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PRESS RELEASE

PARLIAMENT DEBATES PUBLIC ELECTIONS ACT, 2022

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Tuesday 21/06/2022 extensively debated the bill entitled "The Public Elections Act 2022".

The Public Election Act 2022, seeks to repeal and replace the Public Election Act, 2022 (Act No.4 of 2012), to provide for supplementary provisions to sections 32 and 33 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 (Act No. 6 of 1991).

Presenting the bill, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Mohamed Lamin Tarawally Esq. said the bill was necessary and went on to highlight the importance and powers of the document relative to voting, elections, registration, technology, and electoral offenses amongst others.

The Acting Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas said such a bill required extensive debates and public engagement.

Opening the debate, the Chairman of the Legislative Committee, Hon. Abdul S. Murray Conteh spoke about the importance of the bill and its democratic features. He informed that it was prudent to use the lessons learned after every election to review and improve on election laws and went on to say the document is very essential, in light of the conduct of the peaceful election, unity, inclusivity for the participation, and platform for discussion of all compatriots. The MP advised colleague MPs to debate the bill on the platform of nationalism and in the interest of Sierra Leone.

Hon. Hindolo Moiwo Gevao said he was concentrating his debate on a particular section that relates to the district block system, adding that the latter had economic and tremendous advantages, including inclusive politics, and national cohesion. He spoke about the importance of the proposal to indicate the date for the Sierra Leone Election. He asked members of Parliament to closely look at the provisions of the National Constitution as some of the proposals in the bill are already provided for in the constitution, relative to the composition of Parliament and the period for both presidential and parliamentary elections.

"What would happen to Sierra Leone, if the President-elect dies before the inauguration," he said and went on to say there is a lacuna in the proposed law.

Hon. Rev. Sama Sandy spoke about the nexus between Sections 76 (1a) and 41 (d) in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, adding that, both speak in spirit and application to the qualification of someone to contest for the office of president of the Republic of Sierra Leone and went on to say, a repeal of one (Sec 76 (1a) can undermine the other (41d). He emphatically informed that a presidential candidate must be equally qualified to be elected to Parliament

For the Proportional Representation, he said nearly a hundred countries are practicing it and the system gives minority parties to participate in governance and went on to decry the constituency system. He emphatically spoke about the necessity and advantages of the PR system. The MP described the preservation of safe seats as discriminatory, adding it would cause want another segment to request.

Leader of C4C, Hon. Saa Emerson Lamina said the proposal contradicts Section 76 (1) of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, which gives qualifications to dual citizens to be voted for as Members of Parliament but disqualifies them for the presidency. According to him, such provision would result in statelessness, when both the President and Vice are absent and the Speaker becomes President.

He informed that the bill has the prospect to address many problems including election chaos, address the problem of the new districts. He spoke about the lacuna including the election fees. The Leader said the bill is very solid, in light of addressing the voting problem, elections, and speedy court proceedings on election offenses. He appealed for synergy and supported the gender sensitivity in the bill as well as the peaceful nature of the bill.

The Chief Whip of Parliament, Hon. Dickson Rogers asked the Acting Speaker of Parliament to give them time to consult with their constituents on the bill. He cited a certain lacuna on the qualification for MPs and that of the President which is contravening. He also spoke well about the advantages and national cohesion and peaceful nature of the PR system. He decried the proposed reserved seat system and proffered another solution for women's representation in Parliament. He commended the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice and team for the specific election date and also asked for additional six months to the one year for a person working for the government to resign from his/her job, be eligible, and contest in the upcoming Parliamentary Election. " This bill is born out of the 2012 Election Act" he concluded.

Hon. Joseph William-Lamin expressed profound thanks to his people and the team who put the document together. He referenced the Constitution of Sierra Leone instead of loyalty to state on the dual citizenship. He spoke well of the bill on the District Block system and the proposal to reduce desperation amongst contestants. For election offenses, he said the fines levied were too small and urged all to demonstrate peace.

Hon Charles Edwin expressed thanks to the team for the document. He threw light on the safe seats and gave a critical analysis on the same. For dual citizenship he said one cannot serve two masters and expressed fear of importing bad behavior by the latter. The elections he said are laudable and suggested that, after the Presidential election, the outgoing and incoming presidents work together to enhance cohesiveness. To ensure that the people participate in the process and said there would be less expenditure on the election and there would be no by-election.

Hon. Rebecca Y. Kamara spoke about dual citizenship, adding that compatriots living abroad should come home and settle with the people. The MP wanted the twelve months to remain for the resignation of government workers. She said if someone from the diaspora is not allowed to be voted for, they should not vote as well. She appealed for women's candidature fees to be reduced. She expressed disappointment over men who are denouncing women's safe seats and said some MPs have so much hatred for women. "The safe seat is not a taboo," she said with venom and anger.

An Independent Member of Parliament from Kailahun district, Hon. Quintin Salia-Konneh asked for the fate of independent contesters but agreed that the bill is a good one. The MP said everything is predetermined by the bill relative to the elections' slated election date. "PR is the best way to go for Sierra Leone" he stated and went on to speak about the transparent and accountable nature of the bill, developmentally oriented amongst others. He also recommended one year and six months for the resignation of people who are receiving salaries from the government consolidated fund. He suggested safe seats for all categories of people.

The Deputy Leader of Government Business, Hon. Bashiru Silikie thanked the previous administration, in light of the reviewing of previous election acts. He informed that there are few areas to be corrected by the bill and went on to give indicators in the proposals. On women's representation, he recalled how female Members of Parliament defeated strong men in elections and suggested that let more strong women be encouraged, rather than having reserved seats as armchairs.

He made referenced previous acts and went on to inform that, the proposal had some doubts that need clarification and amendments.

He denounced dual citizens' participation, referencing countries that cannot allow people that have the latter to work in high-profile positions, and emphasized the lacuna in the proposal.

He used the opportunity to advise the leadership on the controversies. The Leader also denounced the six months resignation of people receiving salaries from the consolidated fund. The PR system he said would reduce the tension and violence among contenders as well as improve retention. He encouraged colleague MPs to thoroughly review some areas in the bill, to make it a good law.

Leader of Opposition, Hon. Chernor R.M. Bah requested the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone and the Office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice to provide a soft copy of the said bill.

The Acting Speaker also requested citizens and others to submit their contributions and positions on the bill, through the Office of the Clerk of Parliament.

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