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**PRESS RELEASE**

**PARLIAMENT APPROVES STATE OF EMERGENCY**

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Thursday 26th March 2020 extensively debated and approved with unanimity President Bio's proclamation of a State of Public Emergency in Sierra Leone to prevent and fight covid-19 that is currently ravaging countries in the world with better and sophisticated healthcare systems.

After the votes had been determined by acclamation without any dissenting voices by the general membership of the House, the Speaker of Parliament, Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu pronounced that "in light of the unanimity of the House, the motion on the proclamation of a State of Emergency by President Bio has been unanimously carried".

Seconding the motion, the Deputy Leader of Government Business, Hon. Sahr M. Nyuma thanked President Bio for putting the nation first in the fight against covid-19 by proclaiming a State of Emergency in the best interest of the people of Sierra Leone; adding according to WHO "there is no cure or vaccine for covid-19". He described the proclamation as the right step in the right direction; and recalled measures taken by former president Koroma including the declaration of a State of Emergency (SoE) to fight and combat Ebola in 2014. He also said, besides stimulus packages announced by developed countries; thousands of people had died as a result of the coronavirus.

Hon. Hassan Sesay of APC said as an Opposition Party, their primary interest hinges on the survival of the people whilst referring to the declaration of SoE as a necessary measure taken by President Bio to fight covid-19. He called for the regulations to give effects to the SoE to be brought to Parliament within 10 days for approval. He also said that "we are in support of the SoE and hope it will be purposefully used for public health reasons only".

Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament said that the country was in imminent danger of contracting "a virus which nobody knows anything about", describing it as "a strange enemy in the history of mankind". Recalling how former president Koroma was late

in declaring a SoE to fight Ebola; he commended President Bio for being proactive in his preventive measures against covid-19; whilst assuring that the SoE would not be used as was used before during the dark days in our country's history. He was impressed that "the Opposition has no intention to go against the proposition of President Bio". He emphasized that relative to the SoE "nothing out of the ordinary will be done to anyone as a result".

Hon. Dr. Kandeh Yumkella, Leader of NGC recalled how Parliament had questioned Ministers about the country's preparedness about the covid-19; adding the MPs had helped the President to declare SoE; following continued debates in the House relating to prevention and containment of covid-19. He spoke about the need for continued meetings and consultations in the House; adding the Opposition had no intention to stand in the way of the President. He averred that "it is the discretion of the President to declare a SoE subject to the approval of Parliament". Speaking on human rights, he cited Section 29 (10) of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone relative to the regulations that are to give effects to the SoE; subject to parliamentary review or amendment after every three months; noting that the SoE would last for one year. He added that the fears earlier expressed by the Opposition would be assuaged by the regulations coming to Parliament for approval within 10 days. Without ulterior motive, he advised the Government to cajole, consult and avoid the use of threats to get two thirds votes in Parliament.

Hon. Saa Emerson Lamina, Leader of C4C recognized Sierra Leone as the only surviving country in West Africa without a confirmed case of covid19; whilst speaking on its devastating impacts in the world. He commended President Bio for taking the fight to covid-19 rather than the reverse; adding "we cannot wait to be caught pants down as it was with Ebola". He also called for social distancing and avoidance of public gatherings; whilst speaking on the necessity for the regulations to give efficacy to the SoE.

The Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Chernor R.M Bah praised the position expressed by the Deputy Speaker of Parliament in light of the SoE. Relative to Section 29 on the declaration of the SoE, he encouraged MPs not to impute as the interpretation of the Constitution rests on the Supreme Court. He also spoke about the regulations which are subject to review after a period of 90 days. He also averred that "the Opposition is not afraid of threats"; whilst speaking on the need for exercising patience and consultations are necessary ingredients for the way forward in life and politics. He assured that "the APC is not averse to the SoE declared by President Bio to fight covid-19"; and that they would support the regulations to give effects to the State of Emergency. He also said that "SoE has effect within seven days until it is superseded by a resolution of Parliament for its continuation or termination". Calling for effective public education, he said "the Opposition is in sympathy with the people whose votes are needed in 2023 to vote the SLPP out of power". He praised President Bio for replying to his letter by suspending the activity of NCRA until further notice; and called on security personnel

to use a human face during the course of implementing the measures that have been put in place by the Government to fight covid-19.

The Leader of Government Business, Hon. Sidie M. Tunis thanked the MPs for their brilliant contributions during the debate. He referred to President Bio as “a listening President”, for replying to the letter sent by the Leader of the Opposition. Clarifying, he said President Bio has excessive powers as Supreme Executive Authority with precedent in the Supreme Court; adding President Bio would only use the SoE to prevent and fight covid-19 and nothing more; recalling how he used SoE only to deal with rape and its attendant issues. He said “the declaration of the SoE is only a coincidence and has nothing to do with the conclusion of the Commissions of Inquiry”. He said the SoE would last for 12 months; subject to the approval of Parliament; adding the regulations give effects to the State of Emergency. Promising to engage the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, he said that the proclamation of SoE “is not a license for harassment”, whilst speaking on the need for aggressive public education on covid-19. He said the SoE is not a political fight, but a preventive measure from the claws of the wicked covid-19 or coronavirus that has currently brought the world almost to its knees.

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