



## Behind Bars: A Victim of Early Child Marriage and Prolonged Detention

During a mobile complaint hearing in Fadugu, Koinadugu District, North of Sierra Leone, the team headed by the Vice-Chairman of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone Victor Idrissa Lansana Esq. embarked on a usual monitoring exercise by the Commission to detention facilities.

In Kabala, they were gladly welcomed at the Kabala Correctional Centre by the leadership of the centre who narrated the current state of affairs ranging from overcrowding of a centre with a capacity of 70 but currently holds 94 inmates, to the late supply of medicines and food, delay in the production of indictment for committal cases (12 inmates still waiting for indictments), to a battered toi-



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### **Progress in the Implementation of the UNGPs in Sierra Leone Towards Creating a Responsible Investment Conduct**

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) was developed by Professor John Ruggie starting from 2005 to 2008 and mid 2011 endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council. The UNGPs serve as the global framework for the conduct of states and all businesses to address human rights harm arising out of the operations of



### **The Kush Drug: A Human Rights Concern**

Sierra Leone over the years has been challenged with drug abuse among its youthful population. The old-time marijuana or as locally called 'jamba' has almost gone into extinction as the young population innovated new hard drugs to quench their desires. From tramadol now called 225 and co-codamol another invention came to the stand. Youths



**Victor Idrissa Lansana Esq.**  
Oversight Commissioner



**Richard Tamba M'bayo**  
Director



**Millicent Kargbo**  
Deputy Director

## Editorial

### 'Making Rights Real'

During the quarter under review, the Commission carried out activities with funds from UNDP, Irish Aid and Global Fund. This edition will share insight into activities implemented.

With a mandate to protect and promote human rights of all in Sierra Leone, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone whose motto is 'Making Rights Real' has for almost 20 years now restored the dignity of people.

Sierra Leone has ratified and acceded to many international and regional treaties and conventions on human rights. These conventions generally provide for protecting the rights of people; they cannot be enjoyed if HRCSL as the national human rights institution does not advocate for its full access.

To make rights real, therefore, the Commission has several functions which include Complaints Handling, Monitoring and Research, Public Education, advising the government on laws and policies to ensure it is human rights friendly, publish state of human rights reports among others.

HRCSL receive or monitor on their own human rights violations as stipulated in section 7(2)(a). This involves a public official omitting or neglecting or negating in the execution of his/her duties that provides for the enjoyment of rights. Notwithstanding, HRCSL also receives human rights abuses which are recorded and referred to its partners; Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) that constitute the Re-ferral Partnership Forum.

Monitoring detention facilities, hospitals, police cells, schools, etc. also forms part of the Commission's work to protect and promote the rights of people. The enjoyment of human rights mostly comes with responsibilities. In its public education drive which is aimed at promoting human rights education, HRCSL has reached hundreds of people in communities and schools through media engagements and outreach programmes.

HRCSL has recorded many successes over the years hence its reaccreditation to a Grade – A National Human Rights Institution. This is a motivation to continue to 'Making Rights Real.'

### Team

#### Editor in Chief

Comm. Victor Idrissa Lansana Esq.

#### Editors

Richard Tamba M'Bayo

Millicent Kargbo

#### Writers

Ibrahim Tarawallie

Abdulai Yollah Bangura

#### Design / Layout

John Peter Fuller

#### Photographers

Jesse D. Jabateh

Alusine Kamara

Mohamed Lansana

## A Renewed Commitment: The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone's Next Chapter



In the realm of human rights advocacy, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) stands as a beacon of progress and dedication. As the current set of Commissioners embarks on their second term, their journey from April 2019 to April 2024 offers a compelling narrative of achievement and renewal.

On 18<sup>th</sup> March 2024, His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio renewed the mandate of four Commissioners in

line with Section 4(1) of the HRCSL Act 2004. It was a momentous moment as the staff received the news with cheer and vibrance. This decision underscored the remarkable strides made during their first term and set the stage for continued advancements in human rights protection in Sierra Leone.

