



Human Rights Monitor

NEWSLETTER

HRCSL REACCREDITED GRADE 'A' STATUS

By: **Brima Kelson Sesay**

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone was established by an Act of Parliament (No.9) of 2004 following recommendations in the Lome Peace Agreement of 1999 and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report of 2004.

On the 4th October 2022, the Commission faced the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA) in an interview conducted by the UN accredited body called the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). This followed HRCSL's submission of its Statement of Compliance and other relevant documents together with evidence of its work over the past years.

Consequent to the said interview, HRCSL on the 10th October 2022 received an official note of its reaccreditation as a Grade 'A' National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) from the United Nations



Stand up for Human Rights - IHRD 2022



The commemoration of International Human Rights Day by the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) climaxed with panel discussions on the local theme "Human Rights and Elections." The theme was coined in view of the forthcoming elections in Sierra Leone in June 2023.

The discussants included representatives from the Sierra

Public Inquiry into the Conduct of Law Enforcement Officials



The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone embarked on a Public Inquiry into the conduct of Law Enforcement Officials namely; the Sierra Leone Police, Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, Sierra Leone Correctional Service, Road Safety

EDITORIAL



Dear readers,

Welcome to the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone Newsletter '**Human Rights Monitor.**' This is our latest edition that features our work in 2022 and which was made a reality with the support and combined efforts of a dedicated team.

2022 stood out as another remarkable year for us as the Commission was reaccredited as a Grade A National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The Commission has been accredited Grade (A) Status for three consecutive times – first in 2011 and then in 2016 and in 2022.

The Public Inquiry into the Conduct of Law Enforcement Officials was a great experience for the Commission, as five public institutions were summoned to respond to complaints from members of the public relating to human rights violations allegedly committed by their personnel. These institutions were: the Sierra Leone Police, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, the Sierra Leone Correctional Service, the Metropolitan Police, and the Road Safety Corps. As we publish this newsletter, the Commission is compiling decisions from the panels for its report.

As Sierra Leone will be holding national elections in June 2023, we ended the year with a conference on International Human Rights Day (December 10th) which focused on 'Human Rights and Elections'. This is because our role is key in monitoring the process and ensuring that human rights issues that may arise from the conduct of the elections are addressed. We held a panel discussion bringing representatives from Elections Management Bodies, Youth, Women, and Persons with Disabilities. From these discussions and further engagements, the Commission will be well-situated to protect and promote the human rights of all, especially during the electioneering period.

Enjoy reading!

Millicent Kargbo

Principal Public Information Officer

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HRCSL recredited grade 'A' status

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

This was the third time that HRCSL was accredited as a Grade 'A' NHRI. The first was in 2011, the second in 2016 and then in 2022.

The Commission faces the accreditation committee every five years for thorough scrutiny of its work and compliance with the Paris Principles which is the guiding UN document for all NHRIs. The next re-creditation assessment is due in 2027.

The Commission's first accreditation as Grade 'A' NHRI and subsequent reaccreditations demonstrate international acceptance of the Commission's work and its compliance with the Paris Principles.

With a Grade 'A' Status, the Commission is entitled to participate in high level decision making processes and can hold governance positions within GANHRI and can benefit with talking slots during UNHRC organised programs.

The certificate of Reaccreditation was presented at GANHRI's Annual General Assembly in Geneva on 15th March, 2023 and was received by the Chair and

Vice Chairpersons of the Commission, Patricia Narsu Ndanema (Mrs.) and Victor Idrissa Lansana Esq, respectively.

The Commission thanked the Government for its financial support towards its operations and for its non-interference in compliance with the Paris Principles, and to also graciously thank its other major partners including the Embassy of Ireland, the UNDP, OSIWA, DHRCs, MDAs, CSOs and traditional leaders, to name a few.



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HRCSL Commemorates International Human Rights Day



Leone Police (SLP), Civil Society Organizations, the Media, Women, Youth, and Persons with Disability. The topics discussed were; the role of Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) in ensuring Peaceful and Credible Elections, the Participation of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disability in Elections and the role of Political Parties in ensuring violence free Elections.

