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PRESS RELEASE

FOURTH ALLOTTED DAY: PARLIAMENT CONTINUES DEBATE ON PRESIDENTIAL SPEECH

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Thursday 1st July 2021 continued debate on the Motion of Thanks on the Speech delivered by His Excellency the President, Dr. Julius Maada Bio on the occasion of the State Opening of the Fourth Session of the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone, in the Chamber of Parliament on Tuesday 18th May 2021.

Continuing the debate, Hon. Abdul Sulaiman Marray-Conteh thanked President Bio for his proactive interventions relative to development programmes that have been implemented by his Government. He said the passing of good laws including the Cyber Security and Crime Act of 2021 would contribute to the success stories of the current Government, headed by President Bio. He also acclaimed President Bio for restoring dignity to politicians and for raising the profile high of military personnel in the country.

Hon. Aaron Aruna Koroma said the APC government did very well in Kono in terms of development including road construction and securing funds for a University. Decrying efforts made by Government on the free quality education, he referred to President Bio as a "tok and do that never was", and in his opinion gave reasons for saying so; citing increments in fuel prices with a rippling effects resulting in suffering for the general public. He reminded Government to fulfill its promises for the construction of major roads in Tonkolili linking other parts of the country.

An Independent MP from Kailahun, Hon. Quinton Salia-Konneh praised Parliament for ensuring that MDAs, who are the drivers of development are in attendance to witness the presidential debate; following parliamentary summons. He condemned previous speakers for criticizing Government in spite of huge efforts in revenue mobilization, repayment of debts owed by the immediate past government, and the implementation of the free quality education by Government for the development of the country. He also praised Government for doing well to attract the MCC Compact Funds and for marked improvements in the fight against corruption in the country.

Hon. Keikura Vandy spoke about progressive efforts that have been made by the current Government in education, the recruitment of 5000 teachers in the country to support the free quality education. He also said that energy supplies have markedly improved in the country through rural electrification and ended with a song in praise of the leadership of President Bio.

Hon. Abdul Latif Sesay described the President's Speech as "scantly unacceptable". Speaking on projects initiated by the past government, he said the current Government has failed to fulfill its promises to the people on education. Calling on Government to improve on electricity supplies in Port Loko District, he appealed to Government to allow students from Limkokwing University to have access to the Student's Loan Scheme to return to the university and conclude their respective programme of studies.

Hon. Deputy Speaker, Segepoh Solomon Thomas explained the purpose of debate on the Presidential Speech with a view to guiding the MDAs on the strict implementation of the policies and programmes of Government for the development of the country. He denounced negative criticisms from opposition parties, and told them that they could not serve as genuine judges on the current Government. He recalled some of the bogus promises made by APC government that were never fulfilled, and acknowledged that the problems of Sierra Leone could not be solved in five years. He said the current Government is laying a solid foundation for development in the country, and emphasized on the necessity of civic education to understand the history, laws, rights and obligations of citizens of Sierra Leone. He condemned the former government for removing the syllabus on the causes of war from the education curriculum. He urged the opposition to criticize fairly for the sake of God and country, especially in areas like education, MCC among others. He said even with the latest increment on fuel, he maintained it is being sold at cheaper prices compared to neighbouring countries.

For truth to be told, he said as "a nation, we lost it since 1967 to several years of one party rule of APC in power for 27 years", and accused the past APC government for constructing roads with exorbitant prices, leaving the country with a huge debts burden payable by the current Government of SLPP, championed by President Julius Maada Bio.

Hon. Emilia Lolloh Tongi, an Independent MP from Kailahun lauded the efforts of President Bio especially for the Free Quality Education, and the Hands Off Our Girls Campaign initiated by his wife, Mrs Fatima Bio for improving girls education and enrollment in schools without missing classes due to menstruation. She also called on Government to come up with concrete measures to free Yenga from a neighbourly grip. Extending felicitations to President Bio from her constituents, she praised Government for passing gender sensitive laws aimed at protecting women and children in the country.

Hon. Abdul Titus Kamara appealed to the Government to support the aged and acknowledged that the Free Quality Education is now in progress. He called on Government to do timely interventions for the attainment of food sufficiency in the country.

Hon. Kadie Davies said, she hoped that President Bio would prioritize gender reforms, and added that violence against women is on the rise. She also said that, there is no co-ordination among the institutions responsible for the protection of victims suffering from gender-based violence. Speaking on land reforms, she said her constituency has the capacity to offer land for the construction of holding centres for victims of gender-based violence in our communities.

Talking on participation and cohesion, she said the proposed construction of a fishing jetty at Black Johnson has human rights considerations.

Hon. Rev. Horace E. Vincent debunked opposition MPs by saying that President Bio is honestly sincere by fulfilling most of his manifesto promises to the people of Sierra Leone, such as a repeal of the Public Order Act of 1965. He also said that, President Bio has done well by appointing women of substance to top positions and the revamping of the economy. He praised Government on education and energy, especially for providing electricity to some areas in the opposition strongholds.

Hon. Foday Lamin Kabba said that the Speech deserves some seriousness, but some Members are trivializing it by deceiving the people. Following promises made by Government, he said electricity and access to water still remains a challenge in Koinadugu and other places in the country. He also expressed disappointments on excessive timber logging and noted that his people did not benefit from registration by NCRA.

Hon. Sahr E. Juana lauded the Speech of President Bio. Following different reference to the Speech by opposition MPs, he described the Speech as "an actualized realization". He observed that most of the projects the opposition is boastful of were planned and left by the SLPP government led by late President Tejan Kabbah of blessed memory for implementation. He called on all and sundry to support President Bio's New Direction Government and commended the Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu for his intervention on the Yenga issue.

Hon. Ibrahim Conteh said that some speakers to the debate were very deceitful, and added that agricultural institutions are not properly utilized and are now in a state of dilemma. He called on Government to implement the policies and programmes that are embedded in the President's Speech to Parliament.

Hon. Festus Mohamed Lansana debunked previous speakers for misunderstanding economy and spoke about the marked improvements Government has made in the area of education including the award of scholarships and payments plan for students of Limkokwing University. He also spoke on huge derivative benefits from fisheries, agriculture and effective and efficient revenue mobilization drives in the country to enhance and facilitate development programmes in the country, and the creation of three new universities in the country.

Hon. Hamidu H. Mansaray said his District has been forgotten in light of support to agriculture and that much has not been done for supporting the youth. He said the frequent shortages of electricity in Freetown is affecting domestic economic activities in the country. Saying that his constituents in Bafodia are deprived, he accused the Government of unfulfilled promises devoid of truths, and that the Makeni-Kabala road is in a bad state.

Hon. Boston Munda said the people have lost confidence in some politicians and their dignity needs to be restored. He commended President Bio for repealing the criminal libel law, and for passing the Cyber Security and Crime Act of 2021 into law. He said MPs are part and parcel of

the successes that have been achieved by Government. Contrary to statements made by previous debaters, he said the Government has established Car Wash Centres for unskilled youths.

Hon. Abdul Karim Koroma said contrary to the call for the national cohesion and reconciliation, properties belonging to past APC functionaries have been seized by Government. He noted that education was strengthened under the administration of late President Tejan Kabbah and consolidated by the previous APC regime. Thanking the Government for electricity supplies to Lunsar and a re-start of the Marampa mines, he referred to the free quality education "as mass education without quality".

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