



HRCSL ENGAGES MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ON DRAFT NATIONAL POLICY ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS



The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) with support from UNDP and Irish Aid on 7th and 8th June 2024 held an engagement with Members of Parliament on the Draft National Policy on Business and Human Rights at the Bombali District Council, Makeni.

The 50 MPs (9 females and 41 males) who participated in the engagement represented various committees in Parliament ranging from the Committee on Human Rights, Mines, Labor, and Youth among others.

Business and Human Rights (BHR) is still an emerging concept even within government operations, and often policies or laws of MDAs do not comprehensively speak to addressing business and human rights concerns arising out of operations of companies in the country. Therefore, the engagement with the MPs was to give a full understanding of the document and



other business and human rights-related issues that will pave the way for the development of a National Action Plan on business and human rights.

In her statement, the Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone Mrs. Patricia Narsu Ndanema said the actions of businesses can affect human rights. She said the importance of the engagement was to discuss the content of policy with Parliamentarians which captures the operations of businesses vis-à-vis their implication in the enjoyment, abuse, or violations of human rights. “As a Commission, we are aware of the tremendous contribution of businesses in terms of paying taxes and also meeting their Corporate Social Responsibilities all geared towards the promotion of rights, however, we are also concerned about the several human wrongs which include wrongful dismissal, and the refusal to pay staff benefits that accompany businesses that subsequently affect the enjoyment of human rights”, she added.

She noted that the step taken by the Commission to develop a National Policy is in line with the global call for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to monitor the operations of multinational companies to ensure that they comply with the United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights and other regional and domestic legal framework meant to protect and promote human rights and the responsibilities of companies.

Hon. Saa Emerson Lamina, Deputy Leader two (2) of Government Business and Chairperson of the Committee of Mines in Parliament commended HRCSL for the engagement and called it “an eye-opener” to an emerging concept of human rights relating to business. He said as someone from one of the mining districts in Sierra Leone he saw firsthand the effects of businesses on communities and people living in those communities. He therefore stated that as lawmakers they should support progressive concepts of human rights as they would want to see a serene environment of business in Sierra Leone so investors will come and do business.

Hon. Abdul Kargbo, Leader of the Opposition in Parliament said addressing human rights issues relating to business should not be limited only to a policy but extend it to become a legislation that will stand the test of time. “I have worked for a multinational company and I have seen the level of abuse when it comes to human rights”, therefore we need actions to curtail the adverse effects



of businesses on citizens. He added that Sierra Leone is very good at making laws, but a major challenge is to monitor its compliance. He called on the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone to invest in establishing offices at different mining sites across the country where he said several human rights abuses occur that their oversight function is not sufficient to cover.



The consultant Sorie Sengbeh Marah Esq. presented the draft Policy looking at the introduction, context, the three pillars, and conclusion. During the session, MPs asked several questions as well as proffered some recommendations which include; ensuring monitoring of businesses, HRCSL to organize similar engagements with the interpreters of the law (lawyers), and businesses to know about their rights and responsibilities by popularising the concept of BHR.

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