



POLITICAL PARTIES REGISTRATION COMMISSION

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The Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and the United Nations Integrated Peace Building Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) on Thursday 9th January 2014 held a one-day consultation meeting for executive members of the ten registered political parties. The meeting was held at Santano House in Freetown.

In his opening remarks, the Chairman of the Commission Honourable Justice M.E. Tolla Thompson says “we live in a world of change and in a society such as ours, political parties are better placed to confront these attendant changes in our political system, by reformation and review of the Constitution when you discover that the Constitution is working hazard in some areas in its every day application”.

He says some of the provisions need to be reviewed because some of its provisions need to be looked into in the light of the prevailing circumstances, affecting the political spectrum in its application. The role of the political parties, the Chairman says, is essential to the review of the Constitution and by extension to the political development of the country hence the theme: “Voice to the Voiceless”.

In his statement, the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, Frank Kargbo, says the decision to restart the constitutional review process was made primarily because in the aftermath of those national elections, discussions were centred on the urgent need to address the electoral processes to ensure that they promote national dialogue and inclusiveness. He assured the meeting that government has allowed the Committee a free hand to carry out its mandate and will not interfere in the work of the Committee and vow to uphold whatever outcome is presented as the people’s wish. He says he is particularly delighted that the PPRC has taken the bold step in organising the meeting.

In his statement, the Deputy Head of Mission UNIPSIL Berhanemeskel Nega says UNIPSIL’s support to this exercise is to complement the efforts of the Constitutional Review Committee and is not a parallel initiative but one aimed at facilitating the review process by preparing and empowering key

stakeholders to understand the process and effectively contribute to its success. Political Parties as primary responsible for governance he says has the power and responsibility to effect positive change. The Constitutional Review process he says will provide political parties an opportunity to use their common platform to pursue their common objectives of further entrenching political pluralism, good governance and promotion of the rule of law and human rights, ensuring social and economic justice for all. Constitutional review he says is a rare opportunity to be seized and taken seriously by all.

Honourable Justice Edmond Cowan, Chairman of the Constitutional Review Committee, says this is the first time that the people are involved in the process. Prior to present day he says, few people would hang heads to work on the Constitution, without consulting the people.

He admonished political parties to forget about their personal interests and work for the good of the people. Political party members he says should come into the process with open minds. He also assured political parties that government has given them a free hand to work.

In his presentation on the 1991 Constitution and the Political Parties Act of 2002, Mohamed Pa Momoh Fofanah Esq., says the review of the Constitution is very important and that it must be taken very seriously because when once amended will not be amended for a very long time.

As legal entities, he says, political parties must be organized, structured along set principles outlined in their constitutions. He says they should be transparent in their operations and dealings with their members and general public, as well as be disciplined and democratic.

Recommendations by political parties formed the high point of the meeting. These recommendations include, addressing fundamental human rights and freedoms, elections to office and inauguration dates, including powers of the President and the need to enhance the authority of the PPRC.

Other proposals include: strict measures to eliminate non-performing parliamentarians, enhancing the Judiciary's independence, maintenance of state institutions, efficient management of national resources, women's empowerment and the 30% quota and addressing the contradiction between the Constitution and the Dual Citizenship Act.

After the executive level meeting in Freetown, a one-and-half day dialogue and inter-party consultation meeting will be held in Bo; bringing together party members countrywide.

At the forum in Bo, parties will jointly deliberate on some of the emerging issues on the Constitutional Review Process.

The process will be guided by a seasoned lawyer and UNIPSIL's Legal Advisor.

It is expected that these interactions and joint deliberations will reduce continuing tensions between parties.

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