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25th July 2022

PRESS RELEASE



IRISH AMBASSADOR TO SIERRA LEONE PAYS COURTESY CALL ON SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT

The Irish Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone, Claire Buckley has on Monday today 25/07/2022 paid a courtesy call on the Speaker of Sierra Leone Parliament, Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu in his office at Parliament Building in Freetown.

The Irish Ambassador to Sierra Leone spoke about their work in the country including gender empowerment, governance and food and nutrition. She also said that their focus remains on a free, fair, credible, inclusive and peaceful elections in the country in the months ahead. She also raised concerns on the Public Elections Bill including reserve seats for women which is also in line with the GEWE Bill.

Responding, Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu referenced a statement he had already made regarding the misconception, mischaracterization and misinterpretation about some provisions in the Public Elections Act of 2022 in light of the Proportional

Representation (PR) System. He said the Bill was not intended to introduce a new PR system, but rather it was trying to reaffirm an electoral system which had been used in 2002 following a constitutional amendment made in 2001, known as the District Block representation system. He also said that he had called on MPs not to indulge themselves in that popular misconception.

Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu spoke on the two alternative routes for election to Parliament, that is either first-past-the-post or the PR system known as the District Block representation system both of which are already embedded in the Constitution. Each system had its own unique conditions for bringing them into operation.

He said the first-past-the-post or constituency based system is predicated on the conduct of a census which had already been done for the purposes of delimiting or demarcating constituencies for electoral purposes. To this end, he said the Opposition was against the Instrument laid in Parliament and had told their supporters not to participate in the census even when they had the opportunity to do so. Now that the census results were out the Opposition had cried out saying the results were flawed and not good for purpose. He said even though he had no idea of whether the Government intended to use the census results for electoral purposes, he pointed to the fact that it was a matter that falls squarely within the constitutional powers of the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

He said it was also within the mandate of the Presidency to use either the PR system or the constituency based system as provided by law through the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone.

He emphasized that boycotts never win elections anywhere in the world and he said that he was hopeful that Parliament would conclude the passage of the Public Elections Act 2022 this week as they have already looked at 2/3 of the said Bill.

He also said that reserve seats for women was a matter generating great controversy, but he was hopeful that the 30% quota system for women would be attained in light of the provision that says for every three candidates in a district one must be a woman. He said once the Public Elections Act of 2022 is passed into law, Parliament would consider the GEWE Bill.

On female genital mutilation, he said that he preferred a gradualistic approach given the customs, values and traditions of our country and that practices outside the country should not be imposed on Sierra Leone.

The Irish Ambassador was accompanied by Carol Hannow, Head of Development, Embassy of Ireland in Sierra Leone.

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