



PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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PRESS RELEASE



FIFTH AND FINAL ALLOTTED DAY:

PARLIAMENT CONCLUDED DEBATE ON 2025 NATIONAL BUDGET

The Parliament of Sierra Leone on Tuesday on 27/11/2024, concluded debate on the Bill entitled "The National Budget 2025 or The Appropriation Act 2025" for the Financial Services of Sierra Leone on the theme; "Improving the Well-being and Quality of Life of Sierra Leoneans". The Bill is seeking to authorize expenditures from the Consolidated Fund for the services of 2025 and for other related matters.

Continuing the debate, the Whip of the Opposition, Hon. Abdul Karim Kamara from Kambia, thanked the Ministry of Finance for putting the budget document together. Unlike previous Budgets, the MP noted that the current Budget has lot of intentions for road constructions and expressed hope for the actualization. He lauded the increase in salaries but said the inflation was huge. The MP spoke about a huge financial investment in the education sector, but there is a serious problem in that sector. He pinned some of the challenges in the education sector, including water and sanitation facilities and pupils struggling to register for WASSCE. He also raised concern over the inadequate water provision in Freetown, adding that the current Guma Valley Water Company budget allocation is not enough and underscored private sector support in that direction. On roads, he appealed to the Government to construct the road from Kambia to Tonko Limba and Braimaya Chiefdom. He also informed the House about the lack of accommodation for judicial proceedings because of the depilated state of the structure and also used the opportunity to appeal for more allocations to that sector.

The MP from Kambia called for more improvements in the Health Sector. He used the opportunity to ask the House to debate oversight Committee Reports to enhance due diligence. The MP raised concerns over huge amount of money spent by Government on offices rental from private people whilst the Government rents its own structures at a low price. He expressed dismay over the inadequacy of cost recovery drug sale and also informed the House about the inefficiency in cash transfers system by NaCSA and the alarming of low allocation budget to the Drug Enforcement Agency. The correctional facility, he said, lacks training or skill training and nothing to write home about the police. "Mr. Speaker, the issues are painful and many," he noted and appealed for more road constructions and remedy for the aforesaid situation.

Hon. Moijue... from Bonthe District, debunked the previous debater and went on to relate the budget to the benchmark set from 2024 with reference to gains made by the Government. He underscored economic prudence, stable inflation couple with donor confidence with many achievements.

The MP urged colleague MPs to support the Budget in tandem with the document's objective. He advised Colleague MPs to predicate their debate on pressing issues, including Government priority projects like 'Feed Salone', and the economic prudence and fiscal management.

Deputy Whip of Opposition Hon. Catherine Zainab Tarawalie from Bombali District criticized the budget theme and noted that it is ironic and unmatched by minimum wage and inflation. The MP raised serious concern over the foreign exchange rate against the Leone and categorically stated that there is no decrease in inflation and spoke about the shortage of dollars at commercial banks. She expressed concern over the existence of 'Feed Salone' and advised the Government to scrutinize the E-Voucher system in that sector. She advised not to take the poultry feed production to Bo, adding that there are more chicken farms in the Western Area than other places and pleaded with the Government to cascade development nationally. The MP urged the Government to provide medical insurance for MPs just like other officials and emphasized on provisions of pipe borne water provisions to some areas in Makeni City especially the Regional Hospital and other communities. She noted that the cost of living is becoming serious, and the economic reserve according to economists, can only maintain two months instead of six months. The Gender and Children Affairs Chairperson said the One-Stop Centers are in a deplorable state to address Gender-Based violence and urged Government to improve allocations to the sector. She concluded by asking the authorities to follow due diligence in the Child Rights Act.

Hon. Mustapha Sellu from Moyamba District recalled how Sierra Leone's economy dropped and became unmatched with the Foreign Exchange rate during the bad governance of APC. According to him, everything depends on the FSS document in tandem with the Budget. He zoomed in on donor support and benchmarking, in light of their confidence and recalled why the past government lost the same. He positively spoke about economic projection in tandem with Government and donor support in the budget. The MP spoke about Factors in tandem with increment to nominal value and dilated on measures.

