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PRESS RELEASE



PARLIAMENT DEBATES THE EMPLOYMENT ACT, 2022

The Parliament of Sierra Leone, has on Tuesday, 17/01/2023, extensively debated the bill entitled, "The Employment Act, 2022" and committed it to the Legislative Committee for further scrutiny.

The bill seeks to consolidate and improve on the laws relating to Labour and Employment, to provide for promotion of equal opportunity and elimination of discrimination in Employment and occupation and other related Matters.

Presenting the bill to Parliament, the Minister of Labour and Social Security, Alpha Timbo said that the bill is very important and would form a valuable asset of the nation's workforce. According to the Minister, most of the country's labour laws are obsolete and thus the need to

repeal and replace them with more friendly and realistic laws that will cater for the interest of Sierra Leoneans.

He further explained that some of the laws that contravene the rights of workers are in conflict with International best practices. He pointed out that, when the bill is passed into law, it would positively impact on the country and its workforce. According to the Minister, the bill predicated on repealing many obnoxious labour and employment laws and replace them with the current essentials.

Hon. Dr. Roland Kargbo said that the Minister has done tremendous work to address the problems of employment. He informed the House that, replacing those archaic laws were overdue as employees were left at the mercy of employers and this unwarranted practice would never be tolerated. "This document has a lot of merits", he stated. He called for proper scrutiny of the document for the benefit of the State.

Hon. Sama Sandy said that the document addressed a lot of labour problems including human rights in tandem with International laws. He recalled and spoke about obsolete laws that undermined the security of employment of citizens. "I think that even our workforce who are facing problems in other countries would be secured", he revealed.

Hon. Bash Kamara said that when the bill is passed into law, it would benefit both employers and employees. He informed Parliament that most workers do not have standard working conditions and that the bill would ameliorate the perennial problems. He used the opportunity to appeal to Parliament to support the Ministry to garner funding in order to implement the bill when passed into law.

Hon Joseph Williams-Lamin, spoke about the risk compatriots are facing abroad and appealed to the Minister to track fake recruitment agencies working on their contracts, adding that the use of children as labourers in the workforce should be looked into.

The MP emphasized on the protection of citizens' rights, amidst the numerous foreign workers that are doing jobs that are supposed to be done by citizens. He expressed worries over the unemployment rate of compatriots and appealed to the Minister to fully implement the law when enacted into law.

Hon. Moses Jokie described the bill as an important document and informed the House that it is timely. He assured that the bill when passed into law would provide more jobs for Sierra Leoneans. He also revealed that the document would also limit some jobs to be done by compatriots and went on to say negative issues relating to contract jobs, and that expatriates over-staying in the country should be addressed.

The MP lamented over corrupt registration of membership by some worker's unions without deriving benefit from the latter. While recalling some bad incidence, Hon. Jokie expressed his dismay over some entities that are denying workers to go on leave.

Hon. Hassan Sankoh commended the Labour Minister and team for putting the document together and called on all and sundry to collaborate with him to address the employment problems. He spoke well on the necessity of the bill and categorically stated that the document would eliminate corruption as he made comparative analysis to nearby countries' wages and salaries, in light of standard employment status. He asked the Minister to work with other ministries, departments, in light of ensuring effective and efficient service delivering.

Deputy Speaker Hon .Segepoh Solomon Thomas said that Sierra Leone has always had beautiful laws, but there are problems with implementation and recalled some bad incidence related to labour laws. He expressed his disappointment over the indignity some countrymen are undergoing at the hands of foreign employers. He asked the Minister to improve on the situation.

Leader of C4C, Hon. Saa Emerson Lamina, heaped praises on the minister, whilst recalling some of his efforts in that direction. He expressed that without the necessary fundings, it would be difficult to achieve the implementation. He said that the Employment Act,2022 will seek the interest of both Employers and Employees. He recalled many horrendous situations faced by workers in the past and continued to celebrate the importance of the new law if enacted and passed into law. He made it clear that the Minister should look into issues around fake employers.

Hon. Bai Kurr Kanagbaro Sanka III referred to the bill as a national document that carries a national agenda and went on to say that the document would touch the lives of many compatriots. He recalled the good attributes of the Minister with close reference to trade unionism, Sierra Leone Teachers Union and social security expert. He earmarked certain clauses of the bill, recalled the essence of communal labour, and asked colleague MPs to consider the same for national development. He made reference to other countries and the past amidst weekly payments of workers to improve on cash flow.

Explaining the importance of employment, the PCMP spoke about the lack of industrialization in Africa amidst poverty and went on to ask the Minister to look into certain clauses that would help to improve the economy. He spoke patriotically about positive developments.

An independent Member of Parliament from Kailahun District, Hon. Lolloh Tungi said that the bill was one of the best documents and it touches many angles. She blamed the Ministry for the breach of certain labour laws and emphasized on the protection of citizens. "Without labour, the country would die slowly" she stated, and went on to say, "workers must be protected".

Acting Leader of NGC, Hon. Foday Mario Kamara, supported the bill and informed all that the Minister is very considerate. According to him, the bill would protect compatriots in and out of the country. He reiterated the protection of people working for the government, especially in the situation of a change of government. He emphasized on the protection of employees and employers.

In rounding off the debate, Acting Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Hassan A. Sesay said that the document was long overdue. He suggested that the entity be renamed as Commission of Labour and Employment. He commended the Minister and team for addressing overstayed laws. He strongly noted that the position of previous speakers with regard indignity of compatriots by foreigners.

The Leader spoke about the protection of all and encouraged colleague MPs to properly look into the proposed law for it to match with the current trend and supported the repeal of obsolete laws as well as proper implementation. He encouraged the House to do justice to the bill for nation development.

In concluding the debate, the Leader of Government Business, Hon. Mathew Sahr Nyuma said that progressive States are synonymous with good laws and strongly emphasized that the law would predicate on a win-win situation for both the employers and employees. He clarified certain areas relating to the enforcement of the law, in light of protection.

The Leader categorically stated that without collaboration with the executive arm and other partners, the implementation of the law would be difficult. He drew the attention of the Minister to further look into matters relating to casual workers, a code of practice, discipline as well as modern method of application for jobs.

He also suggested to the Minister to enhance on capacity-building for workers to enable them become more professional and went on to clarify several concerns and enforcement of strong penalties in the law.

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