Chairperson Patricia Narsu Ndanema, Vice Chairperson Victor Idrissa Lansana Esq., Commissioner Hassan Samba Yarjah, and Commissioner Simitie Lavalay have collectively made significant contributions since their appointment.

One of the most notable accomplishments of the past term was the re-accreditation of the HRCSL as a Grade A National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) in 2022. This prestigious status, reaffirmed for the third consecutive time, reflects the Commission's adherence to the rigorous standards set by the United Nations Paris Principles, which assesses the operations of NHRIs globally.

Reflecting on their tenure, Chairperson Ndanema mentioned the re-accreditation as a major achievement. She also pointed to the Commission's regionalisation efforts, which saw the establishment of new offices in Port Loko District and Freetown's Central Business District. These strategic expansions were designed to enhance accessibility and address regional human rights concerns more effectively.

In response to emerging human rights challenges, HRCSL established five new directorates, including those focused on Gender and Children's Affairs, Business and Human Rights and Labour Relations, Migration and Human Trafficking, Climate Change and Information Services and Treaty Body Reporting and International Mechanisms. This proactive approach aimed to tackle contemporary issues with greater expertise and resources.

Financial challenges also loomed large during their first term. HRCSL settled a significant debt to international human rights networks, paying off \$73,000 in overdue subscriptions from 2016 to 2021. This action restored HRCSL standing and enabled it to benefit fully from global networks as HRCSL currently serves as an Executive Committee Member in the Network of National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa (NNHRI-WA)

On the quasi-judicial front, HRCSL initiated a public inquiry into the conduct of law enforcement officials whose final report will be published publicly. This move highlighted HRCSL's commitment to accountability and transparency.



## The Kush Drug: A Human Rights Concern

**From Front Page:** boil babies' diapers (pampers), drained them and let to settle before intake. It was believed that this drug was hard and easily got them high.

In 2020 a new kid joined the block and it is called Kush. During its initial appearance, it was said that the drug was made out of herbs which they dried, crushed and then used for smoking. In 2022, the drug started gaining inroads into society popping up with some devastating effects on consumers. These people mainly youths looked like zombies after intake as they would stand but in staggering posture and fall asleep. Also, many who have been on the drugs for a very long time would show weight loss and sores on their feet.

The devastating effect of the drug was overlooked with little or no efforts to trace its root and give possible solutions before it wiped out the entire youthful population. Like wildfire, the drug spread to other parts of the country as it was believed that a local manufacturing company was now producing the drug using its chain of suppliers to get to communities.

As Kush continued to ravage the youths, a public outcry in early 2024 called for more action. Among several efforts was community mobilization, a national campaign against Kush by various local organizations and the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) called on the government to declare it a public health emergency.

In a press statement by the Commission on 21st March 2024, the Commission noted with grave concern the rate at which the substance was affecting the rights to life and health of its victims. While highlighting the specific human rights concerns, HRCSL noted the mass burial of 32 persons who allegedly died as a result of the use of the dangerous drug. As a result of the many deaths reported by authorities from the Government's Morgue at the Connaught Hospital in Freetown, HRCSL expressed concern over the undignified treatment of victims of Kush including undignified burial, shaving of their heads, and sometimes the beating and dehumanization and stigmatization of these victims by persons in different communities.

HRCSL therefore recommended that the President immediately declare a state of public health emergency on drug abuse, especially on the use, importation and trade on Kush. It also called on security agencies, the Immigration Department, the National

Drug Law Enforcement Agency and the National Revenue Authority to strengthen security at border crossing points in Sierra Leone. To contain the spread it recommended that the Government through the Ministry of Social Welfare and NaCSA identify hotspot areas and create rehabilitation centres for victims of substance abuse.

Furthermore, the Chairperson, Mrs. Patricia Narsu Ndanema conducted a monitoring visit at the Rehabilitation Centre at Hastings, established in February 2024 for victims of drug and substance abuse.