The MP analyzed positive input in Feed 'Salone' and told the House that the outcome would be realized in subsequent years. He related the exchange rate to production and exportation. On budget management, he advised MDAs to stick to their budget expenditure and also spoke about the positivity of revenue mobilization and applauded the Minister of Finance for same. He assured compatriots on economic stability and taxability in tandem with economic development and reassured Sierra Leoneans of President Bio's leadership to providing national development.

Hon. Aaron Aruna Koroma from Tonkolili debunked the previous debater' on several issues raised and advanced clarifications on inflation, basic goods and services. He decried the

Government for comparing the revenue to GDP ratio with reference. He also raised concerns over the increment of electricity tariff on ordinary citizens and noted that the re-denomination of Leone currency had no impact on positive nation's economy. The public debt, he said, is still huge in terms of nominal value. On inflation, he said prices are still skyrocketing, and the suffering of the people continued. On the projection in the budget, he said there is no stability, and the foreign exchange rate would continue to increase. The economic reserve, the MP said, has dwindled from 6 to 2 months maintain any abnormal situation. He recalled that the minimum wage was better than it is now as compared to the dollar rate. The minimum wage used to buy two bags of rice in 2018, but cannot do so now. He advised the Government to adjust it. Teacher salary, he said, had decreased comparative to the dollar rate but increased in nominal value, and it was recommended to the Government to address same. He also questioned the budget expenditure and informed the House on the extortion by health workers rendering Free Health Care services and raised concern over the budget disbursement of same. The MP used the opportunity to appeal for Tonkolili and advised the Government to construct the road linking Magburaka to Bo and other places noted that the roads would build on the regional ties and central connections.

For education, he appealed to the Government to increase fees per pupil for the Free Quality Education. He thanked the Government for the BADEA Project and urged the Government to connect Tonkolili District to CLSG. He raised concern over the cargo tracking note and called the attention of the House to look into it.

Taking a bite on the debate, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Ibrahim Tawa Conteh, recalled that the first time Tonkolili was mentioned in the National Budget was in 2015. He reminded MPs that the APC skipped Tonkolili District for Bumbuna electrification and recalled that 6 years of projects implemented by APC before SLPP came to Power were at snail-pace. According to him, the current Government is repaying most of those debts. He added that School Feed and subsidies were ineffective under the previous government. The Deputy Speaker underscored Government efforts in that direction, dismissing the cost of Fee as earlier raised by other speaker and debunked the failure to register for WASSCE and described it as fundamental problems, adding that the Government is paying for it. According to him, the country's economy still depends on mining, and the trade balance is import-driving.

The Deputy Speaker analyzed the budget for various support and noted that most of the youth's problems are that they live on handouts. The Budget, he said, is good for youth capacity building. He lauded government efforts and noted that it was mistake by the previous Governments for constructing roads that were not economically viable with loans, which are now a burden to the economy. He emphatically noted that this would continuously affect the economy's progress. He debunked the previous debater for claiming that Kambia is more viable in rice productivity than Torma Bum in the Bonthe District and explained in details. The MP decried certain tax concession and noted that should not be tolerated.

He urged NRA to be robust in revenue collection and apply a proper system on cargo tracking. He also raised concern over tax collection among the councils and the Chiefdoms and urged them to apply prudence in percentage sharing.

He said the Procurement Act does not contain a punitive measure and urged the House to review it for. On the mining lease agreement, he said Sierra Leone is not realizing much from that sector, like Guinea. He urged the Government to improve it.

He said climate change measures would affect the country. The Deputy Speaker assured that the 2025 National Budget is very good and not deceitful and underscored the budget's objective and urged other revenue mobilization sectors to improve. Hon. Ibrahim Tawa Conteh also urged the

House and the Minister to invest in mining because the sector was contributing hugely to the economy.

The Opposition Leader, Hon. Abdul Kargbo from Port Loko, thanked the Minister for stabilizing the exchange rate. He clarified that Magburaka is enjoying the Bumbuna electrification. He clarified other areas, including roads in Port Loko and noted that it is better for a Government to take loans and construct roads. Hon. Abdul Kargbo debunked with comparative analysis that the current Government had incurred more loans than the previous Government.

