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ECOWAS PARLIAMENT

COUNTRY REPORT OF THE SIERRA LEONE
DELEGATION TO THE ECOWAS
PARLIAMENT

MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION

1. Hon. Chernor R.M. Bah – Leader of Delegation
2. Hon. Sidi M. Tunis- Deputy Leader of Delegation
3. Hon. Ajibola Manley-Spain
4. Hon. Veronica K. Sesay
5. Hon. Shiaka M. Sama

Rt. Honourable Speaker,

Honourable Members,

I would like to convey, on behalf of my Delegation, fraternal greetings from the government and people of Sierra Leone to the Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members, and to the federal government and people of Nigeria. I am delighted to share with you the following highlights:

I. POLITICAL SITUATION

In August, 2019, following violent clashes between supporters of the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the main opposition party, the All People's Congress (APC), in bye-elections, the Sierra Leone Parliament held a leadership retreat in the southern city of Bo, where the Bo Declaration was signed. By adopting and launching the Bo Declaration, members of the 5th Parliament have committed to work in harmony, irrespective of political affiliation, to respect parliamentary procedures, promote sincere consultations with political parties and other stakeholders and to depoliticize the administration of Parliament. On 12th September, 2019, former President Ernest Koroma paid a courtesy call on President Julius Maada Bio at State House in a move to improve inter-party dialogue and promote political tolerance. These interventions have helped to improve the relationship between the SLPP and the opposition political parties. Subsequent bye-elections have been generally peaceful.

II. HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

1. Status of Operations of the National Human Rights Commission/Agency

The Human Right Commission of Sierra Leone is the body responsible for protecting and promoting human rights in Sierra Leone. Human rights in Sierra Leone have been in a rather deplorable state, but have improved gradually with the return of democracy in 2002 after a decade of civil war. Among the major human rights violations in Sierra Leone today are rape, societal discrimination and violence against women, child abuse, trafficking in persons, harsh conditions in prisons, abuse of labour and land rights, police brutality, detentions without trial, insufficient legal representation and prolonged delays in trials. The Human Right Commission has been making frantic efforts to improve the situation of human rights through mediation, close monitoring of detention centres and investigation of reported cases. Two cases

worth mentioning are the Commission's intervention in the release of a young sierra leonean inmate at the Kenema Correctional Centre who had been under detention for 12 years without trial on allegations of conspiracy, larceny and burglary. In another matter, the Commission also caused the release of a vessel and six foreign crew members after they were detained by the Criminal Investigation Department in Freetown for more than a month on suspicion that they were engaged in criminal activities.

2. Protection of the Rights of Children and Women

In response to rampant cases of rape and other forms of violence against women, the First Lady, Mrs Fatima Bio, has embarked on a district-level "Hands Off our Girls" campaign, which seeks to end Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, with emphasis on rape. She has been appealing to religious and traditional leaders to stop promoting child marriage and warned parents against compromising cases of rape in the name of safeguarding family unity. Through her campaign, the First Lady has been raising public awareness on the social, economic and health impacts of sexual violence against girls.

The Sexual Offenses Act 2012 was amended on 19th September, 2019. The Act sets the age of consent at 18. The new law criminalises sexual harassment and marital rape, and has increased the maximum penalty for rape and sexual penetration of a child from fifteen years to life imprisonment.

The President, Rtd. Brig. Gen. Julius Maada Bio, on 7th September, 2019 commissioned 327 female soldiers into the Sierra Leone Armed Forces, the first time the Sierra Leone Army has recruited an all-female batch of soldiers since 1978. The all-female recruitment drive was in adherence to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations which call for 30% female representation in every public sector. The move was also to facilitate the fulfillment of the UN policy which requires that all peacekeeping contingents must include 15% of females.

In 2018, the Parliament of Sierra Leone, in collaboration with development partners, sent a study mission of female parliamentarians and their male champions to Rwanda and Kenya to find out how Sierra Leone could use affirmative action to grant at least 30% representation to women in Parliament and in other decision-making bodies. The resolutions of the study mission were

presented to the President this year. President Bio has expressed the political will to support initiatives that would empower women in Sierra Leone.

3. Freedom of the Press, Right to Access Information, Freedom of Assembly and Protests

The government has been widely commended for the unprecedented political will it has demonstrated to repeal the obnoxious criminal and seditious libel law which has been an obstacle to press freedom. Cabinet approved the repeal of the law and the Law Officers' Department has drafted the bill, which we hope will eventually be passed into law. The enactment of the Right to Freedom of Information Act (2013) and the setting up of the Right to Access Information Commission has promoted the citizens' right to information. Freedom of assembly and protests are generally respected, but in some instances a police clearance may be required for security reasons.

III. SECURITY SITUATION

Sierra Leone has remained a peaceful country after the civil war. Among the serious security threats are corruption, endemic poverty, youth unemployment, political intolerance, and tensions between local communities and multinational companies over large-scale acquisition of farmland for mining and agriculture. Government has set up a Mediation Team, led by the Vice President, to resolve the land conflict in Pujehun District. Reducing poverty and youth unemployment through promoting human capital development and increasing private sector participation are key priorities of government. Through the amendment of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act (2008), Parliament has granted additional powers to the Anti-Corruption Commission, which has made corruption a very risky business in Sierra Leone.

IV. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION

1. Economic Growth

The Sierra Leone economy grew by 3.5 percent in 2018 compared to 3.8 percent in 2017 mainly as a result of the weak performance in the mining and construction sector. The economy is estimated to grow by 5.1 percent in 2019 due to increased activities in the agriculture sector, higher

production of rutile, increased construction activities and expansion of the services sector. Excluding iron ore, the economy is estimated to grow by 4.5 percent in 2019.