According to Ibrahim Tommy, Executive Director of Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL), electoral processes must be peaceful and collaborative. He added that violence occurs in disagreement or lack of trust or participation. He noted that Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) especially the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) and Political Parties Regulatory Commission (PPRC) should maintain electoral dispute resolution mechanisms where they can constantly dialogue with key players in the process – the political parties. Mr. Tommy said other organs of the state like the SLP, the Judiciary, and the Media should provide support to ECSL and PPRC to ensure a peaceful, free and fair process.

While the audience called on the SLP to resist brutality and ensure effective security management during the elections, the Head of Media, Assistant Commissioner of Police Brima Kamara noted that the SLP has been effective in its mandate and impartial but urged Sierra Leoneans to abide by the Rule of Law.

The participation of women, youth, and persons with disability in elections was emphasized by panelists and the audience. Sallieu Turay, Vice-President of the Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues (SLUDI) said, the location of some polling centres, lack of aiding materials for persons with disability, and not providing space in political parties for persons with disability to contest for positions are major barriers to full participation in electoral processes.

The National President of the National Youth Council Tejan Z. Kella called on youths to resist incentives from politicians that will lure them to participate in any form of violence. He said youths should be thinking of positive participation in politics by contesting for positions within their political parties or na-

tional leadership. He noted that in as much as people should enjoy their human rights, that should go with responsibility.

Aminata Kelly-Lamin Advocacy Manager of Action Aid Sierra Leone applauded the enactment of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act 2022 which will increase the number of women in political positions. She however noted that although the GEWE came in handy, some women are disappointed that the Act states that 'in the distribution of symbols after every two men then one woman' even when women constitute 52% of the country's population – "this is not equity", she added.

In a resounding statement by the Chairperson of HRCSL, Madam Patricia Narsu Ndanema she strongly called on everyone to observe, respect, and defend human rights not only on December 10th marking the International Human Rights Day (IHRD) but throughout the conduct of the 2023 electoral processes. She added that "as Sierra Leone prepares for the multitier elections, we must have in mind that electoral processes are expressions of people's political will. This simply means that the right to express diverse ideas must be firmly guarded during election periods as guaranteed in Article 19(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Sierra Leone is a party. It is however worth adding that while we enjoy this right, it must be done within the confines of the law. "

The Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, Mohamed Lamin Tarawally Esq. in his Keynote Statement said, the government is aware of the fact that promoting prerequisite rights is to ensure that peaceful elections are maintained within the law. He however added that diatribes and hate messages sent on social media could fuel violence during elections. "As a government, it is our duty to ensure that peace, law, and order are guaranteed at all times as provided in the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991", he said. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to the peaceful conduct of elections, and that no one shall be deprived unnecessarily of their rights and called on all Sierra Leoneans to be law-abiding to avoid another August 10 scenario.

He commended the Commission for strides made in the protection and promotion of human rights in the country, and for maintaining its Grade 'A' Status.



Who defends the defenders?

By: Alphonsus B. M. Gbanie

GUEST WRITER



The question ‘Who defends the defender’ often comes up when human rights defenders who act to promote and protect human rights are subjected to reprisals including smear, surveillance, harassment, trumped-up charges, arbitrary arrest, online trolling, and detention. While some people would think that human rights defenders (HRDs) are only people who work for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), it is however true that HRDs include those in public service, journalists, lawyers, trade unionists, whistleblowers and the like. They defend human rights as part of their jobs, as volunteers or as private individuals. We note that women human rights defenders and environmental human rights defenders (who are very often indigenous- such, as Malen Affected Land Owners Association (MALOA) face greater repression and risks than human rights defenders working on other issues.

Recognising the risk faced by HRDs, the United Nations in December 1998 issued a Declaration on Human Rights Defenders to legitimise the work they do and to extend human rights protection to them. The Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups, and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms – more commonly known as the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders –is based on and incorporates human rights enshrined in legally-binding

international instruments. Additionally, the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights issued Resolution 119 on the situation of Human Rights Defenders in Africa- in November 2007 and Resolution 196 on Human Rights Defenders in Africa -November in 2011. More protection mechanisms were introduced by the European Union for the protection of Human Rights Defenders.

