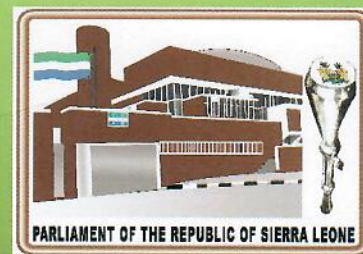




**SIERRA LEONE
HOUSE OF
PARLIAMENT**



**GENERAL DEBATE ON THE THEME
PARLIAMENTARY ACTION FOR PEACE,
JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTION
(SDG 16) BY HON. DR. ABASS
CHERNOR BUNDU, SPEAKER OF THE
PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE.**

Madam President of the 147th Assembly,
President of the IPU,
Colleague Speakers,
Honorable Members,
Secretary-General of IPU,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to deliver this address at the 147th Assembly of the IPU and we congratulate the Parliament of Angola for the excellent facilities put at our disposal. The topic for our discussion is most important and most timely: **Sustainable Development Goal 16**, Parliamentary action for peace, justice, and strong institutions.

This recognizes our critical role as Parliaments in shaping societies and achieving sustainable development; maintaining peace and inclusive societies; promoting access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Promoting and maintaining peace in society is our primary role. This is why we enact laws to protect human rights,

foster social cohesion, and address the root causes of conflicts. We also promote dialogue and mediation, contribute to resolving conflicts and build a culture of peace.

Peace is the cornerstone of any thriving society. It is the foundation for building progress and development. It promotes human rights, sustains social harmony, and enables economic growth. So it is crucial that we recognize and support Parliamentary actions for fostering and consolidating peace.

Unfortunately, our world today continues to be bedevilled by armed conflicts and violence. They are endangering the lives of millions in ways more than we can imagine. **Sustainable Development Goal 16** should therefore serve to strengthen Parliaments to advocate for peaceful solutions, for policies and for legislation that address the root causes of conflicts. Additionally, justice, an essential pillar of **Goal 16**, is fundamental to a fair and equitable society. Parliaments must therefore work to provide equal access to justice for all, promote the rule of law, and reduce corruption.

In Sierra Leone, we have made it part of our effort to ~~protect~~ and promote human rights; we have expunged the death penalty from our criminal law and replaced it with life imprisonment. Also, we have strengthened our oversight responsibilities to make government more accountable and more transparent.

Strong institutions, especially strong inclusive institutions, in the hands of strong men and women are the backbone of any functioning society; the bulwark for good governance, accountability, transparency and resilience. This is why our new mantra is radical inclusion that leaves no one behind.

We have increased the participation of our women from around 10 per cent to nearly 30 per cent both in our Legislature and in the Executive branches of Government. We have achieved all this by changing our method of voting to proportional representation: a radical change in our electoral law. Political parties cannot take part in our General Elections any more unless for every three candidates they nominate, one at least is a woman. This is what we did in our General Elections of June this year. In

the next electoral cycles, we aim to move even closer towards gender parity. This is only fair as women constitute 52 per cent of our population. Therefore, they deserve nothing less.

Similarly by passing laws to guarantee and strengthen freedom of speech, assembly and association, Parliaments can enable the citizenry to participate more and more in decision-making.

To this end, the Parliament of Sierra Leone in 2020 removed from its statute book a law on seditious libel that was embedded in the Public Order Act of 1965 and had criminalised free speech. Effectively Parliament removed a legal restraint that had somehow inhibited citizens from fully participating in governance. Additionally, we have established a functioning legal aid service and promoted an alternative dispute resolution mechanism as another significant milestone under **Goal 16**.

However, this is not to say that the attainment of **SDG 16** through Parliamentary action is not without challenges. Lack of political will is one big challenge. Prioritizing other

development goals over SDG 16 ultimately leaves it with insufficient national resources. It is essential therefore that Parliamentary advocacy must never relent in seeking equal or higher priority for SDG 16 to ensure that it receives the necessary support and resources.

Corruption and lack of transparency within institutions is another formidable challenge. Parliaments must continue to take a proactive role in combating corruption by enacting and enforcing anti-corruption laws.

Lastly, Parliaments must make it an overriding duty to seek to make their membership more inclusive and more representative of all sections of society. Women, youth, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups must have a voice in Parliament and in decision-making executive organs. Their perspectives and experiences are just as essential in shaping policies that address the needs and concerns of all citizens.

Thus, Ladies and Gentlemen, we in Sierra Leone have demonstrated in our own modest way that Parliamentary action is vital for the achievement of Sustainable

Development **Goal 16** on peace, justice, and strong institutions. Parliaments do have the power to effect radical inclusion. Let us therefore continue to work together to prioritize **SDG 16** and unleash the transformative power of Parliamentary action for a more just, peaceful and prosperous world.

I thank you all for your attention.