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E-mail: [sierraleoneparliament@hotmail.com](mailto:sierraleoneparliament@hotmail.com)/[admin@parliament.gov.sl](mailto:admin@parliament.gov.sl)

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**PRESS RELEASE**



**PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE**  
**STATEMENT**

By:

Rt. Hon. Dr Abass Chernor Bundu  
Speaker of Parliament

at the  
OGP Africa-Middle East Regional Meeting

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Hon. Speakers,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I bring you greetings from the Parliament and People of Sierra Leone.
  
- Introduction: Africa and the Middle East, like the rest of the world, are today witnessing unprecedented national and international upheavals mainly stemming from popular mistrust in existing democratic and governance institutions. Therefore, we face the indomitable task of changing this worrisome reality and restoring public trust and confidence once again from civil society and the citizenry at large for the enhancement of good governance through openness, transparency, and accountability. Open Government Partnership (OGP) gives us a veritable and necessary platform to recalibrate our efforts in this direction by involving the citizenry more and more in the shaping and defining of both the current and the future through improving transparency and accountable governance and using evolving technology in this regard.
  
- Background. Since becoming OGP's 65th member in 2013, Sierra Leone has been active in developing and implementing four (4) National Action Plans so far. In varying degrees, with the advent of the Legislative arm in 2019, our activism has grown in leaps and bounds. Parliament today is not only an active player in using the OGP mechanism, it is also working in partnership with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, CSO partners, and the Government in the co-creation process of National Action Plans.
  
- The Implementation of NAP 3. The implementation of NAP 3 in particular was seriously dogged by the sudden appearance of COVID-19 and its negative impact on the work of partners and the economy of Sierra Leone, yet there has been sustained political support for OGP and stronger collaboration and coordination with CSOs. Because of these fundamentals, incremental progress was palpable in the implementation of our NAP 3 (2019 – 2021). From the 8 commitments, 4 received substantial implementation around access to information, gender, open parliament, records and archives management whilst 3 commitments received limited implementation around access to justice, education, and beneficial ownership. The only exemption was the commitment relating to tax exemption.
  
- Ladies and Gentlemen, though two years, might seem too short a period to measure the impact of any reforms, in the implementation of NAP 3, Government was able to:
  - Develop a comprehensive duty waiver and tax exemption policy through the Ministry of Finance and the National Revenue Authority and this policy makes provision for six monthly publications of tax exemptions.
  - In August 2020 Parliament enacted an Amendment expunging the infamous Criminal Libel law from the 1965 Public Order Act, decriminalising libel and thus opening up the civic space for promoting

freedom of expression and allowing journalists to freely practice their trade and do their work. In the latest MCC Scorecard, Sierra Leone is rated at 90% for freedom of information.

- In October 2021 Parliament also passed a law abolishing the death penalty.
- In November 2021 Parliament again passed a new Cyber Security and Crime Act.
- Since the advent of the Fifth Parliament of the Republic in 2018, all debates in the plenary of Parliament are unrestricted for broadcast by both public and private radio and television nationwide. This has helped to raise public awareness in no small measure of the valuable work of Parliament and Parliamentarians.
- To protect women, particularly the girl child, Parliament in 2019 passed a Sexual Offences Amendment Act increasing the penalty for rape and sexual penetration of minors from 15 years to life imprisonment.
- In September 2022 a new Public Elections Act 2022 became law. It makes provision for a strong gender-sensitive reform amongst other things. This Act now prescribes mandatorily for a minimum of one female amongst every 3 nominees for parliamentary elections put forward by political parties. This has the potential to significantly increase women's representation in Parliament from the present 16 female ordinary members (12%) to as many as 44 ordinary members (33%) after the 2023 general elections.
- There is a seeming political will on the part of the Presidency to appoint women to as much as 30% of appointive positions in Government soon to be enacted in a new Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment Bill 2022.
- Again, in September 2022, Parliament passed into law two critical pieces of legislation, the Customary Land Rights Act & the Land Commission Act. They are designed to empower and remove deep inequalities and discrimination against women in the ownership and control of land in their own right, especially in the provinces. By these laws, local landowners can now negotiate the value of their lands with investors and prevent them from being leased out without their express consent. These laws also made provisions for the establishment of Land Use Committees with a membership of at least 30% women and the Committees are vested with the authority to make decisions about how community lands should be managed.
- In the area of Parliamentary openness, Parliament commenced the implementation of the Parliament Open Day in 2019; developed a digital App to increase citizen's interaction with Parliament through mobile phones; erected a ramp to improve access to the physically-challenged; established a cross-party OGP Steering Committee to work together to support OGP initiatives and to raise public awareness of OGP among their constituents. These achievements are well recorded in the OGP's Independent Review Mechanism Report as well as in the Parliamentary Network Africa Open Parliament Index (OPI) Report of July 2022. The latter Report ranked the Sierra Leone Parliament as the 3rd best among 13 West African Countries embracing Open Parliament.
- There has also been significant improvement in Sierra Leone's budget credibility, oversight, and public accountability. This is evidenced by the following concrete actions:

Parliament established a functioning Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) that is presently supporting MPs on macroeconomic and fiscal analyses targeted at improving the quality of debate on the budget in Parliament.

