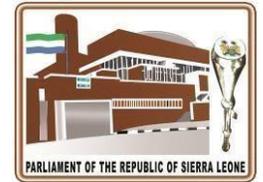




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**PRESS RELEASE**



**PARLIAMENT, CSO, MINISTRY ON GENDER BILL**

Following the tabling of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Bill in Parliament, a group of Civil Society organizations in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, with support from the Office of the Vice President on Wednesday, 30/03/2022 engaged some Members of Parliament at Conference Hall of the Administrative Building, Parliament in Freetown.

In a consultative meeting held on the Theme: "Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow," Members of Parliament, civil society organizations and partners dialogued on the smooth passage of the Bill into law.

While giving the purpose of the meeting, Gender Adviser to the Vice President, Madam Battu Jambawah expressed appreciation to some male Members of Parliament for their unflinching support towards women's empowerment. She recalled the struggle of women and commended the Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, in light of piloting the Bill. According to her, they want the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Bill to be passed into law, before the end of the year. "If this bill is enacted, latest by May 2022, it can among others restore one of the persistent calls by women's right activists and their supporters." She reiterated and went to say that the passage of the Bill can serve as a response to the massive support for women's empowerment to governance and elective positions, in light of the upcoming General Election.

She informed that Parliament is very instrumental in the dialogue relating to the passage of the document. According to her, strong consultation and dialogue were necessary for all including young women, girls and others, in order to influence decision making.

In her statement, President of the Women's Forum, Sallay Adams said the engagement was timely and they as women are passionate about the Bill, adding that the document when approved, will help them to achieve their goals and objectives in all spheres of lives. She thanked President Bio and the Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs for their relentless effort towards women's empowerment and the document as well. She also spoke about their ongoing nationwide advocacy and awareness and other lobby skill to see the light at the end of the tunnel, in light of the passage of the Bill.

Representative from an international partner, Plan International Jenneh Gbao said the engagement was critical to all and it was timely to pass the document and they as an organization were calling on Parliamentarians to enhance the smooth passage of the Bill. "Plan International is joining every CSO to call on Members of Parliament to pass the bill into law" she stated. She also emphasized the necessity of passage.

On behalf of the girls or young ladies, Margret. M. Mansaray from Koinadugu founder of Female Force Foundation Sierra Leone and partner to Plan International spoke about the effort and contributions of Plan International. According to her, they advocate for girls and young women and supported the passage of the Bill for them to benefit more.

Other organizations including Forut and Action Aid also made meaningful contributions to the dialogue.

Hon. Aiah Kassegbema urged all to always support and empower women as according to him, deserve to serve in elective positions.

Also contributing to the dialogue, the UNDP Technical Advisor to Parliament, Hon. Rosaline Jariatu K. Smith, said CSOs are expected to guide Female Honourable Members from time to time rather than engaging them, when elections are getting closer. She made reference to her re-election campaign before she dropped from the race due to constitutional reason.

P.C. Meama Kajue from Moyamba District informed the facilitator that, there is the need for the 2009 Chieftaincy Act to be reviewed to encourage and increase female participation in local governance, and also consider the quota of Female Paramount Chiefs in the Gender bill.

The Chairperson for Gender and Children's Affairs Committee, Hon. Catherine Zainab Tarawallie while speaking on behalf of the Clerk of Parliament and Speaker assured the CSOs of their fervent commitment as Parliament. She recalled the tabling of the Bill, efforts made so far and recommendations and amendments relating to the smooth passage. She reassured the audience of the passage of the Bill soonest. She also applauded the efforts of their male counterparts in Parliament with regard the document. She also reaffirmed that they as female MPs would continue to canvass the male MPs to give their huge support to ensure the passage of the Bill unanimously. "I want to assure you civil societies and all members of the civil societies that visit Parliament today, with the Speaker's commitment and with the Leadership's commitment and with the Director General's commitment before June the Bill would be passed into law" she stated and said that they would want to demonstrate the document as a task fulfilled and to showcase to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) conference slated in Freetown for June this year.

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