



# PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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## PRESS RELEASE



STATEMENT BY RT. HON. DR ABASS CHERNOR BUNDU, SPEAKER OF THE SIERRA LEONE PARLIAMENT TO THE 148TH ASSEMBLY OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION (IPU) IN GENEVA ON 24 MARCH 2024

Mr President of the Assembly  
Madam President of the IPU  
Mr. Secretary-General of the IPU  
Colleague Speakers  
Members of Parliament  
Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen  
Good morning/afternoon

My delegation is delighted to be part of this 148th Assembly of the IPU here in Geneva.

As representatives of legislatures from across the globe, we meet in a spirit of shared values for strengthening parliamentary diplomacy and mutual understanding as vital ingredients of Parliamentary stability.

For this, we would like to convey our best wishes to you Mr. President for your election as President of this Assembly and also to Dr. Tulia Ackson, Speaker of the Tanzanian Parliament, for her election as President of the IPU. We are confident that you will represent Africa with high distinction.  
Mr. President

We in the Sierra Leone Parliament have had our own experience of the great value of parliamentary diplomacy and our experience in this respect is quite unique and it happened during the life of our Fifth Parliament from 2018 to 2023.

That Fifth Parliament predominantly donned all the hallmarks of a Hung Parliament where no single political party had an absolute majority. The governing party, Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), whose flagbearer was also elected as President of the Republic, won 58 seats; its main rival, the All People's Congress (APC) 59 seats; the Coalition for Change (C4C) 8 seats and the National Grand Coalition (NGC) 4 seats. There were also 3 Independent Members of Parliament and 14 Paramount Chiefs elected by a restricted franchise.

This political configuration inevitably raised question: how it was going to be possible for Parliament to pass legislation to ensure the peaceful and unfettered governance of the State.

There were resounding echoes of acrimony everywhere within the corridors of Parliament, forecasting a bipartisan relationship in which post-election tensions would be further heightened. All the auguries just did not look good and they were pointing inextricably towards the intensification of an unstable Parliament and by extension the whole country.

Parliament's ability to fulfil its solemn constitutional responsibilities, particularly its law-making powers, also came under persistent questioning. Politics, which at the best of times is adversarial and transactional; under a Hung Parliament it is inescapable that it would grow even more strident and hostile. But mercifully it did not. Somehow, perhaps one might add mysteriously, wiser counsel was able to prevail. To the surprise of many it succeeded in changing the language of conversation radically in favour of adopting constructive dialogue and consultation and these became the essential tools that underpinned the content and tone of debate throughout the life of the Fifth Parliament. In fact they got nurtured almost into art form and, depending on the occasion, they provided succour and shelter to the political leaders in Parliament in their mutual relationships and engagements and, like inseparable twins, they imperceptibly became integrated into the flow and decorum of our parliamentary diplomacy. And it did not take too long before everyone realised that no new legislation would stand any chance of passing without calling into aid the process of dialogue and consultation.

So, through parliamentary diplomacy, the Hung Parliament of 2018, conceived though it was out of existential challenges, it compelled the political leaders to cultivate an intellectual environment where the discourse became less strident and more civil and ultimately it produced an historic milestone of transformative proportions. Despite all the challenges and uncertainties of being a Hung Parliament, the Fifth Parliament was able to stamp its imprimatur on a myriad of outstandingly progressive policies and transformed them into legislation. And they weren't just ordinary laws; they were laws that were ground-breaking in character as they were designed to withstand the test of time.

So it happened that the Fifth Parliament confounded the naysayers and ended up passing 75 Bills into law; approving 66 constitutional and statutory instruments; 200 loans and grants; ratifying 60 treaties and conventions and tabling 120 committee reports. By any standard this was no mean achievement. These could not have been possible if all the parties did not agree to adopt the spirit of parliamentary diplomacy especially against the historical odds of a devastating civil war lasting 11 years.

Thus viewed, I wish to submit without exaggeration, that the Fifth Parliament of Sierra Leone should be considered as a true exemplar of the transformative power of parliamentary diplomacy; a "locus classicus"; as it were, of parliamentary diplomacy. By its prismatic light it served also as a catalyst to build bridges and transcend the horrible scars of a civil war; to heal the wounds of adversity; and to forge a future defined by shared values of sustainable peace, mutual trust, inclusivity and prosperity.

At the international level, now, more than ever, is the time to reaffirm our commitment to a future where peace must reign supreme by building bridges that connect us rather than walls that divide us; seeking understanding rather than perpetuating misunderstanding; and embracing diversity and inclusivity as a source of strength rather than a cause for division. I implore all of us to draw inspiration from the words of Nelson Mandela when he said: "It always seems impossible until it is done"

SHARED BY:

PARLIAMENTARY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE