



# PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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## PRESS RELEASES



### US AMBASSADOR REASSURES SPEAKER ON BILATERAL RELATIONS

The new United States Ambassador to Sierra Leone, His Excellency Bryan D. Hunt, on Monday 9 October 2023, paid a courtesy call on the Rt. Hon. Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu.

During the meeting in the office of the Speaker in Parliament at Tower Hill in Freetown, a wide range of important bilateral issues were discussed as well as the participation of the Opposition APC Members of Parliament in the governance of the State.

In his opening statement, the United States Ambassador said he visited the Speaker to pay his respects before the House resumed from its Recess on 12 October and also to learn about the key matters ahead for debate in the upcoming sessions.

The Ambassador also spoke about identifying the way forward for the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact. He revealed that the MCC was on course and that a team had recently engaged with the Government of President Bio on what further needed to be done to progress through to the successful realisation of the MCC approval from its Board and the United States Congress.

In light of the engagement with the MCC team, the Ambassador further informed the Speaker that they had agreed on the way forward to commence a dialogue with the Opposition on 16/10/2023. He added

that the President had expressed the hope to see a lot of electoral and constitutional reforms in collaboration with the Opposition and went on to acknowledge the strategic role of the Speaker in that regard.

While referring to the dialogue, the US Ambassador categorically told the Speaker that the MCC had very strict policies to be followed before disbursing the compact funding for energy, for example.

He expressed the hope for a successful outcome of the dialogue as he would want to see the Opposition in attendance when the Parliament resumes its session on 12/10/2023

Sharing experiences on the boycott of Parliament, the Ambassador told the Speaker of Parliament that the US had never had a situation where large numbers of the Congressmen failed to come and represent their people. He also asked a series of questions, relating to penalties for boycotts.

Ambassador Bryan D. Hunt agreed with the Speaker on the necessity to build a formal relationship between the United States Congress and the Parliament of Sierra Leone to share experiences.

Responding earlier, the Speaker heartily welcomed the Ambassador and depicted their utmost desire for United States support. "We always look to the United States for a meaningful relationship as a friend", he responded. He noted that the MCC is a critical issue and articulated the hope for a positive outcome.

Responding to questions relating to the boycott, the Hon. Speaker recalled his efforts to persuade the APC MPs to come to Parliament and also assured the Ambassador that their positions in Parliament and the Standing Committees were reserved. "Their side of Parliament is reserved for them alone, and even in the composition of the standing committees" he disclosed and reaffirmed. He categorically stated that he could not really fully understand why the Opposition was still refusing to come to Parliament and instead had settled for a boycott that would most certainly yield no positive results or dividends in politics. "Dialogue between political parties within Parliament is and will always remain a better option".

He added that it would have been more prudent for the Opposition to seek redress in Court as stipulated by law but they didn't and rather chose the poor substitute of a boycott. The Speaker however articulated optimism that the Opposition would see good reason to abandon their boycott and come and discharge their constitutional duty to represent their people in Parliament. The Speaker further explained the legal consequences of failure by elected MPs to take their seats after the effluxion of 30 sittings of Parliament.

Responding to the expected sessions with regards to the parliamentary calendar, the Speaker said there would be the passing of legislation, holding the executive to account, and that it is likely to call Ministers of Government for questioning at the plenary.

He said the Opposition has a critical role to play and that two-thirds of the MPs were required to amend the Constitution of the Country, adding that the composition of the present Parliament can perform other functions and responsibilities. "97 MPs have so far subscribed the oath of office, 81 for the ruling SLPP, 2 Opposition APC and 14 Paramount Chiefs MPs, and three more MPs are needed to reach the two-thirds" he disclosed. The Speaker categorically vehemently informed the US Ambassador that, by the laws of Sierra Leone, the Opposition MPs that were boycotting had only ten more sittings for the expiration of their seats. He used the opportunity to ask the US Ambassador to use his good offices to intercede with the Opposition to see reason and that he was ready and willing to welcome them as MPs at any time within the ambit of the period allowed by the Constitution.

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