



PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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PRESS RELEASE



ICELAND DELEGATION MEETS SPEAKER AND LEADERSHIP OF PARLIAMENT

The Iceland Ambassador to Sierra Leone, Her Excellency Asdis Bjarnadottir and team comprising visiting Members of Parliament led by Dilja Mist Einarsdottir (Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs), Mr Logi Einarsonon (Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Icelandic Parliament), Ms Elin Rosa Sigurdardottir (Director General of the International Development Cooperation Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Iceland and Head of the delegation) paid a courtesy call visit to the newly elected Speaker of Parliament, Hon Segepoh Solomon Thomas and the Leadership of Parliament on Friday 3/5/2024. In a meeting held at the Speaker's Board Room, Parliament Building at Tower Hill in Freetown, wide range of bilateral issues including fostering development for mutual benefits were discussed.

In her opening statement, Her Excellency Asdis Bjaarnadittir said Icelandic Members of Parliament were in Sierra Leone on a study visit. She said they were trying to deepen bilateral ties with Sierra Leone and expressed interest in development programmes in the areas of fishing, and intended to promote renewable energy, and support the implementation of the country's medium term national development plan and gender empowerment efforts. She went on to say, that Iceland has become a popular tourist destination and tourism is the highest revenue earner in recent times followed by the

fisheries sector. She said there were huge potentials in tourism for Sierra Leone that the country could tap into for national development.

"I see such great potentials in the partnership between Sierra and Iceland", she said.

Delivering her statement, the head of delegation from the Icelandic Parliament, Dilja Mist recalled how Iceland used to struggle with their economy and how they became self-sufficient in the 1980s through fishing and other economic diversification.

On his part, the newly elected Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Ibrahim Tawa Conteh informed the team from Iceland about various supports received by fishing communities from partners, but the country has not realized enough from that sector. The Deputy Speaker categorically stated that their bilateral collaboration with Iceland would engender mutual benefits. While speaking about malaise including illegal fishing, not meeting the requirements for exporting fish to the European Union Market, the dynamic and youthful Deputy Speaker expressed hope that such collaboration would proffer solutions to the country's revenue mobilization. He also informed the team that Sierra Leone has lot of touristic attractions and if bilaterally supported in this partnership, it would yield dividends. He reiterated that Sierra Leone fisheries is important to meeting the Feed Salone flagship programme of the government.

Responding, Iceland MP, Logi Einarsson said for Sierra Leone to realize its fishing potentials there must be strong measures or controls over the country's natural resources and that value addition to fisheries products was a key driver to achieving this objective. He also advised the Leadership of Parliament to continue to promote gender empowerment policies in its development strategies.

In his contributions, Acting Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Daniel Brima Koroma said Sierra Leone is not only endowed with fisheries resources, but currently progressing in democracy citing the just concluded speakership elections. He reiterated that, the country's rich touristic attraction is not only limited to the coastal areas but also reported that Sierra Leone has West Africa's highest peak, the Loma in the Bintumani Mountains. The MP appealed to the Iceland team to build the capacity of compatriots, in order to be able to combat foreign based illegal fishing and also promote investment in that direction.

On his part, the Chief Whip of Parliament, Hon. Dickson Rogers raised concern over how vessels can be licensed based on the size of the boats and not the quantity and types of fish caught. He suggested that strong monitoring mechanisms over fishing be implemented to ensure that Sierra Leone benefits from its natural resources. He used the occasion to ask the Speaker to have a joint meeting with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, the Iceland Team and Parliament in order to proffer solutions for mutual benefits and was quickly buttressed by the Speaker who suggested timeline for implementation of projects by the latter.

In his submission, the Speaker of Parliament, the Rt.Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas said that the bilateral supports are laudable and noted their viability. "We are interested in the bilateral support as a country because we know its potential benefits", he stressed. He said the joint meeting with the Ministry is to know what the latter is doing in light of benefits to the nation. "To modify or if it is about changing the law, we change the law", he categorically stated and went on to reveal that three years ago a businessman visited him and asked him to sublet the coastal areas of Sierra Leone to him for two hundred million dollars yearly. The Speaker also informed the team that if all efforts

prove futile in that direction they would consider investment alternative for the country's fisheries and mineral resources through subcontracting to good investors.

The Leadership in unison asked the Iceland Team to look for an investor who will give huge sum of money to government yearly and takes care of the fishing activities and only allow local fishermen to operate.

The Iceland team responded to all the concerns raised and assured the Speaker and Leadership of continued support and constant communication to proffer lasting and sustainable solutions to the problems of fishing for a win-win situation.

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