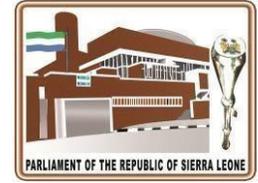




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**PRESS RELEASE**

**PARLIAMENT CONTINUES DEBATE ON THE PUBLIC ELECTIONS ACT 2022**

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Thursday 14/07/2022 continued debates on the bill entitled "The Public Elections Act 2022".

The Bill seeks to repeal and replace the Public Election Act, 2022 (Act No.4 of 2012), to provide for supplementary provisions to section 32 and 33 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 (Act No. 6 of 1991).

Before the commencement of the debate, the Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu announced that he has received an Assent copy from the Presidency on Section (2) and (8 ) of subsection 32 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone which was recently amended by the Parliament of Sierra Leone.

In his submission to the debate, Hon. Abdul Kargbo highlighted the important nature of the bill before the House. He recalled on election violence that occurred in Constituency 110 bye-election in the Western Area Rural District, which he said contravened election laws. He opposed the proposal in the Bill for the cancellation of votes during violence and also opposed the National Identification Number (NIN) proposal in the current Bill for the Voter' Register for the 2023 elections, "This violates the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone", he concluded.

He used the opportunity to highlight several discrepancies in the Bill that are against the Constitution, citing the proposed Proportional Representation (PR). He urged his Colleague MPs not to go against the Constitution of Sierra Leone.

Hon. Ibrahim Tawa Conteh recalled how government, passed a law in Parliament that contravened the 1991 Constitution and noted that the database of the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) has more than six million registered Sierra Leoneans. He said the NIN in the proposed Bill is not contravening the Constitution of Sierra Leone. He said President Bio's Administration is mindful of the Constitution of Sierra Leone. "Nobody is introducing PR and NIN, everything is part of the Constitution". he asserted.

On women's empowerment, he said women had suffered injustices in the country. He underscored the point that women should be empowered in the governance system of the country.

The Acting Leader of NGC, Hon. Foday Mario Kamara congratulated the NEC Commissioner for conducting the recent bye-election in Tonkolili District with fairness. He said the proposed Bill before the House is not so bad, but highlighted the negative effects of using the NIN for voter registration, "The NIN is dangerous for our electoral process", he asserted.

On her part, Hon. Catherine Zainab Tarawally referenced a previous speaker, in tandem with NCRA and opined that it was misleading. According to her, the law must be respected. The MP told the Attorney General and Minister of Justice that she had problems with certain clauses in the Bill, adding that there are problems with definitions in light of the content. She asked rhetorical question as to what they were repealing, and begged the House to amend the Act just as they did to the Sexual Offences Act.

Further, she asked the whereabouts of the Gender Empowerment Bill, advancing some contentions. She said in light of percentage quota for women in the Bill, women were not recognized. According to her, the Bill can not stand the test of time, if passed into law. "We want our percentage to be placed in our own Bill, the Gender Empowerment Bill" she informed. She raised a series of concerns and questions regarding the temporary feature of women in the Bill and went on to say the Clause is not safe for women adding the Bill only makes provision for female Members of Parliament and not other women in the various walks of life.

Hon. Musa Fofana spoke about election offences in the Bill and went on to recall incidences. He used the opportunity to give reference to the Local Government system, relative to the Bill. He advised the Minister to popularize the Bill, especially on electoral offences in various languages. He also informed that issues surrounding women were critical and called on the Attorney General and Minister of Justice to bring the Gender Empowerment Bill. He said they would continue to support and advise where necessary.

Hon. Alpha Amadu Bah said there were several provisions contained in the Bill that would affect the National Constitution. He insisted that, they are clauses that would affect the National Constitution and therefore requested the Attorney General and Minister of Justice to bring another constitutional instrument to support the amendment. He made reference to some Clauses in the Bill would affect of the Constitution, in light of the composition of MPs. "We must not pass this Bill" he stated. He also continued to point out areas in the Bill that would contravene the National Constitution "I want to submit humbly that this Bill must pass with a two-thirds vote " he stated.