Following the Declaration of the UN, the Resolutions of the ACHPR, and another protection mechanism from the European Union, increasing numbers of activists have adopted the HRD label; this is especially true for professional human rights workers/activists. To ensure coordinated and sustained protection mechanisms for human rights defenders, National and Regional human rights defenders Networks/Coalitions were established to enhance the protection of HRDs including the promotion of their rights. Several international Organisations including foundations were established to promote and protect HRDs using International and Regional human rights mechanisms. An open and pluralistic civic space that guarantees freedom of expression and opinion as well as freedom of assembly and association is not only a prerequisite to development and peace but also makes development and peace sustainable. Therefore, HRDs participation is the lifeblood of any healthy democratic society. When HRDs operate in a SAFE, FAIR, and SECURE environment, it means vibrant debate, freedom of thought and opinion, and public engagement in policy reforms and formulations.

The Human Rights Defenders Network-Sierra Leone (HRDN-SL) and its partners including Frontline Defenders, Pan African Defenders, Amnesty International, and the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone remain committed to protecting and defending the rights of Human Rights Defenders in Sierra Leone.

Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone

Quote of the week



Free and Equal

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Article 1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Climate Change a Human Rights Concern

By: Comm. Victor Idrissa Lansana



Climate change is a global phenomenon that has affected the entire world, both great and small nations. According to the Fifth Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (AR5) it is said that climate change is caused by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases. The impact of climate change on

human rights is wide-ranging; it affects the enjoyment of the rights to life, housing, water, food, health, self-determination, among others. Interestingly, these rights are protected by international law and conventions including the United Nation's Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the Declaration on the Rights to Development and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, etc. However, much attention has not been paid by States to protect the rights of their people even with the existence of these international instruments and covenants. Worse still is the fact that the normative and legal frameworks at the national levels are quite weak and there is very little cooperation between and among states to curb the negative effects of climate change. What this means is that least developed countries suffer the most from the impact of climate change when in fact the emission levels of greenhouse gases are produced by advanced countries. Little wonder then when the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Flavia Pansieri remarked during the AR5 Panel discussion that, "those who have contributed the least to greenhouse gas emissions will be the ones who bear the greatest burden; the poorest people, in the poorest countries, their children, and all our children". AR5 found out that "people who are socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally or otherwise marginalized are especially vulnerable to climate change and also some adaptation and mitigation responses".

There is now no contention over the fact that human activities on the natural environment have exacerbated the impact of climate change. Urbanization, industrialization, migration, agricultural work and encroachment on rain forest reserves are all examples of human activities that have accelerated climate change. According to a study presented by the Policy Department of the European Parliament on the impact of climate change on developing countries (2007), "global temperatures are likely to rise between 2 and 4 °C within the next century". But as a matter of fact, the world does not need to wait for the next century to experience the impact of climate change. Already the negative impact is real and destructive. It has led to frequent flash floods and droughts, mudslides and earthquakes. There have been multiple loss of lives and increased poverty levels and migration in countries where such incidents resulting from climate change have occurred. Mostly the indigenous people especially women and children bear the greatest brunt that climate change brings.

In Sierra Leone for instance, the country has experienced its own fair share of the impacts of this global menace. There is no waiting for future generations anymore to experience the brunt. In 2017 flash floods and mudslide left over one thousand indigenous Sierra Leoneans dead and many displaced in the Mortormeh Community in the far west of the capital, Freetown. The urge to live in the capital city has led to the encroachment on and destruction of the greenbelt, the rainforest and water catchment areas. The mining activities mostly in the provinces have been causing havoc on the environment. In Kono, the diamond rich area in the Eastern Region for instance, mining activities sometimes cause flooding in the township preventing children from going to school. In some cases, the quality of water is affected as mining activities cause water pollution so that the indigenous people are deprived of pure water to drink. There is little wonder then that our country Sierra Leone is said to be the third most vulnerable country in the world to climate change disaster according to the 5th Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In fact, in June, 2021, the Metrological Department announced that the country would experience less rainfall but heavy storms during the rainy season. Indeed, there was less rainfall which would have affected agricultural work and insufficient water storage for both domestic and industrial or commercial

purposes.

