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**PRESS RELEASE**

**SECOND ALLOTTED: PARLIAMENT CONTINUES DEBATE ON 2023 NATIONAL BUDGET**

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Tuesday 29/11/2023 continued debate on the 2023 National Budget as was presented by the Minister of Finance, Dr. Denis K. Vandy earlier this month for the services of Sierra Leone.

The Bill seeks to authorize expenditure from the consolidated fund for the services of Sierra Leone for the year 2023 and other related matters, with the theme: "Addressing the needs of the vulnerable in the context of multiple crises".

Continuing the debate, Hon. Musa Fofana thanked the President for his proactive measure in managing the economy, amidst the Ukraine and Russia war and global pandemic. He described the budget as a "national budget" and went on to comprehensively elaborate on the positivity of the Government National Medium Term Plan. He explained the progressive impact of education in the last few years. "This Government has navigated to ensure that the economy did not collapse" he stated and went further to commend the Government for the construction of good roads, health facilities and viable agricultural activities. The MP said revitalization of tourism, energy and were remarkable and highlighted challenges and recommendations in that direction. He advised the Minister to motivate revenue generation institutions, in order to deliver more services. He advised the Minister to consider the construction of more buildings, to reduce the huge rental cost for office premises.

Hon. Charles Osman Abdulai debunked a certain MP who earlier labeled the country on economic hardship and eloquently explained the factors of the global economic problems and mitigating factors. The MP highlighted the budget allocation of various agricultural sectors and efforts towards food self-sufficiency and security. He used the opportunity to ask the Minister to reconstruct the Bumpé collapsed bridge, in order to improve on accessibility.

Hon. Joseph Williams-Lamin while making his contributions, clarified several concerns raised by colleague MPs. He stated that, the budget merely indicated how reasonable the Government in terms of addressing welfare of the citizens. The MO went on to disclose that, the Government had reviewed the appropriation budget in the last few years, in light of economic growth and employment. In line with the Government development agenda, Hon. Williams-Lamin explained how he personally raised money to construct a library in his constituency. He Heaped praises on Parliament for gender equality, swift response of staff, and welfare. He went on to highlight some positive international comparisons of other Parliaments to the Parliament of Sierra Leone. The Lawmaker acknowledged the efforts of partners toward education.

Hon Mohamed Kanneh described the budget as a very honest document and went on to refer to the COVID-19 pandemic as an obstacle to national growth. He made a comparative analysis of the reduction of taxation. The MP revealed a goodwill message from his people, relative to growth and development and informed Parliament that, his people would in turn vote overwhelming for the government. While other countries were struggling with shortage of commodities, he said the Government was busy promoting the private sector to import more commodities and encouraging local farmers to produce food. The struggle for the energy, he said is no longer a matter of discussion. The MP Heaped praises on the Government for infrastructural developments especially road construction.

Hon. Sahr Charles spoke about the importance of the budget in terms of authorization, and commend the Minister and team. He said it would be prudent to do justice to the budget to address the financial needs of the people."Let us debate the budget as a national document, not a political document" he stated. He raised concern over the theme of the budget and went on to say, the measures of the

Government are not addressing the sufferings of the masses. He reiterated that, the Government should not continue to blame the country's economy on COVID-19 outbreak and Russia-Ukraine War as factors for Sierra Leone's economic predicament. According to him, there are many possible ways to diversify the economy. He emphasized that, the country has not done much on tourism and agriculture. He said the budget theme was ironical, in light of the economic situation. He decried some MDAs for their inabilities and raised series of concerns over the lackadaisical attitude toward implementations. He allegedly decried Government for under funding of foreign missions and for the current state of the Audit service in Sierra Leone.

However, the MP Commended the Government for more enrollment of pupils and encouraged them to improve on recruitment of teachers. Raised concerns over the less allocation to Local Court and youths affairs and lethargy over accountability and corruption in recent times.

The debate on the National Budget continues tomorrow in the Chamber of Parliament where MDAs are expected to witness the deliberations.

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