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Celebrating Twenty Years: The Successes and Vision for the Future

On 10th December 2024, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone celebrated its 20th Anniversary dubbed with the theme “Celebrating 20 Years of Excellence and Independence in the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights in Sierra Leone.”

The event was commemorated to mark the annual International Human Rights Day celebration on December 10th. In an atmosphere marked with grit and elegance, the Freetown International Conference Center at Aberdeen in Freetown hosted almost four hundred (400) guests from all walks of life among whom were recognized and awarded.

This was the Commission’s first awards event, which recognised the work of eminent personalities in Sierra Leone who have been on the journey of ‘Making Rights Real’ in Sierra Leone.

In 1991 a Constitutional Review Commission was set up by the Late President Joseph Saidu Momoh was chaired by Dr. Peter Tucker, who was responsible for reviewing the 1978 One Party Constitution. Amongst many of the recommendations of that Commission in its Report dated March 1991, it was recommended that a National Human Rights Commission be **See page 10**

HRCSL Launches Public Inquiry Report into Conduct of Law Enforcement Officials

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) officially launched its highly anticipated Public Inquiry Report on August 26, 2024, addressing the conduct of law enforcement officials in Sierra Leone.

The report, a result of extensive investigations into allegations of human rights violations by the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), as well as recommendations and directives, highlights critical issues within the law enforcement sector.

In January 2022, HRCSL, with the support of OSIWA, UNDP, Irish Aid, and the Government of Sierra Leone, **see page 9**



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Editorial

'Imbibing the Culture of Human Rights for the Enjoyment of Fundamental Rights

The concept of human rights has ancient origins. Human rights are everyone's collective rights, regardless of nationality, sex, ethnicity, religion, race, or other status. People practised basic human rights principles even before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Through their community bylaws, religious practices, and cultural practices. The history of human rights is a complex and evolving narrative that spans centuries and is deeply intertwined with the development of societies, cultures, and philosophical thought. The UDHR ushered in the legal recognition of human rights. Even still, the moral principles that constitute our fundamental rights are rich in history.

Sierra Leone is a signatory to Regional and International human rights instruments. These instruments are the benchmarks for the enjoyment of human rights by all in the country. The government plays a critical role in protecting human rights and ensuring that its citizens are treated fairly. It can do this by ratifying international human rights treaties, enacting national laws and policies that protect human rights, and creating independent institutions to monitor compliance with these laws and policies.

Governments also have a responsibility to prevent and respond to human rights violations. They can do this by investigating and prosecuting those responsible for abuses, providing reparations to victims, and adopting measures to prevent future violations.

Whereas the government has what could be the greater responsibility for the enjoyment of human rights, citizens also have their part to play. Section 13 (a-J) of the constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 clearly states the 'duties of the citizen.'

Among other things, this section identifies key responsibilities of citizens including; cultivating a sense of nationalism and patriotism that supersedes other interests, protecting and preserving public property preventing the misappropriation of public funds, and helping appropriate and lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order.

Have citizens been undertaking this responsibility? The answer is "partially." The reasons are glaring and very striking sometimes. There are countless examples of citizens destroying public property during protests to express disagreements. There are instances also where citizens have conveniently destroyed public property like cutting electricity cables, destroying electricity transformers, cutting water pipes, and converting public properties to private use.

Recently violent clashes between police and citizens had led to deaths from both sides. The latter that is supposed to help appropriate lawful agencies to maintain law and order and attack the very people who should protect them.

Citizens often agitate for their human rights but talk less about their responsibilities as highlighted above. Rights always go with duties and rights are not absolute. They are given by law and restricted by law.

The enjoyment of human rights comes with much freedom and is the ideal of society; however, for citizens to fully enjoy that right, they must imbibe the culture of human rights recognising and respecting the values and principles associated with human dignity and basic needs.

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Lawmakers Engaged in Draft HRCSL Act 2024

In a bid to strengthen its mandate and improve the protection of human rights in Sierra Leone, The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone hosted a Pre-Legislative Engagement on the Draft HRCSL Act 2024 in July 2024 in Port Loko. This event brought together lawmakers from both the Human Rights and Legislative Committees of the Sierra Leone Parliament, who were allowed to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the draft Act.



The HRCSL Act, originally enacted in 2004, has been the cornerstone of the Commission’s work in promoting and protecting human rights. However, with emerging human rights issues and the evolution of the Commission’s mandate, there is a pressing need to revise the Act to address

grey areas and bring it in line with current happenings.

During the engagement with MPs, Mrs Patricia Narsu Ndanema, Chairperson of HRCSL, stated the extensive consultations involved in developing the draft, including input from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other partners, as well as engagements with the Attorney General’s Office to review the document further.

While thanking the MPs for their continued support, the Chairperson noted that “This review of the HRCSL Act is an important step toward ensuring the Commission’s effectiveness in protecting the rights of all in Sierra Leone.”

During the session, Commissioner Simitie Lavalley Esq. presented key areas of the draft Act requiring amendment and led discussions with MPs, enabling them to make meaningful contributions.

Chairman of the Human Rights Committee, Hon. Abdul Karim Kamara, expressed his gratitude for the engagement, emphasising that human rights work requires collective efforts from all sectors of society, not just the HRCSL.



HRCSL Embarks on Border Monitoring and Awareness Raising

In addition to its work on complaints handling, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone is also tackling the critical issues of migration and human trafficking. The Commission, through its Directorate of Migration and Human Trafficking, conducted border monitoring activities in Kambia, Falaba, and Pujehun districts. These sessions aimed to raise awareness about migration-related human rights issues and strengthen collaborations with local authorities and stakeholders.

tor drivers, who are familiar with the routes used for illegal migration and trafficking.