She engaged social workers from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Medical personnel from the Psychiatric Hospital, Military Officers, and also the 40 victims of Kush residing at the Centre. The discussions focused on the rights to health, water, food, security, rehabilitation, recovery and reintegration. Meanwhile, the team also did a conducted tour of the facility to assess whether affected persons were treated in line with human rights standards despite their current conditions.

On 4<sup>th</sup> April, His Excellency, the President, Dr. Julius Maada Bio in a National Broadcast declared a National Public Health Emergency on Drug and Substance Abuse with a focus on the deadly substance called KUSH. A task force was set up with the President, Vice-President and Task Force Committee chairman as figureheads. The task force includes Government Ministries, Departments Agencies, Universities, and the Security Sector with a mandate among many others to investigate the trade, intake by victims and provide treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims.





# Human Rights-Based Approach to News Reporting



Over the years, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone has been working closely with the media in Sierra Leone as a strategic partner to support the work of the Commission through visibility. This partnership spans across the country shedding light on HRCSL's continued efforts to protect and promote the human rights of all in Sierra Leone.

To enhance the reporting skills of journalists in human rights reporting, HRCSL organised a capacity-building training on *'The Human Rights-Based Approach to News Reporting.'*

This was geared towards building the capacity of over twenty (20) journalists in reporting human rights issues and tackling misinformation, especially on social media posts that have the tendency of igniting chaos in society.



The journalists were exposed to topics such as a General Overview of Human Rights Education, Human Rights and Court Reporting, Reporting SGBV, Human Rights and Elections Reporting, Reporting Political Incidents from the Human Rights Lens, and Social Media Reporting: The Role of Journalists.

In his statement on behalf of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Secretary-General Alhaji Manika Kamara thanked HRCSL for organising such a training session. He said journalists have benefited from many trainings in specialised reporting and they were again given another opportunity to specialise in human rights reporting through the training.

He noted the importance of a human rights perspective in journalism, noting the role of the media in promoting peace and development. He emphasised the importance for journalists to be knowledgeable in local, regional, and international human rights laws and other instruments that will support their work.

The Chairperson for HRCSL Mrs. Patricia Narsu Ndanema said HRCSL acknowledges the media as a valuable partner to its work and therefore said the training was geared towards equipping journalists with knowledge in human rights reporting to avoid chaos in society.

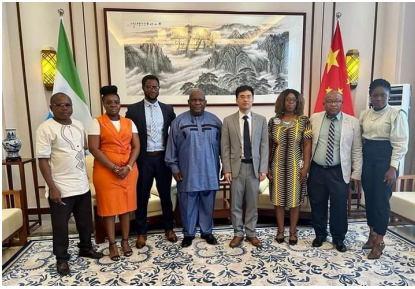
She stated that HRCSL regularly monitors the media and has in some cases acted on issues raised in the media relating to human rights violations. She however noted that whereas the media provides information on key issues in society they do not provide further updates to the public on progress in resolving such issues.

Similarly, she also mentioned instances where the media had shared inaccurate reports that may have led to chaos. She encouraged the journalists to be factual in their reporting and avoid misinformation.

The training was climaxed by a presentation of Certificate of Participation to the journalists.







STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT WITH PARTNERS AND EMBASSIES



HRCSL AND ACC SIGN MOU



HRCSL GIVES HOPE TO THE HOME OF THE AGED



HRCSL ENGAGES AG: DISCUSSES FUNCTIONS, STATE OBLIGATIONS AND UPR PROCESS



HRCSL & VP OFFICE TRAIN COMPANIES ON CONFLICT PREVENTION AND BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS



HRCSL & DHRC VALIDATE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT ON CAPACITY ASSESSMENT OF HRCSL



HRCSL COMMEMORATES AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DAY



DECriminalIZATION OF PETTY OFFENCES



HRCSL PRESENTS ITS 12TH AND 13TH SOHRR



HRCSL DECIDES ON THE RODNEY MICHAEL AND 2 OTHERS CASE



HRCSL MONITORS KOIDU HOLDINGS TO ENHANCE COMPLIANCE WITH BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS



HRCSL TRAINS COMPANIES AND HOST COMMUNITIES ON BHR



# GALLERY



HRCSL REVIEWS HR MANUAL AND OTHER POLICIES



HRCSL ENGAGES STRIKING DOCTORS



TRAINING OF COMMISSIONERS AND STAFF ON PUBLIC INQUIRY



HRCSL TOURS PRESERVED RECORDS AT THE PEACE MUSEUM



HRCSL MEETS WITH A TEAM FROM USAID



HRCSL REINTEGRATES WOMAN BANISHED FOR WITCHCRAFT



TRAINING OF COMMISSIONERS AND STAFF FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY



STRENGTHENING CAPACITY OF COMMISSIONERS AND STAFF ON THE UPR



A DELEGATION FROM DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO DISCUSSES TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PATHWAYS WITH HRCSL



HRCSL HOSTS NANHRI DELEGATES



LAUNCHING OF 2023 ELECTIONS' SITUATION ROOM



HRCSL MEETS WITH A TEAM FROM USAID



A VISITATION BY THE AFRICAN PLATFORM ON CHILDREN AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICT



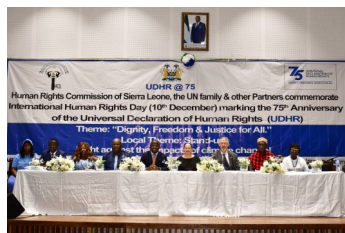
HRCSL JOINS COUNTERPART IN LIBERIA TO MONITOR ELECTIONS



VICE CHAIR OF HRCSL ATTENDS 14TH INTERNATIONAL CONFAB FOR NHRIS IN DENMARK



HRCSL ENGAGES MDAS ON GOVERNMENT'S HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS



COMMEMORATION OF 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF IHRD



UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR APPLAUDS HRCSL FOR MAINTAINING A 'GRADE A' STATUS



## HRCSL Trains Paralegals in Human Rights-Based Approach and Management of HIV/AIDS



The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) with support from the Global Fund held a two-day engagement with Paralegals and desk officers in Freetown for the western area, northwest, and northern regions and Bo for south and eastern regions targeting over 100 participants on the human rights-based approach and the management of HIV/AIDS.

According to Director of Climate Change and Information Services, Mr. Abubakar Kamara, the training focused on empowering the participants with knowledge on how to respect and protect the rights of vulnerable groups including HIV/AIDS, same-sex, persons with disability, and commercial sex workers among others. “These key populations (KPs) often face discrimination and stigma which create barriers to access several rights including rights to health, education, or other social facilities”, he said.

Monitoring and documenting of complaints by these vulnerable groups also formed part of the engagement. Public awareness of the negative impact of the virus and how to support prevention and increase awareness of testing and treatment.

Joshua B.M Sesay from the National AIDS Control Programme under the Ministry of Health and Sanitation said in the last survey of 2019, the HIV prevalence in Sierra Leone was 1.7%. He added that the country was divided into seven burden areas where the western area rural showed the highest prevalence of 3.4%.

He noted that to meet the WHO 95 95 95 target which means 95% of all people living with HIV to know their HIV status, 95% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection to

receive sustained antiretroviral therapy, and 95% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy to have viral suppression by 2025, they have turned their prevention strategy to the key population.

He said they are key drivers of HIV because their activities put them at a high substantial risk of being infected. He said as part of their awareness-raising drive, they organise moonlight picnics and community engagements.

One of the participants Beatrice Turay from the Female Network Advocacy Group in Magburaka said, the training was impactful but most importantly she



learnt about the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS Act of 2007. She said the knowledge gained during the training will be cascaded to her community members.

Mr. James P. Magbity from the National AIDS Control Programme under the Ministry of Health and Sanitation from the Bo regional office disclosed that there are currently sixty thousand people on HIV treatment (60,000) in Sierra Leone. He also noted that the response against HIV/AIDS requires a multi-sectoral approach as no single institution can succeed in the fight against the virus.



