



PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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PRESS RELEASES



STATEMENT TO WELCOME THE HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF THE ALL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS (APC) TO THE SIXTH PARLIAMENT OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC AFTER THE JUNE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS
BY

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SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT
7 NOVEMBER 2023

Honourable Members,

Like the seminal date of July 13, 2023, when the Members of Parliament of the ruling SLPP Party subscribed the oath of office, today, November 7, 2023, marks yet another milestone in the life of this Sixth Parliament of the Second Republic. 52 Members of the Opposition APC Party who had followed the dictates of their Party to boycott Parliament have today also subscribed the oath office as Members of Parliament. I therefore consider it a great honour to welcome all of you to this hallowed and sacred Chamber of Parliament.

Honourable Members

Permit me to start with the question: what kept you away? On several occasions I tried to plead with you to see reason and come to the House to perform the sacred constitutional duties for which you had been elected by your people. Instead you chose to stonewall. You should have come a long time ago just as your honourable colleagues across the aisle did on July 13, and also as your Party comrades, Hon. Mohamed Bangura and Hon. Alfred Thompson, had done so gloriously. Although nearly four months late in arriving, nonetheless it's better late than never. More especially, I feel deeply gratified that my urgings didn't fall on deaf ears entirely and today this Sixth Parliament can proudly say its whole membership is now fully seated and in full conformity with the multiparty democratic Constitution of 1991; a Constitution that vehemently

and vigorously eschews any return to anything even remotely resembling the one-party dispensation of yesteryears that it had ingloriously banished to the nauseating attics of history.

Therefore, I should hasten to pay a very special tribute to the dogged determination and perseverance of the Independent Commission on Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC) for living up to its legal mandate and to the expectations of the general public. Differences of opinion, perception and persuasion in the political arena, by definition, form an integral part of any truly functioning and vibrant democracy and therefore it is of the utmost importance that national institutions are established and capacitated to speedily enter into the breach and provide the much needed relief where such party differences occur and particularly importantly where such party differences exhibit the potential of exploding into a national crisis and possible violence. So, all of us, the Executive Branch and the Legislature alike, today deserve the fullest commendation for having had the foresight to propose and legislate into existence the ICPNC which has worked tirelessly to bring about this exalted and much desired outcome. All of us therefore should applaud their timely intervention.

By the same token, I would like to convey, on behalf of the entire House, our profound appreciation and our debt of gratitude to the special peace envoys deployed to our country by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union and the Commonwealth Secretariat, all of whom had spared no effort in discharging their collective role as international interlocutors and moral guarantors to ensure the successful outcome of the dialogue between the ruling SLPP Government and the APC Opposition which today has been consummated by our colleagues from the APC agreeing to terminate their boycott and to assume their seats in the Well of this House to begin the process of discharging their constitutional responsibilities to the Sixth Parliament of the Second Republic to which they have been duly elected by their people.

Nor can afford to not acknowledge the presence in our midst of the indefatigable Hon. Chernor Ramadan Maju Bah, erstwhile Deputy Speaker of this House and former Leader of the APC Opposition in the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic. Indeed no meritorious accomplishments can be properly paid to the Fifth Parliament without a resounding and fulsome acknowledgement of the pivotal role of the Hon. Chernor Bah. Not only was his contribution profound as an illustrious Member of this House and the ECOWAS Parliament but also his exemplary and visionary leadership throughout his tenure as a Member of this House have left an indelible imprint in the annals of our legislative history. Let truth be loudly and boldly told, Honourable Chernor Bah you are a man who is sorely missed in this hallowed Chamber as well as within every corridor of this House.

I turn next to the quintessential Honourable Ibrahim Ben Kargbo. It is most apposite that I should unhesitatingly describe you as both the political encyclopaedia of Sierra Leone and a true first edition of all that stands out as remarkably good of the APC Party, the archetypal Alpha and Omega of Parliamentary politics. On behalf of this entire House I commend you and extend to you our very best wishes for a joyful, peaceful, restful and well-earned retirement.

Last but by no means least I turn now to the affable, tall and elegant Honourable Ajibola Manly-Spain. This is a man of many admirable qualities. His gentility, humility, and even his every slow but majestic steps still re-echo resoundingly throughout the portals of this hallowed Building, and the ECOWAS Parliament as well, with legendary wisdom and tenacity. True, in an age of renewal in any rapidly changing society, it is inevitable that there must come a time when the old has to give way to the young. Indeed one of the most difficult tasks in politics is not how to acquire power but how to transfer it to a new generation of leaders. More difficult still is for leaders to deliberately create new and able leaders to systematically take over from the older when the time comes. But if I were asked to appraise the redoubtable Ajibola Manly-Spain on his character, ability, reliability and strength to connect and influence people, I would say without a doubt that only a handful of men would be able to match him.

Honourable Members,

These three Honourable Members have truly left their marks on the floor of this Chamber and the least homage we can and should all pay them is to say you all carry with you to the rest of the world our most abiding love, respect and affection. Posterity will never forget to chronicle that indeed you once passed through this way.