A human rights-based approach is what has been strongly recommended to prevent and/or control the impacts of climate change. But research has shown that public awareness about climate change is still low and needs robust advocacy to get rights-holders and States alike understand that climate change is here and is real. A human rights-based approach means that policies are formulated, obligations of duty-bearers are identified along with the responsibilities and entitlements of the rights-holders for a better synergy, and the principles and minimum standards of international human rights law – particularly the Bill of Rights and other core universal human rights conventions are always at the center of national policies and programs geared towards combating climate change. Any adaptation or mitigation measure that considers the human rights-based approach would guarantee the promotion of alternative energy sources, forest conservation or tree-planting projects, resettlement schemes among others.

Another strong recommendation to combat climate change is the need for strong international cooperation between and among states especially states which are parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

(UNFCCC). It is no secret that least developed countries suffer most in the scheme of things when in fact they contribute less to the problem.

States have the obligation to respect, protect, fulfil and promote human rights of all persons; any departure from this obligation would amount to a violation and would endanger future generations who have contributed zilch to the climate change menace as it obtains today.

At the national level, it is a welcome news that the Government of Sierra Leone has established a functional Ministry of Environment in addition to the Environmental Protection Agency, the Meteorological Department amongst others geared towards strategic thinking, policy formulation and supervision of the relevant agencies.

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone being the statutory body charged with the mandate to protect and promote human rights through monitoring, complaints handling, public education among others, has also established a full-blown Directorate of Climate Change and Information Services to ensure that the impacts of climate change are monitored and documented, handle complaints on same (climate justice), and educate the public and public servants on the dangers of climate change.

Voter Registration



they were not properly programmed. Therefore, ECSL staff had difficulties logging in. Also, some of the computers could not be powered on due to lack of electricity as the batteries and power banks were not charged.

The long queues could never be avoided as centres were jam packed with registrants and enthusiastic first time voters.

According to Steven Koivah a first time voter at Maffa Field in Lumley, west end of Freetown, it was difficult for many first time voters to register because they were rejected because of the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) registration exercise which some had not done prior to voter registration. Many of them were referred to the NCRA office to complete their national registration and return back to registration centres.

HRCSL monitoring team engaged ECSL on challenges observed to better improve the second phase of the exercise. This included recommending for an extension of the registration exercise so that first

A national monitoring of the voter registration exercise by the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) was done by HRCSL. The process commenced on 3rd September and ended on 8th October with a two phase system employed by ECSL.

A total of 3,630 centres were opened and equally divided into first and second phase.

This first phase was marred by many challenges. HRCSL observed a late start of the registration process which was due to late deployment of ECSL staff. Similarly, at least 15 out of 25 centres monitored on the first day had faulty computers because

Public Inquiry into the Conduct



The Inquiry looked at the period spanning from 2015 - 2021 in a bid to address systemic human rights violation and to proffer recommendations aimed at preventing a recurrence of similar violations.

This was consistent with Rule 42 of the Complaints, Investigations, and Inquiries Rules of 2008 and Section 7 (2)(a) of the HRCSL Act (No. 9) of 2004.

Three circuit sittings were held across the country (North & North-West, South & East, and Western Area) to hear complaints from the public against the listed law enforcement officials as well as from law enforcement officials against members of the public. Twenty-two (22) admissible cases of alleged human rights violations and abuses were brought before the Commission for determination by the various panels.

The panels consisted of Commissioners and Contracted legal practitioners, with each panel consisting of three panelists. The Commission provided legal aid to complainants so as to assist them understand the procedures and successfully go through the hearings.

Except for the Sierra Leone Police, RSLAF provided legal representations before each of the panels that sat to hear the cases.

