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PRESS RELEASE



PARLIAMENT DEBATES THE CHILD RIGHTS ACT, 2022

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Thursday, 23/02/2023, extensively debated the Bill entitled; "The Child Rights Act, 2022", and committed it to the Legislative Committee for further scrutiny.

The Bill seeks to repeal and replace the Child Rights Act, 2007 (Act No.7 of 2007) and the Children and Young Persons Act, (Cap 44), to provide for the promotion of the rights of the child in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to provide for other related matters.

Presenting the Bill to the House, the Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, Manty Tarawallie, said that the objective of the Bill is to repeal and replace "The Child Rights Act of 2007". She informed the House that the Bill is divided into thirteen parts and went further to accentuate on the importance of the Bill towards the development and protection of the child.

In submitting to the debate, Hon. Joseph Williams-Lamin recalled on the background of the Child Rights Bill and also referenced the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act No.6 of 1991, which spells out the rights of the child. He spoke on the need for parental care of the children and their core responsibilities in the upbringing of a child. He commended the Minister and her officials for bringing the Bill before the House for enactment.

On his part, Hon. Charles Abdulai, praised the Ministry for the initiative and underscored the importance of the Bill. The MP went on to question part five of the Bill which deals with the child welfare committees. He advised the House to enact the Bill into law. "The issues of children should be paramount to the people of Sierra Leone", he concluded.

The Acting Leader of C4C, Hon. Musa Fofanah, dilated his contribution on Part Five of the Bill and also underscored the important nature of the Bill to the House. He commended the Minister and prevailed on Parliament to approve more budgetary allocation for the Ministry and the popularization of the Bill.

Hon. Moses B. Jokie said that the Bill is important and emphasized that, the rights of the child be respected. The MP went further to highlight the negative effects of FGM on the girl child. He spoke on the need for the elimination of corporal punishment and advised the Ministry to undertake proper sensitization when the Bill is enacted into law.

An Independent MP from Kailahun District, Hon. Emilia Loloh Tongi said that the children of Africa must be respected. The MP further said that, the use of the word "mutilation" in the Bill is derogatory and asked that, the word be replaced with another suitable word so as to maintain the dignity of the African culture. She decried the way how white people have been degrading the culture of Africa.

Hon. Sheku Muniru Turay said that the Bill has issues based on the cultural dimension of Africa and underscored the need for proper education and research on the Bill.

Hon. Sahr Charles said that, the document is important and advised that, the Bill must not be rushed into enactment, but rather be properly scrutinized. He

referenced many clauses in the Bill and prevailed on the House for their proper consideration before enactment and further consultation.

Hon. Dr. Abdulai Daniel Sesay said that there are many rights of the child and raised questions on their responsibility, "Given rights to children is good, but their responsibility must be stated ", he said, and went further to state that the House should be very mindful, when enacting laws for the State.

Hon. Neneh Lebbie commended her colleague MPs for their contributions to the Bill and said that although the Bill is non-controversial, but it needs proper scrutiny. She said that, the Bill hinges on the culture of the country. She also supported the intent of the Bill and asked for more deliberations on it.

In rounding off the debate, the Acting Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Hassan Sesay, said that the issues of FGM, corporal punishment and child labour are issues that have been seriously talked about in the content of the Bill. He decried the nature of certain parts of the Bill. The Acting Leader narrated a story about himself being punished by his mother and that, the circumstances helped him to grow well in society. The MP requested the House to send the Bill to the Legislative Committee for further scrutiny.

In concluding the debate, the Acting Leader of Government Business, Hon. Bashiru Silikie, commended the Ministry for bringing the Bill before the House for enactment. The Acting Leader recounted on the consultative meeting that was held on the bill with MPs and stockholders and underscored what was highlighted in the deliberation. He reminded the House that Sierra Leone is part of many international treaties that bind States together and those laws have to be domesticated .

He called on MPs to be part of the deliberations when the Bill is submitted to the Legislative Committee for further discussion.

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