



PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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PRESS RELEASES



FIFTH ALLOTTED DAY: PARLIAMENT CONCLUDES 2024 BUDGET DEBATE

The Parliament of Sierra Leone on Tuesday, 28/11/2023 Concluded the debate on the Bill entitled; "Appropriation Act, 2024" (Budget) for the development of the State, on the Theme; "Restoring Macroeconomic Stability while Protecting the Poor and Vulnerable".

The Bill seeks to provide an Authorized expenditure from the Consolidated Fund for the Services of Sierra Leone for the year 2024 and other related matters.

Continuing the debate, Hon Abdul Karim Kamara, Opposition Whip in Parliament from Kambia District assured the House that he would join the President to address the peace, and political cohesion for the stability of the country. He said the Presidential address and the budget should be comprehensively looked at together. On health-related budget, he said the reduction of the budget allocation to health for 2024 is a crisis, citing the epidemic of disease and recruitment of nurses. He said the rapid increase in the dollars to that of the leones is strongly affecting the growth of the economy and warned the government to do the needful to alleviate the suffering of the people.

While defending the business people, the Opposition Whip said the rise of the dollar is affecting the businesses and importers in the country.

On agriculture, he said the Feed Salone project would not succeed; citing the abysmal budget allocation to all agriculture sectors. The MP contrasted the debate on Singapore with that of Sierra Leone in terms of economic growth.

Hon. Mustapha Musa Sellu from Moyamba District made his intervention on Public Financial Management (PFM) and reiterated that the past Government abused the PFM Act and that of the Constitution by using funds without Parliamentary approval. He said over the years this is the only

Government that has a huge financial reserve and went on to highlight fiscal management discipline by the State.

On the 5% imposition tax on rice, he said that funds would re-fence to support agricultural productivity (Feed Salone project). He also said that despite the economic challenges around the world, the Government continues to support all projects and pay salaries. He blamed current economic challenges on the APC and referred to the budget as 'The Redeemer Budget'

Hon. Daniel Brima Koroma Deputy Opposition Leader from Koinadugu District submitted his debate on three aspects of the pro-poor budget, the Feed Salone project, and the Wage Bill.

On the Feed Salone project, he said the Tomabum Rice project has started since 2021, He said 12.16 million dollars was given to the Tomabum Rice project, but failed to yield dividends. He said in 2022 1.9 million dollars was also given to the same project " What went wrong in that project ?' he asked. He said the Chinese and Indian Governments supported the Tomabum project with huge financial support. He noted that the project had not supplied any rice to the Market in Sierra Leone."How pro-poor is the 2024 budget? , he asked and went on to highlight the effect of the 5% imposition of tax on rice and gave a comparative analysis of the previous Government for not imposing tax on rice due to global crises and went on to ask why the imposition of 5% taxes on rice by this Government.

On the Wage Bill, he questioned a lot of appointments and recruitments made by the State House.

On her part, Hon. Mariama M. Zombo from Pujehun District blamed Governments for not prioritizing agriculture and went on to encourage the same to kick start the Feed Salone project initiatives to feed its citizens. Youth in fishery, she said much support is needed to protect and improve the livelihood of the people of Sierra Leone. The MP said the budget spoke a lot about the Free Health Care Program and questioned those who are opposing the 5% imposition tax on rice.

She called for the protection of women's livelihood in the country.

In his contribution to the debate, Deputy Opposition Leader 2, Hon.Aaron Aruna Koroma from Tonkolili District debunked the previous debaters from the ruling Government for accusing the then APC Government of bridging the PFM Act and the Constitution. The MP accused the Government that employing specialists would affect the Wage Bill. The MP went on to compare the public debt of the previous and current Governments and noted that for everything on the Wage Bill, the budget deficit is high.

