



PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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PRESS RELEASE



PARLIAMENTARY FEMALE CAUCUS INAUGURATES NEW EXECUTIVE AND CELEBRATES ORANGE DAY

The Sierra Leone Female Parliamentary Caucus (SLeFPac), in collaboration with Westminster Foundation for Democracy, PetroJetty, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, Orange Sierra Leone and others, have on Thursday, 14/03/2024 at the State Hall of Parliament Building, inaugurated their new executive and leadership whilst celebrating in commemoration of International Women's Day 2024 on the theme: "Invest In Women: Amplifying Women's Political Agenda in Parliament". Dubbed 'Orange Day,' the event attracted a galaxy of distinguished Sierra Leoneans and International Diplomats.

In her welcome address, the President of the Female Caucus, Hon. Neneh Lebbie, said they created the platform to celebrate their achievements, challenges, and way forward. The seasoned Member of Parliament acknowledged the efforts of her predecessor, Hon. Veronica Kadie Sesay, and went on to say that with the support of President Bio and Madam First Lady, more women got elected to Parliament, so their Caucus has tremendously grown in size. The President overemphasized women's emancipation, empowerment, participation, and their dire need for more support.

She acknowledged the support of all who made the occasion possible.

In her opening statement, the Chairperson of the event, Dr. Sylvia Olayinka Blyden, used the occasion to acknowledge two of her mentors who once served as SLeFPaC executives: Hon. Reverend Marie Yansaneh of the APC and the Late Hon. Elizabeth Alpha-Lavalie of the SLPP.

Dr. Blyden praised them for their support of women's emancipation, which inspired her when she was a young woman. She recalled how women, over the years, had struggled with the support of others to attain the desired 30% quota in Parliament. She also mentioned how, by a twist of fate, the outbreak of the coronavirus and the unfortunate events of August 2022 led to the utilization of a District Block Proportional Representation system for the 2023 Elections hence, women got lucky as without a Constituency election, it was easy for the political parties to be forced to include women on their submitted P.R. Lists. The dynamic female state personality explained the avenue that women should now use to maintain or improve their percentage in Parliament, including through support for a constitutional amendment and, importantly, through building trust in their subjects and, finally, by becoming more alert to issues of gender sensitivity. She urged the female M.P.s to join and become the voice of the voiceless women, especially those in provincial areas.

Dr. Sylvia Olayinka Blyden acknowledged the efforts of the Rt. Hon. Speaker of Parliament, Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu, for patiently absorbing hot criticisms while he was pushing for enactments that would ensure an outcome of women's 30% quota in Parliament at the 2023 Elections. The famous female opposition politician also strongly commended President Maada Bio and Madam First Lady Fatima Maada Bio for their undiluted support towards attaining the 30% women's parliamentary representation. Dr. Blyden also commended other stakeholders, like the former Gender Minister Manty Tarawallie, for moving in that direction.

Dr. Sylvia Olayinka Blyden also used the occasion to share her experience with male chauvinism over the past 30 years, starting from her tenure as Student's Union President at the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences some decades ago. She called for elected female M.P.s to expect such from their constituents but to emulate the methods that she used to overcome those challenges.

The Director General of Parliament, Madam Finda Fraser, commended the organizers on behalf of Parliament and re-emphasized the promotion of gender inclusion. Madam Finda Fraser said Parliament is committed to supporting women to higher heights and went on to praise President Bio for supporting the work of women in society.

Representing PetroJetty, Mr. Sylvester Mallah informed the audience about his organization's commitment to supporting women in Sierra Leone and underscored PetroJetty's work in That Country.

WFD Country Manager, Rev. Alusine Diamond-Suma, said this occasion is geared towards enhancing participation and making women meaningful in society. He said WFD, through the British Government, is supporting Sierra Leone immensely in the development of good governance and the promotion of democracy. He said WFD is committed to supporting women's empowerment in Sierra Leone and assured us of WFD's continued support of Parliament and capacity building for female M.P.s.