The terms of reference for the Public Inquiry were to determine nine (9) issues which were:

- Whether LEOs used disproportionate force in the execution of their duties contrary to the UN Guiding Principles on the use of Force and Fire Arms;
- Whether there were loss of lives and grievous bodily harm resulting from excessive use of force by LEOs contrary to Section 16 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991, and Article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) as well as Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);
- Whether the right to property was violated by LEOs in executing their mandate contrary to Section 21 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991, and Article 14 of the ACHPR;
- Whether LEOs lost their lives or sustained grievous bodily harm in the hands of members of the public or individuals while carrying out their lawful duties contrary to Sections

- 16 and 13(j) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991;
- Whether individual LEOs and/or their institutions were held accountable for their actions in line with their institutional Codes of Conduct; Whether appropriate actions were taken against individuals for abuses against LEOs;
- Whether LEOs needed further and requisite training in enforcing the law;
- Whether LEOs were provided with requisite logistical and operational resources;
- Whether citizens were adequately aware of their rights and responsibilities especially the duty to respect and cooperate with LEOs in the execution of their lawful mandate.



In a matter involving a girl child and the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) in Bo, in the South, the child became partially blind and dropped out of school due to alleged police inhuman treatment. Compelled by the situation, the Panel immediately requested the Commission to provide a start-up fund for the child to be able to go back to school, a gesture which the Commission subsequently honored.

Similarly, in Waterloo, Western Area Rural, there was a matter involving an ex-police officer and the SLP in which the complainant withdrew his children from school alleging that his sources of livelihood were gravely affected by the action of the Police. The Panel intervened having heard from the children and asked that the Commission provide startup funds in order to get them back to school. The Commission also did as requested.

The funds were used to buy school materials including bags, books, pens and pencils, shoes, uniforms and a purse for lunch.

According to the Project Lead of the Public Inquiry who is also the Vice-Chairman of the Commission, Victor Idrissa Lansana Esq., the Commission had a successful hearing across the country with the full cooperation of complainants, witnesses, and the Military whose legal team represented their institution in all settings requiring

t of Law Enforcement Officials

their presence, a real manifestation of professionalism and respect for the statutory institution. He said the exercise was meant to provide recommendations to the institutions involved and to improve the human rights record in the country as law enforcement officials have always clashed with civilians causing serious threats to the enjoyment of human rights. The findings, recommendations, and directives of this exercise, he said, would not only be compiled into a report and submitted to H.E. the President and Parliament but would also be officially launched and disseminated for public consumption.

Commissioner Lansana applauded other members of the panel including the Chairperson Madam Patricia Narsu Ndanema, Commissioner Simitie Laval, Commissioner Hassan Samba Yarjah, Consultant Lawyers (Brima Musa Esq., Abdul Karim Kamara Esq., Musa Kargbo Esq.), the PI Secretariat, PI Consultant and all who were involved in the process. He ended by thanking the donors; Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), UNDP/Irish Aid, and the government of Sierra Leone.



Training of Commissioners and staff on PI



Western Area Rural PI sitting



Kabala: Military legal team



Kenema: Registrar leading complainant into oath



Bo: Language interpreter helping a complainant

Assessing the implementation of the UPR recommendations

By: Ibrahim Tarawallie

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process that involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States. The UPR is a State-driven process under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, which provides the opportunity for each State to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and fulfill their human rights obligations.

The UPR Committee reviewed Sierra Leone two times; first in 2011 and again in 2016. During the third cycle review in May 2021, the Government of Sierra Leone received 274 recommendations with a total of 216 accepted and 58 noted.

Additionally, the government's delegation made three voluntary commitments or pledges: to continue the constitution review process, to abolish the death penalty, and to review provisions pertaining to the sentencing of children under the Sexual Offenses Act as Amended 2019 to be consistent with the Child Rights Act of 2007 and other international instruments.

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone as the National Human Rights Institution, plays an integral role in the UPR process due to its independence and capacity to provide evidence-based and authoritative information on the national human rights situation, as well as to monitor and promote the implementation of relevant recommendations. In fulfilling its role, the Commission monitors the status of implementation of accepted recommendations as well as popularizing the recommendations through engagements and consultations with relevant Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs), District Human Rights Committees (DHRCs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

The UPR process requires states to submit a voluntary mid-term report between the time of the initial review and the subsequent full cycle review which

has been scheduled to take place in 2026 for Sierra Leone. Under the UPR process, HRCSL, as the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), is also required to submit an alternative or shadow report to the State's report on the human rights situation in Sierra Leone.

