy in the Budget. He heaped praises on the Ministry of Finance for managing the wage bill and decried the past Government fictitious creations of new districts and municipalities without parameters.

Leader of NGC, Hon. Dr. Kandeh Yumkella said the Budget needs serious reflection. He trended on the crisis in the world and comparatively analyzed the rising inflation. He expressed worries over the survival of vulnerable people in light of food prices in the future. He called on Colleague MPs to support the Government to ameliorate the economic situation. The NGC Leader commended the Government on efforts geared towards the fight against COVID-19 and made some recommendations and went on to make reference on economic stability in other countries in the Sub-Region.

He also made reference to the Bank Governor's statement and used the opportunity to advise the Government to prioritize certain areas to manage the Budget well. He spoke about the necessity of diversification of the economy, especially for agriculture, and outlined positive indicators. He commended the Government for the Free Quality Education and expressed worries over the future danger in tertiary education if certain measures are not put in place. He asked the Government to support priority areas, in light of addressing the economic problems. The MP commended the Government for energy and highlighted remedies to improve on the same. He expressed disappointment over the delay and alleged corruption at the seaport and asked the authority to do more.

He spoke about the relevance of climate finance and due diligence in certain payments. He asked Parliament to collectively support the Government to fix the economy.

He made several recommendations amongst them are to stop all unnecessary overseas travels, stop some of the agencies' extra budgeting expenditures, monitoring of the Port and put moratorium on some road constructions and divert the money into agriculture, reduce spending on workshops.

Acting Leader of Opposition, Hon. Hassan Sesay recalled unprecedented statements against the past Government and went on to highlight the abysmal growth rate of the current Government. He used international comparative analysis on road construction and opposed the Government for spending so much on constructing roads. The Budget he said failed to outline the multiple crises. He decried the Government for poor fiscal management before the global crisis. He emphasized that the country is experiencing an economic downturn because of poor policies and other factors. The simultaneous circulation of old and new currencies, he said is exacerbating the economic situation coupled with inflation. The Acting Leader also recalled that they tried to advise the State Authorities including the Bank Governor but all fell on deaf ears. He expressed worries over the continuous rise in inflation. The Acting Leader insisted that they would always advise and went on to emphasize on the risk of double digits inflation. The MP vehemently admonished colleague MPs on the ruling benches to be honest, in light of the inflation crisis. He advised the Government to consider certain policies that would ameliorate the situation. "Knowing economics and managing economy is different", he referred to the Bank Governor with respect and went on to elaborate on the issues. The MP referred to a series of growths in Guinea, and stability of her currency than Sierra Leone. He decried the Government for the closure of mines few years ago and informed that the situation had caused a devastating effect on the economy. He used the opportunity to demand an explanation of the amount of new notes in circulation.

Acting Leader of Government Business, Hon. Bashiru Silikie recalled the abysmal cost of Wilkinson Road by the previous Government and went on to debunk the opposition for inaccurate comparative analysis of road construction. The MP informed that the economic situation affecting the people is a global phenomenon and the aftermath of the former Government. He allegedly recalled the fictitious deal of the past Government with miners, in light of the glorious economy that was mismanaged. The Leader went on to heap praises on the current administration for putting the economy on a good footing with prudent mitigating measures. Highlighted the tremendous efforts of the Ministry of Agriculture in light of enhancing food security. The MP also commended the Government for subsidizing fuel and cash transfers to

vulnerable citizens. He decried the opposition for dangerous criticism of the Government without providing solution.

The Acting Leader said they have not reneged on their manifesto promises and today many compatriots are benefiting, adding that passing in public examinations to university has increased drastically.

The Acting Leader said they are giving quality education, amidst the current situation. The Acting Leader analyzed that respective of the current situation they are still paying salaries on time, which he said the past governments never accomplished. He lauded the Government's rural electrification in several chiefdoms and went on to outline several development projects and programs that the opposition never scored.

Furthermore, the Acting Leader predicated his comprehensive contributions on the tremendous achievements of President Bio, amidst the global calamity and decried the past Government or main Opposition for lethargy and dangerous criticism.

responding to concerns and questions, the Deputy Minister of Finance, Fatamadi Bangura said he acknowledged the frank exchanges in the debate including the fundamental of the economy, the Budget, and other matters. He clarified so many issues and clear up doubts.

The Bill has been committed to the Committee of supply for further scrutiny.

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