



# PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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30<sup>th</sup> September, 2024

## PRESS RELEASE



### **SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT EXEMPLIFIES S/LEONE'S LEGAL STANCE TO ELIMINATE CHILD MARRIAGE**

Rt. Hon. Speaker of the Sixth Parliament of Sierra Leone, Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas, has showcased Sierra Leone's unwavering commitment and effort in protecting the girl child. The country recently signed the 'Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024', a landmark legislation that makes it illegal to marry children under the age of 18, thereby significantly advancing the country's efforts to protect the rights of children and promote gender equality.

While making his speech at a Dinner organized for Sierra Leone's Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, Speaker Segepoh Solomon Thomas first intimated that Child Marriage is globally recognized as a harmful practice that disempowers women and girls and hinders gender equality. He continued that girls who are married as children are more likely to drop out of school and suffer domestic violence and other pregnancy complications. He added that the practice had existed for generations due to traditions and funny patriarchal practices.

The Parliament Speaker, therefore, stated that their gathering at the dining event was an effort to continue the conversation relating to what he described as a 'grimmed subject.' He acknowledged that Sierra Leone as a nation has had its share of struggles and misfortunes but expressed that they are resilient people, adding that they have always emerged very strong and determined.

"As I stand before you this evening, I wish to state that the Parliament of the Republic of Sierra Leone had a collective conscience in passing this bill into an act. We have identified the missing links generally as Sierra Leoneans and have always come together to address problems affecting us as a nation.

Sierra Leone, as a nation, had identified child marriage as a harmful practice. Still, our problem was leadership, and we needed the leadership that could have championed this change. And it would interest you to know that such leadership was provided by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone and His beautiful wife, the First Lady of the Republic of Sierra Leone. Her role in championing this change is not just commendable, it is inspiring and gives us hope for a better future for our children", said Speaker Thomas.

Speaking on conscientiousness, the Rt. Hon. Speaker clarified that it does not mean they don't have an opposition party in Parliament. He disclosed that they have a robust opposition party in Parliament, adding an opposition that would find fault with every little position of the Government. 'I wish to state that for this particular bill being passed into law, the opposition accepted clearly that it was good to do so,' he underscored as he continued thanking the President and the First Lady. This acceptance and respect for differing opinions is what makes our democracy strong and inclusive."

Recalling the day the 'Prohibition of Child Marriage Act' was to be passed into law, the Speaker revealed that the First Lady of the Republic was proper in the well of Parliament, showcasing her revered interest in the bill. The Speaker noted that on so many occasions, those who typically champion or campaign for bills to be passed into law could not even come to the well of Parliament but said, in this case, Sierra Leone's First Lady was proper in the well of Parliament for the rest of the day as She equally made advances to the opposition campaigning them.

"So let me take this opportunity to thank her profusely for championing this campaign. This is a practice that even our human minds could tell us is wrong, but nobody in Sierra Leone saw the need to champion this course and have it prohibited, except First Lady Fatima Maada Bio. I wish to state that this particular law is pretty and ambitious in the sense that the law not only prohibits the practice but also goes as far as making provisions for compensation and rehabilitation of victims, ensuring that those who have suffered from this harmful practice are not only protected but also supported in their recovery.

The speech of the Rt. Hon. Speaker Segepoh Solomon Thomas at the UNGA dining event showcased that Sierra Leone, as a nation, has joined other advanced countries in the world to prioritize children and protect their fundamental human rights. He revealed the laudable effort and unwavering commitment of the country's First Lady towards the successful passage of the bill into law and equally underscored the conscientious and unanimous commitment shown by both sides in Parliament to have the bill into law and safeguard their children in Sierra Leone.

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