Mid-term reports submitted by states and other UPR process participants, such as NHRIs, are an essential component of the UPR reporting and implementation cycle. Section E.18 of Human Rights Council Resolution 16/21, titled "Review of the Work and Functioning of the Human Rights Council," states that, nations are encouraged to provide a mid-term update on the implementation of accepted recommendations to the Council.

In 2022, with support from UNDP/Irish Aid, the Commission conducted three regional engagements on 15th November 2022 in Kenema and Port Loko, and on 1st December 2022 in Freetown. The overall goal of the regional engagements was to collect information from relevant stakeholders on the status of implementation of the 3rd Cycle UPR recommendations, which will inform the Commission's mid-term alternative report to be submitted in 2023.

These engagements facilitated the collection of information from key stakeholders, including MDAs, CSOs, media, and DHRCs, regarding the 216 UPR Recommendations accepted by the government. The engagements brought together 78 participants representing the country's sixteen (16) districts.

The Human Rights Defenders Network (HRDN) were part of the consultations to further engage participants on the draft model law aimed at protecting Human Rights Defenders. It is hoped that the Network will present a Final Draft Bill to Attorney-General and Minister of Justice.

In Port Loko, the Chairperson of HRCSL, Madam Patricia Narsu Ndanema encouraged participants to discuss progress made and limitations to the implementation of the 216 UPR recommendations which the Commission would use to put together a shadow midterm report in 2023. During the engagement at the Civil Service Training College in Freetown, Vice Chairperson of HRCSL, Victor Idrissa Lansana described it as timely, noting that feedbacks gathered from the consultations will be very helpful in forming the Commission's UPR 2023 shadow report. "The purpose of this engagement is to generate information on what government has done regard-



Assessing the implementation of the UPR recommendations

ing the two hundred and sixteen (216) recommendations that were accepted in Geneva in 2021, and to eventually present an independent report in Geneva in order to achieve objectivity,” he said. So far, the government has made progress in the implementation of the UPR recommendations by resuming the constitutional review process with the launch of the Government White Paper and the abolition of the death penalty in fulfillment its pledge/commitment.



Makeni



Kenema



Freetown

Voter Registration

From page 7

time voters will be captured into the registration database and not be disenfranchised and also those who were unable to register during the first phase. According to ECSL, 3,374,258 people registered during the process. ECSL commenced the exhibition of voter registration Provisional List of Voters (PLV) registered from 24th to 28th October. The process allowed registered voters to verify their details given during the registration exercise. During this exercise, issues such as unpublished, misplaced data and photo were reported. However, ECSL processed correction and inclusion cases made during the exhibition exercise.



20 Schools join our Human Rights and Peace Clubs

By: **Paul Anthony**

In 2022, 20 Human Rights and Peace Clubs from various schools in the North, North-west, South and East were established. One hundred (100) pupils and 20 teachers were trained from schools in these regions in order to increase and deepen their knowledge on basic human rights and how to manage the School Clubs. The training provided information on international, regional, and local human rights instruments.

The topics discussed during the training included – Background to the Establishment of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, Brief History of Human Rights and International Human Rights Systems, an Overview of the Concepts of Human Rights and Human Rights Friendly Schools, an Introduction to the Concept of Peace & Conflicts, The Concept of Human Rights Education & its Benefits in Schools, basic understanding of the Child Rights Act 2007, Approaches in Establishing a Human Rights and Peace Clubs in Schools, and Volunteerism as a School Club Function.

The participants described the training as an eye opener to the concept of human rights, pointing out that their perceptions on human rights issues changed completely from seeing it as a way of imposing western cultures in Africa to fundamental entitlements that everyone is entitled to irrespective of tribe, region, or race. They promised to maintain the established school clubs and called on the Commission to regularly visit the schools and support their activities. The Guidelines/Manual for the hu-

man rights peace club was distributed to pupils and teacher-coordinators to enhance the activities of these clubs, followed by the certification of participants. HRCSL has now established 68 Human Rights and Peace Clubs in schools across the country.