## Progress in the Implementation of the UNGPs in Sierra Leone Towards Creating a Responsible Investment Conduct

businesses thus creating an enabling environment that promotes responsible, sustainable, and profitable business operations. These principles are encapsulated into three main pillars:

PILLAR ONE is about the State's Duty to Protect human rights, by creating the appropriate legal, policy and structural environment that enhances the enjoyment of rights in a business context;

PILLAR TWO is about Corporate Responsibility to Respect human rights, by adopting due diligence mechanisms and refrain from causing human rights harm, and

PILLAR THREE is about Access to Remedy for human rights harm, by ensuring aggrieved persons seek redress through judicial and non-judicial mechanisms, provided by either the state or the business.

Since the endorsement of these Principles, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) across the globe have been pivotal in ensuring that they are implemented in their respective countries. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL), therefore, being one such NHRI, commenced implementation of the UNGPs as part of the fulfilment of its mandate of protecting and promoting human rights in the country. The HRCSL also drew its strength from the Edinburg Declaration of 2010 and the Yaoundé Declaration of 2011 for African NHRIs, where on both occasions efforts were made to identify the role of NHRIs towards businesses upholding human rights in their operations. Also, in the just concluded conference of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) in Geneva on 6th – 8th May 2024, there was a further call for “NHRIs to redouble efforts on business and human rights”.

After the 11-year civil war, Sierra Leone began experiencing an influx of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and other businesses, triggered by the country's policy on “Ease of Doing Business”, starting from 2009 and

onwards. With this increase in the activities of FDI in the country, the HRCSL noted a mixture of positive and negative impacts on the enjoyment of human rights by people. Due to the negative impacts experienced by different sectors of the population, there was an increase in the number of business and human rights-related complaints directed to the Commission.

As a response to this emerging trend, HRCSL, in 2013 developed monitoring tools (Guidelines for Monitoring Business and Human Rights in Sierra Leone) to track compliance and assess the business and human rights situation in the country. In 2015, the Commission (with support from UNDP) also developed a training manual on business and human rights to build on the knowledge capacity of all stakeholders in the subject matter. In 2016, the Commission further established the Business and Human Rights Unit to specifically focus on human rights issues associated with the operations of companies and other businesses in the country and to report accordingly. This Unit was earlier in 2021 upgraded into a full-blown directorate (Directorate of Business and Human Rights and Labour Relations) which has been engaging in monitoring of activities of companies across the country, conducting capacity training sessions and public education for selected companies, CSOs, MDAs and members of host communities. The Commission had also undertaken two assessment surveys on the business and human rights situation in the country in 2017 and 2021. In 2017, the Commission organised an Annual Conference on business and human rights, with the theme “Building a Culture of Human Rights within the Business Community in Sierra Leone”, one of the outcomes of which led to the creation of a Steering Committee for the development of a National Action Plan (NAP) on business and human rights for Sierra Leone. Later in 2022, (with support from UNDP and Irish Aid) the Commission in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice (AGMoJ), restarted the process of developing a draft National Policy on BHR that will later lead to a NAP. The draft Policy which is expected to deepen commitments of government Ministries, Departments



## Behind Bars: A Victim of Early Child Marriage and Prolonged Detention

let facility for female inmates. The manager informed HRCSL that he was trying to construct a new one within the precinct of the centre to avoid male and female inmates frequently breaching the privacy of each other.



After a general address to the inmates by the Vice Chairman on their rights and responsibilities while in the centre coupled with knowledge of the specific human rights issues that the Commission was there to monitor, a very unfortunate discovery was made.

Behind bars was a 15-year-old child who had been incarcerated on an allegation of manslaughter. This child was also having with her, her child who was a 2-year-old baby. This child is a victim of EARLY CHILD MARRIAGE, who had been accused by her mate of giving caustic soda to her 6-month-old child (her mate's child) leading to the death of the child. The 15-year-old lamented that her mate had left the caustic soda open at the back of the house when her other child about 5 years old took

the soda believing it was sugar and gave it to her sister who swallowed it which later led to her death. She narrated that her mate accused her of the act and vowed to send her to prison at all costs and even threatened their husband not to intervene in the matter.