Gross foreign reserves at the Bank of Sierra Leone increased to US\$532.2 million (3.5 months of import cover) as at end of August 2019 from US\$483 million in December 2018, reflecting mainly the disbursement of programme and project grants and balance of payment support by our development partners.

The Leone depreciated by 11.0 percent against the US dollar from December 2018 to September 2019. The external debt stock increased by 2.5 percent to US\$1.64 billion at the end of June 2019. The stock of domestic debt amounted to about US\$635.6 million as at end of June 2019, an increase by 7.5 percent relative to the stock as at December 2018.

2. Fight against Poverty and Youth Unemployment

The 2020 Finance Bill, which was laid before Parliament on 8th November, 2019, proposes several policy measures that would increase revenue and at the same time create the enabling environment for businesses to thrive and create employment opportunities. Government is reintroducing a national micro credit scheme and will provide Le 100 billion between 2020 and 2022 for micro-enterprises development targeting 20,000 people of which 70 percent are women and 30 percent are youth..

The government has allocated 21 percent of the national budget to the implementation of its flagship Free Quality Education Programme. In public schools, the burden of paying school fees on parents and guardians no longer exists. Government also provides exercise books and core textbooks for pupils.

Over 128,470 pupils are benefitting from the national school feeding programme with support from the Government of Sierra Leone, Catholic Relief Services and the World Food Programme. Government has provided 69.9 billion leones in the 2020 budget for school feeding. This would provide school meals for over 428,000 pupils.

V. STATUS OF RATIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY TEXTS AND PAYMENT OF PROCEEDS FROM THE COMMUNITY LEVY

Sierra Leone has ratified 45 out of 54 protocols and conventions. In compliance with the Community Levy Protocol, Sierra Leone paid \$500,000 on 2nd September, 2019 as part of arrears owed.

VI. STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

The Cote D'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea regional electricity project is at an advance stage. The project is expected to improve access to cheap and reliable electricity in Bo, Kenema, Freetown and other parts of the country.

Government provided 17 acres of land for the establishment of a Peace Support Operations Logistics Depot at Lungi. Phase 1, which involves the construction of perimeter fences and an administrative building, was completed in 2016 and \$2 million has been approved to start work on the remaining phases. In May, 2019, the Government of Sierra Leone and the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development signed a joint aid memoire for the construction of the University of Science and Technology in Kono.

VII. PERFORMANCE ON THE MACROECONOMIC CONVERGENCE CRITERIA

The country's performance on the primary convergence criteria improved during the period with Sierra Leone satisfying three out of the four primary convergence criteria. The fiscal deficit, central bank financing of the fiscal balance as a percentage of the previous year's tax revenue and gross external reserves in months of import criteria were satisfied. The single digit inflation criterion and the medium term inflation target of at most 5.0 percent were missed. With respect to the secondary convergence criteria, the country met the public debt-to-GDP criterion while the nominal exchange variation criterion was missed in the first half of 2019. (See Tables 1 & 2).

Table 1: Sierra Leone – Status of Rationalized ECOWAS Primary Convergence, December 2013 – June 2019

| | Target | 2013 Dec | 2014 Dec | 2015 Dec | 2016 Dec | 2017 Dec | 2018 June | 2018 Dec | 2019 June |
|--|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Inflation (End period) | Single digit | 8.2 | 7.9 | 8.7 | 17.4 | 15.3 | 16.6 | 17.5 | 14.4 |
| Fiscal Deficit including grants/GDP (% GDP) | ≤3% | 4.1 | 7.5 | 9.7 | 7.5 | 8.4 | 3.0 | 5.3 | 0.3 |
| Central Bank Financing of Fiscal Deficit as % of previous year's tax revenue | ≤10% | 22.4 | 30.6 | 32.0 | 40.1 | 18.9 | -1.6 | 18.8 | 7.0 |
| Gross External Reserves (in months of import cover) | ≥ 3 months | 3.2 | 3.6 | 4.6 | 5.5 | 4.5 | 3.4 | 4.2 | 3.8 |
| Number of criteria satisfied | | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 |

Table 2: Sierra Leone – Status of Rationalized ECOWAS Secondary Convergence, December 2013– June 2019

| | Target | 2013 Dec | 2014 Dec | 2015 Dec | 2016 Dec | 2017 Dec | 2018 June | 2018 Dec | 2019 June |
|-------------------------------------|--------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Exchange Rate Variation | ±10% | 0.5 | 12.0 | 2.2 | 17.9 | 4.5 | 5.2 | 10.2 | 12.3 |
| Public Debt/GDP (%) | ≤70% | 28.4 | 35.2 | 45.4 | 54.3 | 56.4 | 52.5 | 59.5 | 54.4 |
| Number of criteria satisfied | | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |

VIII. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Sea-level rise, rising temperatures and floods have adversely affected the environment, agriculture, food security and threatens the lives and livelihoods of communities. More than 3 million people who live on Sierra Leone's coastline are severely affected. The western region of Freetown has been impacted most by floods this year. Over 5,000 people have been displaced.

In July, 2018, with support from the United Nations Development Programme, Sierra Leone launched a coastal resilience project with a US\$9.9 million grant from Global Environment Facility's Least Developed Countries Fund and US\$31.6 million in co-financing from the Government of Sierra Leone. The project is designed to strengthen the ability of coastal communities to systematically manage climate change risks.

IX. SENSITIZATION ACTIVITIES

Members of the Sierra Leone delegation have continued to raise awareness on the ECOWAS Parliament and the critical role of ECOWAS in regional integration through report sharing, border visits, sensitization meetings, radio and television discussions.

Honourable Speaker, I will end by registering our delegation's gratitude to you, Honourable Members and staff for the enormous support we have enjoyed working together.

Thank you

Merci

Obrigado