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**PRESS RELEASE**



**PARLIAMENT RATIFIES AIR SERVICE AGREEMENTS**

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Tuesday, 07/02/2023 ratified several air service agreements and Memoranda of Understanding between Sierra Leone and other countries all geared towards the development of the Nation.

The following agreements and Memoranda of Understanding which were laid on diverse dates, Tuesday 1st March, Thursday 10th March, Thursday 17th, and Tuesday 22nd March 2022 respectively are approved by the Parliament:

1. Bilateral Air Services Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania,
2. Record of Discussions between the Republic of Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania,

3. Bilateral Air Services Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Government of the Czech Republic,
4. Bilateral Air Services Agreement between the government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Government of the Republic of Mozambique,
5. Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Republic of Mozambique,
6. Bilateral Air Service Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Government of the Republic of Kenya,
7. Records of Discussions between the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Republic of Kenya,
8. Bilateral Air Services between the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Government of Iceland,
9. Records of Discussions between the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Government of Iceland and
10. Bilateral Air Services Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Government of the Republic of Niger.

Presenting the agreements, prior to ratification the Deputy Minister of Transportation and Aviation, Rex Bonapha said over the years these agreements were made to bid on all air transportation agreements around the world, in order to boost the air industry. He spoke on the objectives of the agreements which would enhance the wider economic development of both nations. The Deputy Minister also highlighted the bilateral agreements between the nations on economic development; adding that the agreements have know financial burden on the State but rather meant to facilitate air transport and it intended economic benefits.He also said the agreements would facilitate world trade, promote tourism and improve supply chains within and outside the country.

In his submission the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Transport and Aviation, Hon Maada Ambrose Leiby commended the Transport Ministry for bringing the agreements to Parliament for ratification. He said the agreements have no additional cost to the Government of Sierra Leone. He said the agreements are non-controversial and went on to state that, the International Civic Aviation Organization was established to regulate the air traffic agreements. He commended the Government for branding the Aviation Industry with a brand-new airport.

The Chief Whip of Parliament, Hon. Dickson Rogers commended the work of the Ministry of Transport and Aviation and went on to say that, the said ministry has ratified most air agreements with other countries. He encouraged the aviation industry to bring an airline that is owned by the people of Sierra leone.

On his part, Hon. Dr. Mark- Mahmoud Kalokoh said the opposition party would always support agreements meant for national development. He said the agreements had no financial implication on the Government and the people of Sierra Leone. He spoke well on the agreements and requested the Minister to clarify matters relating to the agreements.

Leader of NGC, Hon. Dr. Kandeh Yumkella commended the physical improvement of the new Lungi Airport and went further to state that, the improvement in these agreements would link export potential zone and improve economic stability for the nation. The NGC leader requested the Minister to clarify the high tax on air tickets in Sierra Leone than other sub-regional countries.

An Independent MP from Kailahun District, Hon. Lolloh Tongi appreciated the work of the aviation industry and went further to state that, it would create job opportunities. The MP used the opportunity to encourage Sierra Leoneans to learn more international languages to gain jobs in the air transport industry.

Hon. Muniru Lassana said the agreements are good for the nation and said that it is not just passing agreements into law, but also monitoring the agreements. He called on the House to investigate the Westminster security agreement at the Lungi Airport on tax levied on passengers.

Hon. Joseph Williams Lamin spoke on the negative handling of Passengers by airlines and warned that no passenger should be discriminated against for colour. On the agreements he said, it should be used within the ambit of the law.

Rounding up the debate, the Acting Leader of the Opposition Hon. Hassan Sesay said the agreements are many, but they are there to improve the development of the State. He said as an opposition they would continue to support good agreements for the people of Sierra Leone. He spoke on the high cost of air tickets in Sierra Leone and compared it to other countries in the sub-region. The Leader called on the House to look into the matter and address it immediately.

In concluding the debate, the Acting Leader of Government Business, Hon. Bashiru Silikie said these agreements would help the People of Sierra Leone and other nations. The Acting Leader emphasized that some agreements were signed by the previous Government and now it is affecting the People of Sierra Leone. The Leader used the opportunity to call on the Ministry of Transport to review some of the airport agreements, to ameliorate the situation. He expressed that, the operation of the new airport would enable tax reduction and create more capacities and infrastructural development.

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