She alleged that she was taken into police custody for three months and that she couldn't speak Krio at the time so she made her statement in Temne without an interpreter. According to her, she later learnt that the police officers who took statements from her had changed the version of her statement made in a bid to rope her in as if she committed the crime.

At the centre, her fellow inmates confirmed to the monitoring team that the child only started learning how to speak Krio while in prison with them. Her matter has been committed to the high court awaiting trial. Meanwhile, there is no resident judge in Kabala which means that the child's right to speedy trial like many others in a similar situation (the non-availability of indictments) is being violated.





## Progress in the Implementation of the UNDGs in Sierra Leone Towards Creating a Responsible Investment Conduct

and Agencies (MDAs) and other stakeholders in the implementation of the UNGPs in the country, is now submitted to the AGMoJ's Office, awaiting Cabinet Approval and for onward implementation.

Drawing from the above, it is now important to note that Sierra Leone continues to make progress in the implementation of the UNGPs through government recent adoption of progressive policies, laws and structural reforms in the investment, employment, land tenure governance, environment, agriculture and other related sectors that support responsible business operations. This resonates with the country's international and regional human rights obligations under the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), including other Bilateral and Multilateral trade initiatives, processes and frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), the African Mining Vision (AMV), the ECOWAS Mining Directives, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiatives (EITI), the Kimberly Process and Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), like the World Bank (WB) International Finance Cooperation (IFC) and the African Development Bank (ADB) etc. It is also part of the country's adherence to the calls made during the First and Second African Forum on BHR in Accra and Addis Ababa (2022 and 2023), for African states to make progress in the implementation of the UNGPs and the ultimate development of NAPs in their respective countries.

It is therefore hoped that with the stage already set, Sierra Leone is on the move to become a destination for responsible business operations where human rights are protected and respected thus leading to a boom in investment and a win-win situation.

## A Renewed Commitment: The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone's Next Chapter

Commissioner Yarjah, reflecting on the past term, acknowledged the learning curve and the importance of collaboration among the Commissioners. The increased visibility of HRCSL through media engagements and mobile complaint hearings demonstrated HRCSL's dedication to reaching underserved communities and enhancing its outreach.

Looking forward, the Commissioners are focused on consolidating their achievements and strengthening partnerships with donor organisations, including UNDP, Irish Aid, OSI-WA and the Global Fund. They also plan to review HRCSL's 2004 Act to address emerging human rights issues more effectively.

As they kick-start their second term, there was a palpable sense of optimism. Staff members and stakeholders are eager to see further progress, particularly in terms of logistics and infrastructure.



HE President Julius Maada Bio and Mrs. Patricia N. Ndanema, Chairperson



HRCSL REACCREDITATION AS A "GRADE A" NHRI

## 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.

### NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS:

Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL) Building, OAU Drive, Tower Hill, Freetown

Phone: +232-79-481520

E-mail: [info@hrc-sl.org](mailto:info@hrc-sl.org)

### COMPLAINT HOUSE:

45 Fort Street, Freetown. +232-76-373461

### REGIONAL OFFICES:

**WESTERN RURAL :** 1st Floor, 4 Main Motor Road, Waterloo. **Phone:** +232-78-336309

**BO:** 85 Bo/Tiama Highway by Lewabu Junction, **Phone:** +232-78-590267

**MAKENI:** 65 Magburaka Road. **Phone:** +232-76-571770

**KENEMA:** 67 Blama Road, **Phone:** +232-78-114714

**PORT LOKO:** 25 New London, Kambia Highway, **Phone:** +232-76-800026

**Website:** [www.hrc-sl.org](http://www.hrc-sl.org); **Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/HRCSL](https://www.facebook.com/HRCSL);

**Twitter:** [@human\\_sierra](https://twitter.com/human_sierra); **Youtube:** [Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone](https://www.youtube.com/HumanRightsCommissionofSierraLeone); **Instagram:** [http://www.instagram.com/hrctl](https://www.instagram.com/hrctl)