



# PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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## PRESS RELEASE



### MINISTRY OF HEALTH ENGAGES FEMALE MPs ON SAFE MOTHERHOOD AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE BILL

The Ministry of Health on Saturday 15/06/2024 at the Freetown City Council Auditorium engaged female Members of Parliament on its proposed law on safe motherhood and reproductive health care for women in the Republic of Sierra Leone.

The Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Sartie Kenneh said the Ministry of Health is charged with the responsibility to improve the health of the people of Sierra Leone. He also spoke on the reduction of infant mortality rate in the country and some of the challenges associated to child birth including still births and that abortion is currently illegal in the country, even in circumstances where it maybe prudent to do so in order to save lives. Given religious sensitivity, he spoke on the need of where abortion could be done to save lives of women and also prevent the development of complicated pregnancies and ensure reasonable measures are taken in respect of preventable deaths.

Country Director of Marie Stopes, Mohamed Kabba said that we should make sure we have a country where women have rights to choose what happens to their bodies. Speaking on the consequences of unsafe abortions, he appealed to MPs to vote in favour of the Bill when it is presented to Parliament.

Chairperson of female MPs in ECOWAS Parliament, Hon. Veronica K. Sesay recalled the challenges encountered by the Safe Abortion Bill which did not see the light of day. Speaking on the necessity of safe motherhood and treatment centers for women, she said abortion when legalized would take care of complicated pregnancies and the development of deformed foetus. Citing increased representation of women in Parliament, she called for intensive sensitization and that once the content of the Bill is understood, Parliament would now take a decision to improve the health of women in the country.

President of the female caucus in Parliament and Chairperson of the Committee on Health, Hon. Bernadette Wuyatta Songa recalled a pregnant woman seeking job few days ago had died while giving birth to her baby. Speaking on the necessity of safe motherhood and delivery, she said abortion could be necessary in certain situations to save lives. She also spoke on the need for continuous education on the Bill for the survival, growth and development of women and children in Sierra Leone. She also recognized the fact of engaging the female MPs first for proper education before the pre legislative hearings in Parliament.

The Minister of Health, Dr. Austin Demby said several years ago, Sierra Leone had the highest mortality rate in the world, but that ugly situation had been turned around due to collective efforts and the country is now enjoying the fastest decline of infant mortality rate, adding 23% of women dying are teenagers. He said that figure is appalling and unacceptable for our children to die from preventable deaths. He also said that the Bill is seeking to enhance preventable deaths and address issues surrounding unwanted pregnancies. He also spoke on the need for radical inclusion for pregnant school going children, counseling and assistance unto safe delivery, but that the child should also be given the choice to keep the pregnancy or not. Let us support a safe delivery method than otherwise, he stated. He also said that 82% of illegal abortions resulted in complications.

Presentations were done on sexual and reproductive health situations in Sierra Leone and the structure and content of the Bill.

Questions and answers climaxed the day's engagement in light of improving the lives of women and children in Sierra Leone.

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