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PRESS RELEASE

MINISTERS, BANK GOVERNOR BRIEF PARLIAMENT ON CORONAVIRUS PREPAREDNESS

Following summons by the Parliament of Sierra Leone, the Deputy Ministers of Health and Sanitation, Dr. Amara Jambai, Internal Affairs, Lahai Lawrence Leema, Finance, Dr. Patricia Laverly and the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Sahr Lamina as well as the Central Bank Governor, Professor Kallon have on Thursday 19th March 2020 briefed Hon. Members of Parliament on the state of preparedness of the country relative to the deadly coronavirus pandemic in light of health, security and the economy.

In his introductory statement, the Deputy Minister of Health and Sanitation said stringent measures are being put in place to prevent or contain the pandemic should the country has any case. He told Members of Parliament that the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in collaboration with the Office of the President as well as other related bodies have strategized an integrated plan to prevent or forestall any outbreak.

“All the strategies that are being used by countries affected by coronavirus emanated from Sierra Leone during the course of the Ebola outbreak”, he revealed and added that “We have one of the best contact tracing and surveillance”. He went on to say that they are currently applying management and guided quarantine for travellers coming into Sierra Leone. “We are trying case management and prevention”, he emphasized. He informed MPs that Sierra Leone has 3 laboratories and 370 test kits and if any outbreak surfaces, 20,000 kits could be brought in within 24hrs.

In light of the preparedness, the Deputy Minister told MPs that 34 Military Hospital has 30 beds for patients that they are working on a special budget for that unit. “Before the outbreak of Ebola, we do not have epidemiologists, but today we have 176”, he disclosed pointing out that in terms of budgeting, Le120 Billion would be used for prevention and over Le500 Billion would be needed in case there is an outbreak. He also said that 183 people are being quarantined and at least Le1 Billion is being budgeted weekly to pass on knowledge to the general citizenry to

observe the precautionary measures and protocols by the Ministry of Information and Communication.

He used the platform to advise MPs and the citizenry to exercise patient, conform and comply with regulatory measures and not to politicize the process.

On her part, the Deputy Minister of Finance explained the economic measures relative to the importation of essential goods and services, and direct trade with affected countries. “The supply of goods could link to a drastic decrease”, she informed. She noted that domestic goods could be affected and the coronavirus could have huge impacts on importation, tourism and foreign exchange.

Further, she highlighted the mitigating measures that are relative to the weekly budgeting of Le1 Billion for prevention and the World and African Development Banks support to the health sector among others.

In preparedness for the coronavirus, the Bank Governor said they have set up a monetary facility committee intended to lower monetary policy rate, create special credit facility for essential goods and services on concessional interest to be administered by commercial banks and provision for liquidation. He told MPs that whether the country has a case or not there is going to be an impact on the economy.

Giving an update in light of preparedness, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs said the general internal security situation is calm and quiet. “There is nothing regarding the breakdown of law and order”, he assured MPs. He disclosed that the country’s borders are under water-tight security, pointing out that even though President Bio has invoked MAC-P at Lungi International Airport, but the police are still in charge of security. He said immigration officers are ensuring that all travellers are properly screened. He used the opportunity to inform MPs about unfounded information on coronavirus in social media relative to the presumption of cyber laws that would punish criminals and also revealed that if the situation becomes abnormal, Section 29 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone will be invoked by a declaration of a State of Emergency.

Briefing the House, the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Tamba Lamina said his ministry has been collaborating with other MDAs to share information on the coronavirus in light of organizing workshops for Paramount Chiefs and other local authorities about the coronavirus. He added that all the by-laws made by the local authorities during the Ebola outbreak are being activated. He assured MPs that other modalities including awareness raising, training, attitudinal and behavioral change are useful tools to prevent and contain the coronavirus.

The leader of NGC, Hon. Dr. Kandeh Yumkella expressed appreciation for the briefing and encouraged the Ministers and the Bank Governor to be more proactive to avert the deadly coronavirus from entering the country.

Acting Leader of C4C, Hon. Saa Bhendu pleaded with the frontline officials to be more vigilant and responsive in their preventive approach against the coronavirus.

The Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Hon. Chornor Bah commended the Speaker of Parliament for allowing a special session to take place on the enhanced preparedness to prevent and contain the coronavirus and thanked the Ministers and Bank Governor for briefing the representatives of the people on same. However, he raised a question on the current conduct of registration by the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) amidst the fears of the deadly coronavirus.

In concluding the debate, the Leader of Government Business, Hon. Sidie M. Tunis said the Government of President Bio is very serious about the situation in light of its commitments and preventive regulations and protocols against the coronavirus. "The Government is ready to fight the coronavirus or covid-19, without politicizing it", he asserted. He also called on colleague MPs to work with the authorities to educate the general public on the coronavirus.

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