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17TH MARCH, 2022

**PRESS RELEASE**

**SPEAKER RECEIVES COMMUNIQUE FROM THE WOMEN OF SIERRA LEONE**

Below is a verbatim Communique that was presented by Lawyer Yasmin Jusu Sheriff to the Speaker of Sierra Leone Parliament, Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu in Committee Room One, Parliament Building on Thursday 17/03/2022, with a view to advancing the interests and concerns of women for the development of the country.

**COMMUNIQUE**

This Communique is issued by and on behalf of the Women participants meeting at the National Women's Conference held in Freetown on 16th & 17th March 2022 and sets out our final outcome document hereafter called the "The Tower Hill Declaration."

**TOWER HILL DECLARATION**

We the Women of Sierra Leone from all sixteen(16) districts & the Western Area ( Urban & Rural) meeting, at the 50/50 Group Auditorium, Tower Hill under the auspices of the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone with support from the European Union and in collaboration with ActionAid International of Sierra Leone, the Institute for Legal Research & Advocacy for Justice, Campaign for Good Governance, Trocaire, Search for Common Ground and MARWOPNET, with the Rt. Hon. Dr Abass Chernor Bundu, Speaker of the Sierra Leone Parliament as our Keynote Speaker; to be Educated, to Reflect, to Strategize and to be in solidarity with one another and with other women; on the theme: " Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) in an age of constitutional change"

Hereby declare and resolve as follows:

- The year 2022 is our time. The women of sierra Leone deserve more and better than we have had from this nation in the last sixty-two years; we have been kept waiting for too long for our inalienable human rights and equality to be recognized, protected and promoted by the Constitution and laws of Sierra Leone and now we say Enough is Enough.

- While we acknowledge and appreciate that after thirty years of advocacy, mobilisation, and struggle by women of Sierra Leone, a GEWE Bill is finally before parliament for enactment; We, however, demand a minimum 33% quota for women at all levels of leadership and governance, including parliament, local councils, political parties and paramount chieftaincy to be inserted as an entrenched clause within the Constitution of Sierra Leone
- We further demand the recognition and promotion of the capabilities of women with disabilities and their being empowered to participate in every aspect of life in Sierra Leone including within leadership
- We are calling for additional, realistic and urgent legislative amendments of the current GEWE Bill to fulfil the 13 areas highlighted in the GEWE Policy 2020 with priority on the following: educational training, particularly adult education for women, women's centred health care services; financial and economic access, equitable access to land and robust efforts to eradicate GBV;
- While we are cautiously open to the White Paper recommendation of the PR system for the next elections, we demand that any PR system be made responsive to Women's needs and our local context and must guarantee and result in meeting the minimum 33% quota, which can possibly be realised by having a zipper system of One woman and One man candidate lists;
- We are concerned about the proposal of 50%+1 to win presidential election as we believe it entrenches political polarization, deepens division and puts our electoral processes & institutions under pressure; PR can also increase the risk of corruption and malpractice and discourage consensus building and cross party dialogue.
- We note that the Government White Paper proposes that Sierra Leoneans' human rights in the Constitution be limited by 'national security' and we call for a re-consideration of this proposal as Women need more, not less, expansive rights.
- We call for the speedy enactment of economic corruption offences to protect women's access to credit and finance;
- We also demand that positions at every level in political parties go to women who must take swift action to substitute the Mainstreaming of Women in political parties in place of the current sidelining of women into political party wings
- We call for careful attention to be paid to consideration & alleviation of the concerns and anxieties that Male MPs have around the GEWE Bill and the 33% Quota; and efforts be made to secure their whole hearted support and input for attaining these important Equality provisions;
- We call for a law that will enable citizens to hold all those in power and authority accountable for gender lapses;

- We demand the immediate establishment of a Women's Commission that is established & protected in the Constitution and in GEWE Law;
- A further demand is that the Political parties must be reformed to ensure that they monitor and enforce the selection and election of capable women as MPs and local councilors who will be effective in representing their constituents;
- We call for Women and girls to be supported to transform the political, social and economic status quo of this country through training, education and skills-building
- We call for the creation of a Women's Fund for effective political participation
- In conclusion, we applaud the Government's wholehearted acceptance within the White Paper of the CRC 's recommendation to re-draft Section 27 of the 1991 Constitution to provide for gender inclusivity.

Made this 17th day of March 2022, in Freetown, Sierra Leone

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