On the economic situation, he said this Government had put the country in the worst situation since Sierra Leone gained independence and went on to give statistical data on how the Government had mismanaged the growth of the economy. He blamed the Government for flaunting the Constitution by spending extra without the consent of Parliament."This Government had violated the Constitution and the PFM Act by spending without the authority of Parliament ", he said and went on to call on Parliament to investigate the Ministry of Finance for abrogating the law.

On the road network, he called on mining companies operating in the Tonkolili District to construct roads linking Magburoka to Bumbuna and its environs.

On his part, Hon. Ibrahim Tawa Conteh Deputy Majority Whip 2 from Western Area Urban said part of the increase in budget, is the creation of new Embassies that was recommended by the previous APC Government." This Government is operating on the ambit of the law" he said. According to him, inflation at present, is part of the global crisis, and noted that this Government is part of the global village. Hon. Tawa made reference to documentation that supports his claim on global inflation and said that Sierra Leone is not an exception.

Hon. Tawa outlined the reason for the 5% tax imposition on rice and highlighted taxes that were imposed by the previous APC Government on goods and services. On road construction, he debunked an MP from Falaba for saying money allocated to that district by the Government is minimal.

He challenged several arguments or concerns raised by the Opposition MPs on the economy and went on to highlight the economic prudent of the Government in addressing the economy.

On agriculture, he said the issue is an endemic problem and went on to pinpoint previous leaders who made promises for the sustainability of agriculture in Sierra Leone and had failed.

He concluded by calling on all to focus on agricultural productivity.

In Rounding up The debate, the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Abdul Kargbo from Port Loko district said the budget process is protracted and went on to note that what Parliament approved is not what was expended in the previous budget. The Opposition Leader challenged the disbursement of funds to MDAs "Money allocated to these MDAs are not judicially utilized and spent ", he said, and went on to note that the Ministry of Finance is just dramatizing in terms of expenditure. He said over 183 billion Leone had not been recovered by this Government as stated by the Auditor General. He also said the increase of tax on rice is not just a problem, it is the inability of the Government to control the exchange rate. The opposition Leader called for the amendment of the PFM Act to match up with Government priorities. He also said that the Government is in an economic crisis and went on to note that, the Government is treating its citizens with levity.

The opposition Leader outlined Government borrowing to banks for over 315 billion leones, since 2018 to date, and went on to highlight the huge employment of staff by the Government. On austerity, he said many countries around the world have introduced measures to help out their citizens.

He said the Government had killed several Government institutions and went on to question the huge allocation of funds to ECSL for the 2024 budget when it does not have many activities.

He concluded by saying that, the Government had failed to take advice from the opposition on the development of the economy and went on to warn that, if the Bank Governor failed to remove the old currency, the opposition would take court action against him.

The MP warned and called on the Government to treat the livelihood of the people very seriously.

In concluding the debate, the Acting Leader of Government Business, Hon. Bashiru Silikie commended MPs for their contributions to the debate and noted that the Government took over from an austerity Government and blamed the APC squarely for bad governance of the State. He said when the Government took over power, its priority was on education and highlighted its achievements so far.

On employment, he said, all recruitments were fit especially essential staff.

On electricity supply, he said, the previous Government failed to provide electricity supply for the country and went on to highlight the achievement of electricity supply of the current Government. On health-related issues, he said the maternal death rate had reduced and went on to give statistical data on the improvement in the health sector.

On rice, the Acting Leader said during the APC era, rice was very difficult to see and even queues were conducted to purchase it, and now he said rice is available in the market.

On the road network, he said many roads and culverts have been constructed and noted that many more will be accomplished.

"The economic downturn of this country was caused by the APC's bad governance on bad agreements with investors", he said and went on to call on Parliament to carry out its mandate to oversee the activities of MDAs.

The Leader commended the Finance Ministry and team for supporting the development of the State and went on to acknowledge the Feed Salone project for the development of the country.

The Leader called on the Finance Minister to take notes of what MPs had contributed to the budget debates and tried to implement them

"This is a new Parliament and I call on all of you to come on board and support the implementation of the budget". He concluded.

Parliamentary and Public Relations Department

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