In order to keep the school clubs active, the Commission organizes activities such as public education outreach in school and quiz competitions. In 2022, two Inter-Secondary School Quiz Competitions were held in Western Rural District- Waterloo, and Kailahun District. The five schools in Waterloo that battled for various prizes were; Kelly's Vocational Secondary School Hasting, Sunday Foundation Secondary School for Girls, Lorenzo Gorvie Memorial Secondary School, St. Raphael's Junior Secondary School, and Peninsula Junior Secondary School.

Sunday Foundation Secondary School for Girls emerged the winner with a score of 56 points, seconded by Peninsula Secondary school which scored 53 points. Abibatu Conteh from Peninsula Secondary School emerged as the best quizzier followed by Hassanatu Kamara from St. Raphael Secondary School. The pupils were given a certificate of participation and cash prizes were awarded to participating schools.

Similarly, in Kailahun District, a quiz competition was held in commemoration of the International Day of The Girl Child. The event brought together 100 pupils and 20 teachers. The five competing schools were National Secondary School, Methodist Secondary School, Ahmadiyya Muslim Secondary School, Luawa International Academy School, and Luawa Islamic Secondary School. Methodist Secondary School emerged the winner, followed by Ahmadiyya Muslim Secondary School in second place, and Luawa International Academy School took the third position. The Best Quizzier was Bockarie Shadrack-Joe from Luawa International Academy School. Cash prizes and certificates were awarded to participating schools.

The purpose of the quiz was to enhance the students' knowledge on International instruments and local laws that promote and protect their human rights issues affecting their growth, development, and human



Age of Consent: a Starting Point Towards the Abolition of Female Genital Mutilation



By: Gloria Bayoh

Dir. of Gender & Children's Affairs

According to the United Nations, “Female genital mutilation is a grave form of violence against women and girls that amounts to torture. It violates the fundamental rights of its victims, including their physical integrity and rights not to be subjected to torture or other cruel treatment.”

Female genital mutilation (FGM), though not expressly mentioned, is considered one of the harmful traditional practices and an act of violence against children under Section 33(1) of the Child Rights Act 2007 which states that “No person shall subject a child to torture or other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment including any cultural practice which dehumanizes or is injurious to the physical and mental welfare of the child.” Article 24 (3) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) also prohibits harmful traditional practices on children.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Africa and is amongst the few African countries where the practice is not outlawed.

There is currently no national law that explicitly prohibits FGM, but the following laws attempt to protect women and girls against Domestic Violence, SGBV, Harmful bodily harm etc:

The Child Rights Act 2007 criminalizes all forms of torture directed at a child; in the same vein, the Domestic Violence Act 2007 seeks to protect women and girls from domestic violence, harm, or other acts which may endanger their

safety, health, or wellbeing; The Offences Against the Person Act 1861 also criminalizes bodily harm of another person; and the Prevention and Control of HIV and AIDS Act 2007 criminalizes the negligent use of unsafe procedures, leading to the spread of HIV

Sierra Leone is yet to domesticate the Maputo protocol which was ratified in 2015 that has a provision in Article 5 on the elimination of FGM which states that State Parties shall take all necessary legislative and other measures to eliminate such practices, including Female Genital Mutilation; also, the National Strategy for the Reduction of FGM/C (2016-2020) a draft proposed legal framework to tackle FGM is yet to be adopted by the Government.

Some Anti-FGM proponents are of the view that FGM is hazardous to the Sexual Reproductive health of the women/girls who go through the procedure and therefore should be abandoned. The Maputo protocol reinforces this by advising Governments in Article 5 of the said document to put measures in place to eliminate the practice. During the Universal Periodic Review session in 2021, many countries recommended that Sierra Leone Government should put measures in place to eliminate the practice. In responding to the recommendations, the Attorney General at that time assured other member states that the country notes the recommendations and assured them that **“the Government will seriously consider the recommendations in context with the Country’s framework for deliberations and wide National consultation because the Matters are entrenched cultural practices”**

As a National Human Rights institution (NHRI), the Commission accepts the United Nations view that FGM is a Human Rights issue and has over the years carried out a series of community engagements and sensitisation across the country, having in mind the socio-cultural sensitivity of the issue. Being an NHRI mandated to protect the rights of all, and considering that the topic is culturally sensitive HRCSL believes that the age of consent should be given due consideration in the practice of FGM as a starting point towards its abolition. This means that no person under the age of 18 years should be subjected to FGM and persons above the age of majority (18 years and above) should be allowed to choose to be a subject of FGM.