Parliament has also introduced a new approach to approving the budget of the State. From the usual seven subcommittees of the Committee of Supply to a sectoral-based system as required by international best practice.

In this connection the 2021 Open Budget Survey of 120 countries carried out by the International Budget Partnership, Sierra Leone was rated at 45% just behind Ghana in budget transparency in the sub-regional rankings bringing it at par with the global average score. The same Survey scored Sierra Leone on public participation in the budgeting process within the sub-region at 31% putting the country at the highest. Overall Sierra Leone was ranked 64 out of 120 countries.

- In the area of education, the Government of Sierra Leone has continued to invest substantially in its flagship project of Free Quality Education. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Schools has introduced an online result checker for students and parents alike to access examination results at no cost. The latest Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) 2022 Scorecard has rated Sierra Leone at 92% on Primary Education Expenditures.

- In the fight against corruption, Sierra Leone continues to make significant progress. The MCC Scorecard has rated Sierra Leone at 79% in 2019, 81% in 2020, and 83% in 2021. In Transparency International CPI the country jumped 14 places from 129 in 2018 to 115 in 2021. Under the non-conviction-based assets recovery, the ACC recovered upwards of Le40Bn (over \$2.2m) from corrupt officials. The Commission is currently sharing its best practice with other countries worldwide. Buttressing this activity, in August 2022, Parliament passed the Mines and Minerals Development Act containing an element of 'beneficial ownership disclosure' making it mandatory for persons with 5% equity to disclose information to enable the government to trace fraudsters who ordinarily would hide behind the corporate veil to defraud the country.

- Reenergized by these achievements, Sierra Leone's 4th NAP (2021-2023) is built on the successes and lessons learnt from NAP 3. More specifically, NAP 4 is anchored on four (4) commitments bordering on Open Parliament, Access to Justice, Open Elections, and Open Extractives.

- Distinguished Delegates, as you may have noted, I am sure you will all agree that the public trust in public institutions in Sierra Leone is most crucial and fundamental. Although it seemed to have taken flight from Sierra Leone in yesteryears, it is now slowly but assuredly returning. This, however, is not to say the process of implementation of the Open Parliament Commitment in NAP 3 has been entirely devoid of challenges. For example, there is still work in progress especially around the CSO's engagement with Parliament. The CSOs have raised concerns about the levels of parliamentary transparency and accountability. Because we are only 11 months into the implementation of NAP 4, I would like to zoom in on commitment one- 'Open Parliament' only to demonstrate the level of real progress Sierra Leone is striving to make in its implementation of NAP 4.

- Of the 8 milestones bordering around regular engagement and constructive dialogue with CSOs; establishing a CSO Desk in Parliament to facilitate and enhance citizens' inputs in the legislative process; reforming and strengthening the budget-making process; CSO & MPs training in collaborative

working; joint oversight work with CSOs; scaling up parliamentary service charters in the provinces; setting up a digital system for prime time analysis of citizens accessing parliament; publication of the annual report of Parliament in parliament website & parliamentary app, the following are some of the actions we have already taken:

- With regard to the institutionalization of OGP in the administration of Parliament.
  - (i) Parliament has integrated OGP core values within its new Strategic Plan (2021-2025). Goal 4 of the Plan, for example, reinforces building relationships with the citizenry.
  - (ii) OGP Secretariat in Parliament is now in situ to support the work of the OGP Working Group (i.e. a cross-party political group).
- The Leadership of Parliament has approved the establishment of a CSO Desk in Parliament with an agreed TOR. Commitment has been secured from Westminster Foundation for Democracy to support the work of the CSO Desk in the implementation of the Communiqué signed on 18 August 2021 between 52 CSOs and Parliament.
- Recommendations for increasing the involvement of CSOs in the national budgeting process are now before the Standing Order Committee of Parliament for consideration.
- Unlike 2020, the 2021 Annual Summary Report of Parliament is already on the Parliament website.
- Parliament has successfully implemented the 2022 Open Day using a new approach that linked the event to cover the entire country using regional portals. This was a phenomenal improvement compared to previous Open Days.

#### Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen, for the everyday life of Parliamentary democracy now and in the future to become meaningful and transformative, it must be anchored on regaining the people's trust. This overarching value underpins the very *raison d'être* of Parliamentary democracy, now and in the future. Sierra Leone's pre-eminence so far is strong and is supremely confident and determined to ascend even greater heights of achievement in the near future especially in the critical areas we have highlighted for further action and improvement.

Let me now conclude this presentation by expressing our warmest thanks and appreciation to the Government of His Majesty King Mohamed VI under whose patronage we are meeting, to His Excellency Mr. Rachid Talbi Alami, President of the House of Representatives and to the entire House of Representatives for their generous hospitality and for excellent facility provided for the hosting of this OGP Africa and Middle East Regional Meeting in this exquisite setting of Marrakesh.

Thank you, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, for your kind attention.