Honourable Members,

Today, as we welcome our APC colleagues from the shadows into the limelight of Parliamentary politics and banter, let me take this opportunity to remind them that Sierra Leone is at a most critical stage where human capital and economic development have now taken centre stage and indeed are now the topmost priorities. It is indeed a formidable task to accomplish. And it is a task that beckons for attention from all: from all able bodied men and women, the old and young, the lettered and unlettered, the high and low, no matter where you are, at home or abroad, in every nook and cranny of this land that we love so much. It also means it is not a task for one political party alone; on the contrary, it is a task for all of us working together but more importantly with us the Honourable Members of this Parliament taking the lead. Above all I believe it is a task that is doable and achievable so long as our constant refrain is that Sierra Leone is and will always remain our only country and there's no other country we can call our own.

Honourable Members,

Before I delve into the nature of the task in hand, allow me to recall here a little instructive lesson of contemporary history to refresh our minds. Our country, Sierra Leone, obtained its political independence from our British colonizer in 1961, four good years ahead of Singapore, a comparatively small island country in Southeast Asia, which attained its statehood in 1965. It was and still is inhabited by a much smaller population than ours, consisting of Chinese, Malays, Indians and others. So it is not any less heterogeneous than we are in Sierra Leone. But there is this remarkable difference. Singapore had nothing, literally no natural resource at independence apart from human beings and a deep sea harbour, just as we have our own Deep Water Quay. But we in Sierra Leone have a lot more assets to be proud of: we are endowed with gold, diamonds, iron ore, bauxite, tantalite, rutile, palm oil, palm kernel, etc. etc. You name it, we have it.

Yet, in 1961, Sierra Leone's per capita income was only \$140 and its annual GDP was \$328 million.

Singapore's per capita in 1965 was \$517 and its annual GDP was \$975 million. By 2022, sixty years on, Sierra Leone's per capita income was still only \$488 and an annual GDP of not more than \$3,970 million compared to Singapore's per capita income of \$82,808 and an annual GDP of \$466,789 million. Today, with this galaxy of notables gathered in this Well of Parliament from both our two main political parties, I cannot resist the temptation to ask the question: where did we go wrong? It is certainly not for want of human capital, because we once prided ourselves with the accolade of the "Athens of Education" in West Africa although today we lament how that has plummeted to such low levels that the young at school are not ashamed to think they have a Divine right to spy to pass public examinations and our public servants are equally busy embellishing the desks of their offices with Degrees and Diplomas, not properly earned, but purchased from non-accredited "Dominion" Colleges with high sounding names. So while Singapore was busy obtaining laurels and moving up the development ladder rapidly from a Third World classification to a First World, Sierra Leone has remained behind wallowing in abject poverty and deprivation and fighting with other countries and hoping for the crumbs to fall from the dinner tables of rich countries.

Honourable Members

With all the brilliant minds we have produced in this country, past and present, where really have we gone wrong?

To answer this question, I will invite all of us present in this Well today to borrow a leaf from Singapore's enviable Book of Development.

First, they gave the highest national priority to educating and training their people to the highest standard. They sent them to the best of the best colleges everywhere at home and abroad and they got them

bonded on scholarships that obligated them to return and work for Singapore after graduation. The success of this scheme reached such a point that those who went to the United States, the country with the stiffest requirements in the world for a visa, relaxed their entry requirements for Singaporeans because no Singapore graduate wanted ever to remain permanently in America after graduation because the salaries waiting for them at home were much higher than they could earn in America.

Second, Singapore challenged their citizens to imbibe a sense of patriotism that was second to none. Those who have studied with Singaporeans in colleges abroad can testify to this. A student from Singapore aspires to nothing but a first class honours degree and the day he gets it he is on the next plane back to Singapore.

Third, Singapore developed a culture of appointing to high office people of proven competence and leadership based on meritocracy. Nepotism and cronyism died the very day that an independent Singapore was born and they have remained permanently in their graves to this day. Remember, Honourable Members, how serious this principle is respected in a country with such a small population that everybody virtually knows everybody else. Amazingly, this is a country where their development plans are tailored to run for decades and they are executed to the last detail and it matters not who or which political party is in power.

Fourth, in Singapore the culture of incorruptibility is second to none. Their leaders don't govern; they lead and they also peremptorily lead by example. The first Prime Minister, Lee Kwan Yew, was once accused of corruption by a British newspaper in England. What did he do? He sued the newspaper for defamation but interestingly he sued not in Singapore but in the British Courts and he won. That in itself speaks volumes about the character of the man.

Honourable Members

I narrate all this simply to demonstrate the essential ingredients which combined to produce the phenomenal economic development of Singapore. But it also points to another simple truth. Singapore has achieved its phenomenal development and growth over the last 60 years not by luck or happenstance but rather through good and transformative leadership that is highly educated, locally-driven, focused, motivated, dedicated, purposeful and incorruptible. This is the new challenge facing us today in this Sixth Parliament and it confronts all of us equally regardless of party colour or affiliation. I invite all of us to emulate the good example that Singapore presents and it's not yet too late to do so. It may sound like a feat of serendipitous proportions but it's not impossible. Together we can do it and achieve it!

Honourable Members

I thank you all for your kind attention