Representing Orange Sierra Leone, Madam Danetta Young, General Secretary, said she is very proud of the Sierra Leone Parliamentary Female Caucus for promoting gender equality and promised that Orange Sierra Leone would continue to work in solidarity to support women in Sierra Leone.

In his goodwill message, a representative of the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office, Mr. Jack Burne, said the British High Commission would continue to support and take steps to

remove gender barriers to promote women's rights and gender equality. He noted that the initiative to promote women's rights by female M.P.s is laudable.

Goodwill messages were also delivered by others, including the E.U. Mission in Sierra Leone.

On the inauguration of the SLeFPac Executive, the Leader of Government Business, Hon. Matthew Sahr Nyuma, and the Leader of Opposition, Hon. Abdul Kargbo, jointly decorated the female executive with their rosettes of authority to loud applause from the gathering. They both acknowledged the efforts of the Executive of the Female Caucus for the Sixth Parliament and expressed pride, as parliamentary leaders, to be working with them.

In his submission, Majority Leader and Leader of Government Business, Hon. Mathew Sahr Nyuma, made an open commitment to support Women and saluted the Female M.P.s and donor partners for supporting the Orange Day celebration. He said the Orange Day celebration would continue to provide women the platform to showcase their achievements. The Leader reaffirmed Parliament's commitment to supporting women's exclusivity and participation and went on to underscore the work of Parliament in making sure that more female M.P.s participate in governance. The Leader highlighted statistical data on female representation in the Sixth Parliament of Sierra Leone. He called on the female M.P.s to work together to move and shape women's agenda.

In his commitment to women's empowerment, the Opposition Leader in Parliament, Hon. Abdul Kargbo, said gender-based violence had to be eradicated and called on female M.P.s to provide support in that direction to enact laws that would annihilate gender-based violence. He appreciated President Bio for supporting women's inclusion into governance and went on to highlight the exemplary work of India and Rwanda for the massive inclusion of women into their Parliaments.

"You have the integrity to protect women, so please protect them," Hon. Kargbo said. He went on to advise women not to let politics divide them and called on women to work together for their common interests.

Representatives from both the SLPP and the APC called for more support for women and requested immediate action to stop the intake of the harmful drug, 'Kush' by the youths.

Hon. Emerson Saa Lamina, Deputy Leader of Government Business 2, acknowledged championing women's issues and supporting the promotion of women. The Leader also went on to highlight the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act and its achievements.

In her keynote address, the former Minority Leader of Parliament, Hon. Dr. Bernadette Lahai, thanked the Parliamentary Female Caucus in Parliament and appreciated the support of WFD in the promotion of women's equality. The erudite politician commended the female M.P.s for the law-making process and also said that the Orange Day celebration should continue to be marked as an annual event for female M.P.s to showcase their achievements. She said Sierra Leone ranks second behind Senegal in the ECOWAS subregion for female representation in governance. She called for more policies to be set aside to promote women's agenda. Hon. Dr. Lahai also called for more budgetary allocation to the female M.P.s so that they could carry out their parliamentary oversight. Hon. Dr. Lahai commended male M.P.s who totally support female participation in governance.

The President of the ECOWAS Female Parliamentarians Caucus, Hon. Veronica Kadie Sesay, appreciated the support of WFD and other partners in supporting female issues. As a long-serving member, she narrated the work of the Parliamentary Female Caucus as a former president and acknowledged President Bio's support for women.

Hon. Lucinda Kellie and Hon. Mariama Zombo gave inspiring messages on their backgrounds in politics.

Director Gilbert N'habay presented the SLeFPaC annual action plan, and the vice president, Hon. Rose Marie Bangura, gave the Vote of Thanks.

Earlier, the Director of Parliamentary and Public Relations in the Parliament of Sierra Leone, Sheku Lamin Turay, called the event to order and highlighted the importance and positive nature of the Orange Day celebration.

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