According to him, the budget's credibility is problematic and the plan budget execution are at variance. He highlighted the variance among MDAs in terms of appropriation and blamed Parliament for not overseeing the disbursement of the budget appropriation to MDAs and appealed to them to do the needful in due course.

He added that the wage bill and debt services calculation outweigh the percentage and raised concerns over project implementation. He appealed to the Government to address budget deficits.

Hon. Abdul Kargbo said borrowing from commercial banks to address deficits would increase the economic burden on the State. He informed the House that overseas traveling had grossly affected the economy. The MP also told the House that the country's debts are alarming and advised the Government to curtail the debt. The exchange rate, he said, was alarming, citing the fall of the Leone. He also decried the Government for poor monetary policy. He noted that the exchange rate in 2018 is better than now. He commended the bipartisan approach to withholding the 5% tax on rice.

The MP asked the Government to ensure the repatriation of mining proceeds and adopt certain financial policies to stabilize the economy. He also recommended to the Government to have a debt ceiling, in order to improve on the budget, and emphasize healthy investment. He called on the Government to ensure accountability and transparency in the budget and underscored climate change mitigation.

He raised concern over inadequate service delivery in the health sector amidst a 9% budgetary allocation, referring to the Audit Report of 2022. The health system, he said, needs reform. He added that the Foreign Reserve, as at the end of June 2024, was around 2 months, adding that unforeseen circumstances would greatly affect the nation.

Concluding the debate, Acting Leader of Government Business, Hon. Emerson Lamina from Kono, lauded the theme of the Budget and described it as a "Sutra" Budget. He made reference to the late President Mandela regarding love and putting one's country First. He commended the Minister of Finance and team for putting together such a nationalistic budget. He clarified some conceptions of the Budget and advised colleague MPs to be patriotic.

He recalled and compared the former and current government's economic management and noted that a hundred dollars USD could buy two bags of rice in Sierra Leone but not in Guinea and other African Countries. He added that Sierra Leonean businessmen could not go to Guinea to buy onions because they are now planted here. On debt, he recalled that the SLPP Government of Late President Kabbah waived all, but the APC incurred more.

The MP informed that the Budget outlined more road projects and expanded electricity and noted that no district is deprived. He added that the budget's intentions are good and would benefit many parts of the country.

The Acting Leader also advised everyone to support domestic revenue mobilization. He denounced distractions from the Five Big Game Changers, especially rice production, and lauded Government efforts.

He said human capital Development is a landmark initiative for the Government and lauded it for its immense support to education and youth employment schemes in various sectors. He said the Mining Sector alone could provide jobs for over 300,000 youth. Hon. Emerson Lamina assured that investors' confidence had increased the number of mining companies in the country is positive.

He blamed the past APC Government for constructing more roads in the North and politicizing Development with little in the South/East. He recalled the high corruption in the 2017 Auditor General Report and the alarming rate of corruption in the mining sector. He alluded to the current Government's need for more improvements in the mining sector and the huge benefits to the people.

The Acting Leader commended the Government for the huge recruitment and increment in wages and salaries in the budget, especially for teachers. While blaming the past government for corruption, he equally lauded several achievements of the Current Government. He commended the government's debt servicing and highlighted areas for completion of payment. He decried the APC for the sacking of former Vice President Sam Sumana as unconstitutional. He continued that the Government prides itself on good governance coupled with the implementation of infrastructural development, construction of hospitals, and institutional buildings, among others. He used the opportunity to articulate the issues of his people relative to the establishment of the Kono University construction under the Leadership of the Bio-led Government. He decried the perennial historical injustices the people of Kono had been faced with. He applauded that the people of Kono were captured in the 2025 National Budget for the construction of the 18-kilometer tarmac road in Koidu City. He assured that the people of Kono would remain grateful to the Bio Administration and finally elucidated the economic and fiscal management as outlined in the budget.

The Minister of Finance, Sheku Ahmed Fantamadi Bangura, provided in-depth clarification on issues raised by Members of Parliament regarding the 2025 National Budget. The Bill has been committed to the Committees of Sub-Appropriation on Supply for further scrutiny.

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