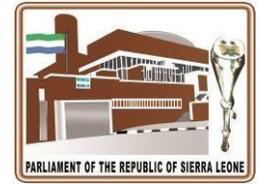




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PRESS RELEASE

PARLIAMENT INITIATES DIALOGUE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

The Parliament of Sierra Leone supported by UNDP has initiated a two-day discussion with representatives from Civil Society Organizations, commencing today 17/08/2021 at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown. The workshop will end on Wednesday 18/08/2021 with the signing of a communique between Parliament and CSOs with the view of building a healthy and mutually supportive relationship between Parliament and CSOs.

The workshop is themed: "building a healthy and mutually supportive relationship between Parliament and Civil Society Organizations in Sierra Leone".

Speaking on behalf of UNDP, Hon. Rosaline J.K Smith said the importance of the workshop between Parliament and CSOs could not be overemphasized. She recalled how UNDP had supported Parliament in areas of capacity building including research and budget scrutiny. She also said that CSOs have a role to play by promoting public education on the roles and responsibilities of Parliament, and the need for having a CSO Desk in Parliament.

On behalf of WFD, Idrissa Cole, National Programmes Coordinator recalled the Parliament Open Day in 2019 aimed at promoting public participation and understanding about the operations and functions of Parliament. Submitting on the efforts made by Parliament regarding open government partnership, he spoke on the need for visibility and the need for CSOs to work with Parliament to promote transparency and accountability in governance.

On behalf of the EU, Hon. Helen Kuyembeh spoke on the importance of the workshop and called for open and frank discussions aimed at improving the relationship between Parliament and CSOs.

Leader of Government Business, Hon. Mathew Sahr Nyuma said he was happy for the platform created for Parliament and CSOs to understand and explain their different roles in the governance landscape of Sierra Leone. He referred to it as their different path ways to building the democratic blocks of Sierra Leone, adding such dialogue will help to shape and enhance democracy in the country. He recalled how he had procedurally withdrawn a Bill relating to the repeal of part 5 of the Public Order Act of 1965, but was unfortunately lambasted by CSOs and

was later vindicated for doing what was procedurally right. He also recalled the role played by CSOs during the interregnum for the restoration of democracy in the country.

Speaking on behalf of CSOs, Mr. Abu Brima said it is a realization that CSOs exist and that they exist for Parliament. On the importance of the workshop, he noted that CSOs have not ceased and they are always working with sectoral committees in Parliament, and spoke about the need for formalizing the relationship between Parliament and CSOs for the development of the country. He also said that CSOs exist as a bridge between Parliament, Government and the people by holding them to account for effective democratic governance in the country. Speaking on the role of CSOs to promote public participation and understanding about the roles of Parliament, he said CSOs would not compromise their mandate to the people for any reason whatsoever.

Delivering his keynote address, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas said the engagement between Parliament and CSOs could not have come at a better time than now, hence the need for collaboration between Parliament and CSOs to strengthen democracy in Sierra Leone. Speaking on similarity of roles, he said Parliament is an elected embodiment that holds the government to account, whereas CSOs are influencers who hold Parliament and Government to account on behalf of the people. He also said that CSOs are there to fill the gaps left behind by Parliament. He also said that CSOs are there to prepare the people to participate in governance, and also help in building and strengthening democracy, justice and development in the country. He also said that CSOs should not be seen as an opposition to Parliament, but rather they should collaborate and partner for the development of the country. He ended by referring to Parliament as a repository of legislative actions and CSOs as an informative platform for development.

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