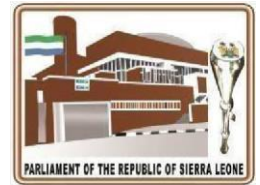




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PRESS RELEASE



SPEAKER LAUNCHES CSOs OFFICE IN PARLIAMENT

In light of making the Parliament of Sierra Leone more open, accessible, and visible to the people of Sierra Leone, the Rt. Hon. Speaker of Parliament Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu has on Wednesday 16/11/2022 officially opened the Civil Society Office Desk in the Parliament of Sierra Leone with support from, the Open Government Partnership, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

Officially launching the partnership desk office in Committee Room One Parliament Building, the Speaker of Parliament recalled that, on the 17-18 August 2021, the Leadership of Parliament met with 52 CSOs selected from all districts across Sierra Leone and attended a meeting at the New Brookfields Hotel to discuss possible means of strengthening the relationship between Parliament and CSOs, aimed at promoting better and constructive result in governance and accountability processes.

Hon. Speaker said in light of that engagement, a communique was signed to establish a CSO desk in Parliament, with the view to educate constituents, relative to bills, policies and programmes that are discussed in Parliament. The Speaker said in strengthening mutual supportive relationships, a steering committee was established for that purpose. The Rt. Hon. Speaker emphasized that, in line with the Open Government Partnership commitment, the Parliament of Sierra Leone has made CSO engagement a huge priority.

He said the steering committee has the role to define strategic direction for promoting programmes and oversee the day to day operations of the CSOs desk in Parliament and also to promote programme visibility through media engagement and other outreach sessions.

The Speaker said in making the desk more effective and functioning, mandates should be drawn from Parliament, CSO, and development Partners, and went further to state that, it would bring a rich blend of stakeholders to provide that value-add dimension to the functions of the CSO desk in Parliament.

In concluding, the Speaker said the setting up of the CSO Desk in Parliament would be a legacy of the Fifth Parliament by making it visible and closer to the people.

Officially declaring the event, the Director General of the Parliament of Sierra Leone, Mrs. Finda Frazer expressed happiness over the launching and also commended the Leadership of Parliament for the initiative.

Madam DG said the official launching of the Parliament and CSOs engagement process, would account for a very robust and constructive relationship between civil society. She also said the initiative would create the platform that would enable and facilitate civil society to provide a complementary support to elected officials to become more active in their legislative, representation and oversight responsibilities.

Madam Frazer also said Parliament plays a crucial contribution to good governance and development of the state.

In his submission, Leader of Government Business Hon. Mathew Sahr Nyuma said the engagement with CSOs is a step in the right direction in making Parliament visible to the people. He said there are a lot of misperceptions about Parliament. He continued to state that, the narrative has to be changed, in order to have a better cordial relationship with CSO. "We build a national development with mutual civil society organizations", he said.

He recalled the engagement with civil society organizations and the communique that was signed and went on to praise the Speaker of Parliament for creating the platform for the engagement. He assured

that, there would be a good working relationship with civil society organizations in moving the democratic principles.

In his submission the Leader of C4C, Hon. Emerson Saa Lamina overemphasized CSOs' relevance in the democratic dispensation. He said the work of civil society can not be over emphasized in the promotion of democracy, and went on to say that, CSOs had been dormant, recalling the sacking of a Former Vice President and a sitting mayor as examples. He stated that, resources are a challenging factor for the support of CSOs. He maintained that, MPs and civil society organizations must collaborate, in order to promote peace and national cohesion. He also reaffirmed that, CSOs have a representative role on the important functions of MPs. He acknowledged the relevance of the working relationship between both.

Representative from Child Fund, Mr. Victor Kamara said having a CSO desk in Parliament is a perfect idea and commended Parliament for the initiative. He promised to support the process.

Key Expert of the Parliamentary Component of the European Union Governance Program, Mr. Adams Fusheini appreciated the Leadership of Parliament for establishing the CSO Desk. He said the desk would provide information, that would enable Parliament to do its legislative, representative and oversight functions. "On behalf of the technical assistance team I want to state that, we have enjoyed partnership so far with Parliament and we are counting on that to support the CSO desk", he said.

Civil Society Representative, Andrew Lavallie said the engagement is a testament that the State cannot do it alone. He said this current Parliament is very transformative and went on to say that, the initiative would foster external information that would be very useful for the development of the country. He spoke on the need for more collaborative efforts to educate the general public on the activities of the Parliament of Sierra Leone.

He commended the Leadership of Parliament for the massive strides made so far, in terms of Bills enacted into law, all geared towards the good governance of the State.

He said as CSOs, they would continue to collaborate with Parliament to have a better understanding on the activities of Parliament.

In his statement the Coordinator of OGP, Hannah Jimmy applauded Parliament for enormous commitments on the OGP process and went on to commend Parliament for the enactment of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Bill into law. He bestowed praises on Parliament for creating a space for a civil society desk in Parliament and also said interaction with the civil society community would increase citizens' involvement in the legislative processes.

"I would like to thank the Speaker, the Office of the Clerk of Parliament for the commitment in the open government partnership," she said and went on to heap praises on the parliamentary working

group. She also commended the Westminster Foundation for Democracy the Director General, and the entire Open Government Partnerships and committee members for their efforts towards their implementations.

In his statement, the Country Representative of Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Rev. Alusine Diamond Suma said his organization wanted to ensure that, Parliament is more visible and open, as well as accessible to its citizens, and went on to highlight strides taken so far to enhance CSOs engagement with Parliament

"The relationship between CSOs and Parliament, I wish not to overemphasize has been more collaborative and cordial on national governance action", he said, and went on to say they would continue to collaborate with Parliament and CSOs in a better working environment.

During the process, the Terms of Reference for the operation of the Parliament CSO engagement was developed and a Steering Committee established

The Director of Parliamentary and Public Relations in the Parliament of Sierra Leone Sheku Lamin Turay moderated the program. The program was climaxed by the cutting of the tape for the new CSO Desk office in the Parliament.

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