He said the issue of PR amendment is different and advanced references that are in contradiction to the Bill including the date for elections, boundary delimitation and constituencies.

An Independent MP from Kailahun District, Hon. Emelia Lolloh Tongi commended the Minister and spoke about the election of the heads of the villages. She also spoke about the percentage of reserved seats in the Bill, adding they are trying to create an avenue for female leadership in the future. She appealed to colleague MPs to be considerate and support the women to ascend to leadership. "Women need more than 30% of seats" she concluded.

Hon. Kadijatu Davies thanked Attorney General and Minister of Justice for bringing the Bill, but said the PR system would disenfranchise the electorates. She insisted that they should not interface with their MPs and ask the question why now. She informed that, the continuation of the Constituency System is prudent and raised concerns about electoral violence.

On the reserved seats for women, she said let there be separate document like the independent Gender Bill and also spoke on violence against women.

Hon. Dr. Sheku Munir Turay said the county is dynamic and must match with the laws. He referenced the 2012 Elections Act and went on with comparative analysis, adding that the content is almost the same. He said the changes in the new Bill are reflective of the dynamics. According to him, they always make good laws, but sometimes they argued unnecessarily. He informed that there are good things in the law and asked colleague MPs to be nationalistic and realistic in the process. He referred to various elections malpractices and how the Bill intends to address them. He used the opportunity to applaud women in light of their support for nation-building and asked the House to support their empowerment. "Let us sometimes present out issues during committee stage" he stated.

Hon. Miatta Amara said the Attorney General and Minister of Justice should have engaged the MPs before presenting the Bill. According to her, the Bill is not national friendly. She also raised concern over NCRA registrations, adding that the officers were conducting the process with faulty machines and raised concerns over the right of new voters. She went on to note that the Bill is not protecting women. According to her, the PR system came in a haste. She categorically preferred the Gender Bill to that of the safe seats in the Bill. She insisted that they do not need 30% but women's protection.

The PR system she said would bring more wage Bills and called on all to be patriotic. "This Bill is a woof in the sheep's clothing" she concluded.

On his part the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas recalled when the Bill initially came to Parliament and urged colleague MPs to pass the Bill. He said 90% of the Bill is made up of the 2012 elections Act, adding it is only trying to upgrade the Act. According to him, the Bill came based on the recommendation of the election monitors during the 2018 elections. According to him, the MPs were misled by bloggers, but the Bill is good. He asked colleague MPs to look at the Bill as it is, adding that would make the removal of electoral commissioners very difficult and informed that the Bill gives definitive date for national elections.

He continued to refer to issues that are very important including nomination fees for candidates. The provisions he said were not undemocratic as portrayed by social media "Interestingly, people think that this is the Bill that is going to re-elect President Bio" he stated and went on to say, they have the requirement to win the election. He also denounced some previous female MPs who debated against the 30% quota. He said there are enough opportunities provided by this government for women.

The Deputy Speaker made mention of some clauses in the document regarding over-voting and cancellation and also recalled his visit in one country and how peaceful their election was and went on to denounce violence.

"Don't hide behind technicalities" he said and informed that, the Bill is upgrading the electoral process.

He decried the previous debater for referring to the Constitution without a proviso, adding that it was disingenuous. He went on to state that, the Bill is consolidating the election of the village head.

He said the impression created around the Bill is shocking and informed that, there is too much garbage on social media regarding the Bill. "There is not much that this Bill has added to the already existing law" he stated.

This PR system he said does not lie with Parliament again and went on to categorically state that it is with the President. "It cannot be determined by Parliament anymore. It does not lie under the purview of Parliament" he affirmed.

He insisted that, the days of funny propaganda are gone. He said when bills are brought to Parliament, let them be passed with decency. He informed that the Bill would engender peaceful elections. In order to avoid violence he also denounced the conduct of political rallying in the Capital Freetown.

