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PRESS RELEASE



PARLIAMENT ENGAGES CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Monday 25th April 2022 engaged various civil society organizations in Committee Room One, Parliament Building in Freetown. The purpose of the dialogue was to strengthen CSOs understanding of the workings of Parliament, its role in the policy processes, and the party-political imperatives that underline much of the decision-making processes and behaviors of parliamentarians on the theme "fostering a mutually supportive relationship between Parliament and Civil Society Organizations in Sierra Leone".

In his welcome address and declaration of purpose, the Director of DePREP (Department of Programmes, Research and Partnership) Mr. Gilbert Nhabay said that Parliament had signed a communique with various civil society organizations in the country. For today's meeting, he

said they were to look at various practical approaches to put the said communique into perspective. "We are partners in ensuring that we address governance issues in Sierra Leone", he maintained and went on to express hope that the engagement would be a roadmap for a new beginning in the country.

In his statement, Leader of Government Business, Hon. Mathew Sahr Nyuma described the event as a new dawn to invite civil society organizations and assured that, they wanted Parliament to be a role model, in light of cementing the relationship with civil society organizations in the country. According to him, such relationship should not be limited to "a talk shop", but should be made into reality. He informed that, they as Parliament were ready to improve on collaboration and participation of in levels of governance. He recalled several instances that bordered on strong relationships with civil society organizations in the country.

Speaking on behalf of Opposition Leader, Hon. Catherine Zainab Tarawally recalled the process of signing the communique and informed that the trend at which things were moving show that Parliament was ready to work with civil society organizations in the country. She supported the position of the Leader of Government Business and appealed to CSOs to improve on their working relationship with Parliament, sincerely and patriotically and added that, reviving CSOs engagements with Parliament was a prudent decision. "Come let's work for the benefits of Sierra Leone", she appealed.

Country Representative for Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), Rev. Alusine Diamond Suma said that, the engagement started as far back as the first Open Day. He spoke about the importance of citizens' participation in governance and the support of WFD to the Parliament. He also threw light on their support to Parliament's openness, accessibility and other efforts. He also assured on their continued support to strengthening the Parliament of Sierra Leone.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Technical Advisor to Parliament, Hon. Jariatu K. Smith described the day as a wonderful one and commended the Leadership of Parliament for their commitment relative to supporting the communique. She recalled that, the disagreement between MPs ushered in the dialogue, retreat, and other deliberations that culminated to the Bo Declaration. "Today we are here as a result of the communique signed". She also encouraged CSOs to participate in oversight, and lawmaking as well as to give support to the overall governance of the country.

On behalf of European Union (EU) Technical Assistance Team to Parliament, Adams Fusheini underscored the existence of Parliament and the participation of citizens and CSOs to enhancing openness, accessibility and transparency. He spoke about their support to Parliament's Openness and commended Parliament for spearheading the event. He also spoke about citizens' education on the functions of Parliament. However, he raised concerns over CSOs neutrality in politics.

Representing the CSOs, Mr. Abu Brima recalled their engagements with Parliament. He explained the essence of the previous engagement and improvement, in light of their support to Parliament including contributions to the lawmaking process. He expressed hope for more improvements, in respect of the communique. "We are aware that Parliament is critical in the development of the country", he stated and explained their roles as civil society organizations supporting governance in the country. He emphasized the roles of Parliament and the support of CSOs. "We will call for the full implementation of the communique", he noted and commended Parliament for the step taken to enhance collaboration and partnership with CSOs for the development of the country. He assured all and sundry of their continued support to Parliament and the state

Speaking on behalf of the Clerk of Parliament, the Director-General of Parliament, Mrs. Finda Findosia Fraser spoke about the role of Parliament in national development. She recalled the Parliament and CSO Communique and its importance. She assured that, collaborating with CSOs was part of their strategic plan and expressed a strong commitment to fruitful workings and relationships with CSOs.

Officially Opening the Civil Society Engagement Forum, the Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu said historically the advent of the 1991 Constitution ushered in democratic governance upon which an engagement like this was predicated. "It makes provision for a dominant voice, an alternative voice, and a third voice". Speaking on the return of political pluralism, he said the dominant voice was the voice of the government and the alternative voice was the voice of the opposition and also referred to the CSOs as the quiet or third voice.

He made reference to a certain country that was practicing democracy, but strangely, that country was without an opposition. He recalled that, recently he discussed with someone and realized that, that country didn't have an opposition in Parliament, but has an alternative or quiet voice outside Parliament, which was the CSOs. He commended the Clerk and the Leadership for the Brookfields dialogue that had given birth to a communique with which they were relating well. He urged CSOs and Parliament to build on the foundation of the existing relationship and collaboration to provide better results for governance and the state.

Further, the Speaker went on to express hope, that the forum would engender CSOs to educate the people about the role of MPs and assured that Parliament would continue to enhance its functions. "I would want to see that, the engagement grow larger", he maintained and went on to say, the Leadership of Parliament has endorsed the CSOs Desk in Parliament. The Speaker also encouraged CSOs and Parliament to work together for nation-building and developments.

A Power Point presentation was done by Mr Andrew Lavalie on understanding the work of CSOs.

Whilst Director of Center for Strategy and Parliamentary Studies (CSPS) Mr. Mohamed Jalloh delivered a presentation on Parliament's corporate agenda and its role in fostering mutually supportive relationship with CSOs in Sierra Leone.

An Action Plan was discussed and developed to move the process forward with steps, roles and responsibilities to deliver on by both parties.

Mr Sheku Lamin Turay, Director Parliamentary and Public Relations Department moderated the sessions and effectively managed the questions and answers between CSOs and Parliament.

Deputy Director of DePREP, Mrs Nancy Jalloh gave the vote of thanks.

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