Making Business Environments Human Rights Friendly

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone has over the years incorporated an important component in its work focusing on ‘Business and Human Rights.’ This is a fairly new concept in Sierra Leone but with the work of the Commission reaching out to government agencies, businesses, and communities’ knowledge of the concept has been enhanced.

In 2022, the Directorate of Business and Human Rights & Labor Relations undertook several activities aiming at making the business environment human rights-friendly. With funding support from UNDP and Irish Aid, the Commission trained 149 participants drawn from businesses, government entities, local councils, and traditional leaders. The training focused on the United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights and other labor-related laws. It further threw light on the concept of Business and Human Rights, and the work of the Commission on Business and human rights-related issues. It also highlighted the roles and responsibilities of partners in addressing problems arising from companies and business entities concerning compliance.

As the Commission also works to build the capacity of companies on BHR, in March 2022 it partnered with Koidu Limited Company to conduct a month-long training for 94 staff and the community people in four phases. The targeted beneficiaries included the senior management, middle-level, and junior staff members of the company and key authorities of their host community.

The training focused on conflict mitigation, respect for human rights, and best practices for community relations between the company and host communities.

In December 2022, a national engagement with stakeholders was done for a National Policy on Business and Human Rights. The policy seeks to provide a framework guide for all relevant government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in responding to business and human rights issues in the country, and to also show the linkage between and among the roles and operations of the relevant MDAs to enhance coherence and consistency. The engagements which took place in Bo for the southeast, Makeni for the north/northwest, and Freetown in the western area aimed at getting the input of key stakeholders to develop a strong policy that will stand the test of time.

Issues raised during the discussions include underpayment of workers, not explaining land lease agreements to community people, communication gap between commu-

nities and companies, the use of state authorities to violate the rights of citizens when they attempt to protest, and sexual harassment.

The Chairperson of HRCSL Mrs. Patricia Narsu Ndane-ma stated that the National Policy on Business and Human Rights would ensure that measures are taken to prevent human rights abuses in the business and corporate sectors. “Businesses must respect human rights if they are to be accepted by the community people”, she added.

The policy would lead to the development of a national action plan which would eventually culminate into an Act of Parliament.



PHOTO GALLERY



Celebrating Africa Human Rights Day



Training of Commissioners and staff on Internal policies



Voter registration monitoring



School clubs



School clubs



Public inquiry into the conduct of law enforcement officers



Commemorating International Human Rights Day



Our Mission Statement

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone exists to take the lead role in building a culture of human rights (including respect for individual responsibilities) which maintains human dignity for all in Sierra Leone in full compliance with the constitution, laws, international and regional instruments, through effective partnership and collaboration.

Our Vision Statement

A Sierra Leone where a culture of Human Rights prevails and the People respect the rule of law and live in peace and dignity.

HRCSL Mandate and Functions

Section 7(1) of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone Act (No. 9) of 2004 stipulate that "The object for which the Commission is established is the protection and promotion of human rights in Sierra Leone." and section 7(2) states the following functions:

- Investigate or enquire into any allegation of human rights violations
- Promote respect for human rights through public education and awareness raising Programs
- Publish guidelines, manuals, and other materials on the human rights obligations of public officials and others;
- Cooperate with institutions working in the field of human rights;
- Review existing legislation and advise government on its compliance with international obligations
- Monitor draft legislations, policies, programmes and administrative practices to ensure they comply with human rights principles, standards and obligation;
- Advice and support government in the preparation of treaty body reporting.
- Visit correctional centres and other places of detention to inspect and report on conditions;
- Monitor and document violations of human rights in Sierra Leone; and Publish and present to the President and Parliament an Annual Report on the State of Human Rights in Sierra Leone.

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