Hon. Agibola Marley Spain denounced the immediate speaker on his statement about stopping rally in the capital Freetown and supported the position of Hon. Amadu Alpha Bah. The MP insisted on the process to be done through the amendment of the National Constitution. He said the ruling party must go by the required process of the Constitution, in light of the PR system and raised concerns and advanced reason for that. "Go through the correct process" he informed and explained the disadvantages of the PR system. He said there was also inception that they were not supporting women's empowerment, but urged the ruling party to do it the right way, by amending the Constitution. He also informed that the provision in the Bill about over voting and violence does not align with the Constitution.

Hon Francis Amara Kaisamba said the issues in the Bill are crucial, critical, and very important. He advised colleague MPs to do justice to the Bill.

The independence of commissioners is also very important and highlighted other important issues in the Bill and said they hinge on peace and security of the state.

He recalled the illegal cancellation of votes in 2007 and went on to say this Bill would address the mistakes. He appealed to all MPs to be nationalistic in the process to help the electoral commission for Sierra Leone.

Hon. Rugiatu R. Conteh said the Bill would have consequences on millions of Sierra Leoneans and went on to say that, more powers have been vested in the Electoral Commission. She recalled how women have been intimidated and harassed in elections, adding that the Bill is too vague about women and their protection. "What we need is a safe space and Women's empowerment". She asserted.

For the PR system, she said they want to take the power of the constituents and give it to the political parties, adding that they are destroying the participation of the people and this would undermine democracy. She also decried MPs on the ruling side that did not consult with their people. "The PR system will leave our people like drunkard giants working the legs of a mosquito" she maintained. For NRCA registration she said many people would be disenfranchised and went on to oppose the inconsistency. "She said the women of Sierra Leone need the Gender Empowerment Bill" adding that the Bill is not properly before them.

Hon. Abdul Muniru Lansana said his contribution would clarify the confusion created around the Bill. The MP pointed out the importance of the side notes in the Bill including registration, and voting in tandem with the 1991 Constitution. The MP also spoke about the advantages of the PR system and clarified the process. He also measured women's position in the Bill.

Hon. Alice Kumabe spoke about over-voting and used the opportunity to ask for more punitive actions to be put in place for those that go against the election laws and support safe seat for women's participation in politics.

Hon. Neneh Lebbie recalled goodwill messages from women of Bo City and insisted their support and participation in governance. She also lauded the efforts of some organizations in support of women on same direction. She referred to the Bill as a springboard that would help women gain more powers. The MP said the Bill would encourage women to come on board.

She recalled how rigorous it was for her in contesting with 7 men and wouldn't like that to happen to other women. She used the opportunity to encourage grassroots food sellers especially the "cockeryseller" to participate in politics side by side with men. "I want to support this Bill on behalf of our women folks" she maintained.

Hon. Dr. Unpha S.G.Koroma said the Bill seeks to change the dynamic of the election and would disenfranchise the people's participation. He spoke about the right to register and decried previous debaters on the NCRA registration process. The MP spoke about the inconsistencies surrounding the process and informed that, it would rob the people of the country. The safe

seats, he said would not be good for the people and it is vague in the Bill. The people he said would lose the opportunity to participate in the election. He recalled the previous arrival of the Bill and informed that, what is before them is contrary to what was initially brought to them.

Hon. Sahr Charles said the Bill would contravene the Constitution and informed that, women must be empowered to participate in the development of the state. He referred to the 2012 parent Act in light of the participation in registration and qualifications, adding that, it is very straightforward and clear, but raised concerns over the Bill before them especially with regards the NCRA number. He said the people of Sierra Leone 'are saying no to proportional representation', adding that they did consult his people. According to him, he did a consultation on the PR system and the people are rejecting it.

The Leader of C4C, Hon. Saa Emerson Lamina decried the immediate previous speaker on the statement about consultation as misleading, adding that he did a consultation in Kono through a radio simulcast and most stakeholders supported the PR system.

Hon. Ibrahim Koyo Kamara said he was making necessary corrections to previous debaters on the Bill. The reserved seats provision, he said was very clear in the Bill. For Proportional Representation, the MP said the system is the best for entire process and added that it would speak to the popular vote and would create room for smaller political parties' participation.

The MP said the Bill made it very clear for the registration of voters process especially with the incorporation of the National Registration number.

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