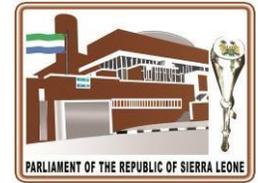




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PRESS RELEASE

FIFTH LEGISLATURE OF ECOWAS PARLIAMENT OPENS SEMINAR IN FREETOWN

The Speaker of Sierra Leone Parliament, Rt. Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu has on Tuesday 23rd March 2021, at the Bintumani Conference Center in Freetown, officially declared open the First Parliamentary Seminar of the Fifth Legislature of the ECOWAS Parliament in the year, 2021.

The aforesaid Parliamentary Seminar is themed: "involving Members of the ECOWAS Parliament in monitoring the implementation of the protocol relating to the community levy"; ahead of its extraordinary session in Freetown on the 29/03/2021.

The ECOWAS Revised Treaty of 1993, Article 72 of the said Treaty provides for Community Levy for the purposes of generating resources to finance community activities, it shall be a percentage of the total value of import duty derivable from imported goods from third countries outside the community, 0.5 percent levy was determined by the Council, conditions for the application of the levy, transfer and utilization of revenue generated in the form of community levy shall be defined in the relevant protocol, and that Member States are to undertake the facilitation and application of the provisions in this Article.

Welcoming participants, Head of Sierra Leone's Delegation to ECOWAS Parliament and Leader of the Opposition in Sierra Leone Parliament, Hon. Chernor R.M Bah thanked the Government and the people of Sierra Leone for supporting Hon. Sidie M. Tunis for his elevation and election to the position of ECOWAS Speaker for the Fifth Legislature of ECOWAS Parliament, constituted in Niamey, Niger last year. Speaking on the disruption of planned activities by COVID-19, he assured

participants that Sierra Leone is full of warm and friendly people with a unique traveling experience of air, land and sea. Submitting on security, freedom and safety, he called on participants to explore the charming coast of Sierra Leone. He also talked about the challenges the country had gone through mentioning war, mudslide and Ebola.

Commissioner of Finance, ECOWAS Commission, Madam Halima Ahmed spoke on behalf of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, she also joined Hon. Bah in welcoming participants to this very important seminar relating to increasing contributions regarding the Community Levy.

She called on the august body to stand and observe silent prayers for two dead persons including Ivory Coast's Prime Minister, Hamed Bakayoko.

She also recognized Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu as her former Boss, when he served as Executive Secretary for ECOWAS several years ago. Speaking on excellent relations between ECOWAS Parliament and the ECOWAS Commission, she said the Seminar will reveal the status of each member states regarding resource mobilization in light of community levy.

Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Dr. Francis Kaikai described the movement of the Extraordinary Session of ECOWAS Parliament to Sierra Leone as a major honour and achievement for the country. However, he observed that the country is at peace now, but it was today 23/03/1991 that the war broke out and claimed many lives and property.

He spoke on some of the interventions of ECOWAS in Sierra Leone through ECOMOG and peace keeping, health, democracy and good governance, and education.

He also talked on the construction of ECOWAS Depot at Lungi for the enhancement of security in the subregion and a joint border post between Sierra Leone and Liberia to facilitate trade among Member States.

Minister of Finance, Jacob Jusu Saffa explained the process of collecting and transferring funds accrued from the Community Levy to the ECOWAS Commission to finance development activities in the subregion.

Contingent on provisions in the ECOWAS Revised Treaty of 1993, he boasted that Sierra Leone is fully compliant and adhering to provisions in Article 72 of the said Treaty regarding Community Levy amounting to the equivalent of over USD 3 Million Dollars that had been transferred to the ECOWAS Commission through Bank of Sierra Leone as contributions from Community Levy.

Speaking on the debilitating effects of COVID-19 on economies and livelihoods, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nabeela Tunis espoused on the role of ECOWAS in the consolidation of peace and security, health resilience and education through the provision of funds for the construction of a University of Science and Technology in Kono District within the Community. She said all of these efforts are geared toward achieving sustainable development and common prosperity for the people of the subregion. She said Sierra Leone is compliant to the community levy and that it has provided acres of land to ECOWAS to beef up and strengthen security in the subregion.

She extended thanks and appreciation to the Speaker of ECOWAS Parliament, her husband for placing premium on serving mankind than himself, since he took the mantle of leadership at ECOWAS Parliament.

Encouraging the people in the subregion to take the vaccines for COVID-19, Hon. Sidie M. Tunis, Speaker of ECOWAS Parliament said, it will help greatly to breaking the virus strains of transmission. This, he said "we either win together, or we perish together.

Compounded by COVID-19 pandemic, he said the 0.5 percent import levy which accounts for 80 percent of the Community Levy has dwindled considerably. In light of resource mobilization amid these challenges, he has called on participants to innovate, and come up with strategies and proposals aimed at robust collection of revenue regarding the Community Levy for the enhancement of development and community integration among Member States; whilst thanking Administrators, Members of Parliament, and Ministers and spoke on the need for taking the ECOWAS Parliament to the people.

Welcoming participants, prior to declaring the ECOWAS Parliamentary Seminar Open, Speaker of Sierra Leone Parliament, and former Executive Secretary to ECOWAS some 28 years ago, Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu recalled the role he

had played in the development of the Revised ECOWAS Treaty of 1993 that has proven to be effective and efficient to this day. He told participants that Freetown was founded for the enslaved and the oppressed. Speaking on the glorious and cosmopolitan nature of Freetown relating to social and economic activities, he cautioned visitors to be wary as all that glitters is not gold.

Speaking on the establishment of the Community Parliament as provided for in Article 6 of the said Treaty, he congratulated the ECOWAS Speaker on his return home; assuring that the confidence placed in Hon. Tunis will not be misplaced. He said the Community Levy was promulgated with the view of overcoming the financial obstacles of ECOWAS relating to its activities for development. He referenced Article 72 of the Treaty regarding the collection of 0.5 percent of import duty and transfer to the ECOWAS Commission to undertake development programmes in Member States. This initiative will help greatly in driving the integration process forward.

He was gratified that Sierra Leone is fully compliant and bears a great success to the Community Levy.

Submitting on the challenges relating to huge transfer of funds to the ECOWAS Commission, he spoke on proper management and utilization of funds relating to same in light of promoting transparency and accountability regarding better management and judicious use of such funds.

He boasted that the said Treaty remains valid and enduring to this day.

He also said that COVID-19 is a transnational virus that warrants transnational cooperation to defeat this roaring pandemic that is claiming lives and disrupting the economies of the world. Speaking on leadership by taking the first dose of COVID-19 vaccines himself, President Bio, his Vice President and other dignitaries, he encouraged other Member States to do same in order to defeat the virus.

Regarding the would-be expiration of the State of Emergency, passed almost a year ago in Sierra Leone to fight COVID-19, he said the regulations promulgated to fight COVID-19 must be strictly adhered to.

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