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**PRESS RELEASE**

**PARLIAMENTARIANS ON GENDER EQUALITY, CAPACITY BUILDING**

Members of Parliament have on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2020 started to participate in a three-day capacity development training and high-level policy dialogue forum at the Golden Tulip, Aberdeen in Freetown. The workshop is organized by the Network of ECOWAS Parliamentarians on Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security in collaboration with non-governmental organizations including AMNet and FAO among others.

According to the Master of Ceremonies, Sheku Lamin Turay, who doubles as the Deputy Director of Public Relations, Parliament of Sierra Leone in welcoming participants said the workshop is targeting Members of Parliament belonging to five Parliamentary Committees including Lands, Mines and Minerals, Agriculture and Forestry, Marine Resources and Local Government and Rural Development; and MDAs and NGOs that are critical to ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment in the country. He also called on the participants to pay keen attention during the course of the workshop as they are critical agents of positive change in the country.

Delivering a statement on behalf of UN Resident Coordinator, Dr. Babatunde Ahonsi, FAO Country Representative to Sierra Leone, Dr. Nyabenyi T. Tipo expressed happiness over the conduct of the workshop and also commended the Speaker of ECOWAS Parliament, Hon. Mohamed Sidie Tunis and the Clerk of Sierra Leone Parliament, Hon. Paran Umar Tarawally for supporting this laudable initiative geared towards women's empowerment.

She went on to say that, their working relationship with Parliament started long ago and also referenced the immense support from Parliaments in Latin America and other places that have created positive results in gender empowerment and investments in Agriculture. The workshop, she said would transform women, adding that, the capacity building is timely considering the vulnerability of women and young girls in the society in light of opportunities. She said that the UN would continue to support women in light of the SDGs.

She also informed MPs about food insecurity and nutritional threats in Africa, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 outlining high figure of victims.

She noted that rural women were greatly affected and vulnerable to accessing productivity and social safety net among others; adding that the outbreak has compounded the problems women are faced with.

She assured the stakeholders of UN and FAO's continued support depending on the 2019 Agenda and the SDGs relative to the UN Secretary General's recently launched COVID -19 response support that is intended to address the problems confronting women.

She spoke of a new social contract as an important aspect to the solutions relating to problems affecting women. The year, 2020 is also in line with UN Resolution 20/35 anniversary and other related women's rights issues. She said, MPs could play a significant role to the improvement of women and girls' rights in the country in respect of advocacy and improved budgetary allocations for the development of women.

On her part, AMNet Executive Director, Hawa Samai thanked donors for supporting this important workshop aimed at bringing multiple stakeholders together for the development and empowerment of women in Sierra Leone. She went further to explain their mission, vision and objectives as well as their modus operandi.

Representative of UN Women to Sierra Leone, Dr. Mary Okumu commended the government and Parliament for capturing women in their programming and policy formulations aimed at empowering women in the country. She went on to inform that, the country could not achieve the SDGs without women's empowerment. She emphasized on gender equality in light of women in agriculture and land acquisitions to do same. She thanked MPs for their large participation in the workshop; adding it would be remarkable if the current Parliament leaves an investment plan and policy reforms for the development women in the country.

Giving the keynote address on behalf of the Hon. Clerk of Parliament, Paran Umar Tarawally, Mrs. Finda Fraser, Director of DePAC informed her audience about the constitutional mandate of MPs and went on to say the workshop was timely to address the problems affecting the development and growth of women in the country. She expressed worries over the hike in figure of victims of food insecurity and lack of nutrition. She told MPs and other participants of the impacts of COVID-19 on women in the country. She noted that agricultural investments were compelling and women must take the leading role irrespective of their vulnerabilities. Adding that women and girls were prone to problems that were relative to exploitation and accessibility among others. She called on stakeholders to address the issues in order to empower women. She informed the participants about the significant gains that have been made in the proposed land bills indicative of women's rights. She highlighted the impacts of the outbreak on women and response necessary for the empowerment of women. She also called on partners and other stakeholders to support policies that would help women in that direction. She underscored the need for more collaboration and coordination for gender equality and capacity building in agriculture and other sectors.

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