Madam Fatmata Turay, Director of the Falaba District Women's Network, spoke about the alarming prevalence of trafficking within Sierra Leone's borders, particularly involving children being taken under the guise of education. She emphasised the need for stronger collaboration among local authorities and the HRCSL to combat these practices

effectively.

During a monitoring visit in Jendema, Immigration Officer Foday S. Momoh stressed the connection between migration, human trafficking, and human rights. He noted that



The project was funded by UNDP and Irish Aid and focused on educating communities about the dangers of human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and other human rights violations at border points.

The HRCSL team visited key crossing points in the north-west region of Gbalamuya, north at Fulamansa, and the southern region at Jendema, where they engaged with local authorities and immigration officers to understand the challenges facing these areas.

The efforts received strong support from residents, who appreciated the Commission's commitment to addressing migration and human trafficking issues at the grassroots level. Pa Lansana Fofanah, Town Chief of Kambia, praised HRCSL for its outreach and called for further engagement with key local stakeholders, including bike riders and mo-

border crossings often raise significant rights concerns, including trafficking and smuggling.

Commissioners also took the opportunity to highlight HRCSL's mandate and the importance of addressing migration and trafficking as emerging human rights issues. These sessions underscored the Commission's ongoing commitment to ensuring the protection and promotion of human rights for all, particularly the most vulnerable.

As the HRCSL continues its work on addressing human trafficking and migration, it calls on all sectors of society to join efforts in upholding the rights and dignity of every individual.

HRCSL Takes Prohibition of Child Marriage Act to Communities



Kambia District

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The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs engaged 350 stakeholders in selected communities across the country on the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024.

The engagements held in November 2024 mobilised community leaders, institutions, and the public to champion child rights issues in Sierra Leone with funding support from UNFPA. The thrust of the engagement was to get community stakeholders to understand the key provisions of the Act and in turn, educate their people.

Child marriage is a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and safeguarding children's rights. This has led to early or teenage pregnancy, school dropout, health implications, and long-term economic and social disadvantages.

In May 2024, the Prohibition of the Child Marriage Act was passed into law. It criminalises marrying any child under the age of 18. Offenders face 15 years in prison or pay a fine of Fifty Thousand Leone (50,000) or both payment and fine.

During the sessions, participants expressed their willingness to popularise the Act, especially key provisions that criminalised child marriage.

A teacher at the Magbema Islamic Secondary School in Rokupr, Kambia District, Mariatu Mansaray promised to help educate her colleagues and children in her school on the dangers of child marriage and the penalties prescribed in the Act for defaulters.

In Segbwema, Nurse Monica Baiom said she will use the knowledge acquired to talk about key provisions in the Act during their clinic sessions with patients.

"Many of the pregnant girls in our clinic are underage, and so this information will be very useful to them. I believe that educating them about the negative impacts will save them from early marriage," she said.

Representing the Koinadugu Women's Network, Mackie Tejan commended HRCSL for involving every key stakeholder in the discussion.

"Before now, our understanding of key provisions in the Act was limited, but this engagement has given us the necessary tool to engage our peers for them to know more about the document," she said.

At the various locations, the sessions were facilitated by commissioners and staff of HRCSL and representatives from the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs.



PHOTO GALLERY: HRCSL 20TH ANNIV



THEME: "CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE IN THE PROTECTION"

ANNIVERSARY DINNER & AWARDS NIGHT



“COMMITMENT AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL IN SIERRA LEONE”

Closing the Gaps in Human Rights Violation in the Extractive Industries

Extractive industries play a crucial role in building and expanding the Sierra Leone economy. However, in their quest to maximize profits, most ignore their corporate social responsibilities and corporate responsibilities of upholding ratified existing human rights laws in the country. Issues of Human Rights violations have become the legacy of the mining sector; reflective of a colonial mode of operations within an African community where the rights only rest with those who own the operations of the company and those who are representatives of the owners and not giving credence or less attention to staff within the lower level. These gaps exist in their business operations and among other things influenced the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone to establish the Directorate of Business Human and Rights and Labor Relations to monitor the activities of businesses in the country.

Business and Human Rights are an emerging concept, therefore foreign to businesses operating in Sierra Leone. Most businesses are in tuned with the “old ways” of doing



things hence the need for monitoring them and enlightening them on the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which is quintessential to meet the universal standard on how business should operate.

In lieu of the aforesaid, the Business and Human Rights and Labour Relations Directorate within the commission in October 2024, monitored Seawright Mining Company in their areas of operations in Masundu Kongoteh and Boroma Community respectively, in Gbenseh Chiefdom, Kono Dis-

trict.

The monitoring process involved the use of a monitoring checklist which is in line with the guidelines for monitoring business and human rights in Sierra Leone and in conjunction with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). The Checklist focuses on five specific sections which address the areas of business. They include Employment Practices, Environment and Communities, Security, Legal and Government Affairs and Contract and Supply Chain. The UNGPs three pillars provides for, the States’ responsibilities (the duty of the state to protect human rights); businesses’ responsibilities (the responsibility of businesses to respect human rights) and access to remedies (victims of human rights should have access to remedies).

The monitoring team met with the community people who were so happy to welcome the team from Freetown; for the first time, as was expressed by their speaker, a platform was given to them to air out their concerns and express their challenges with regarding the operations of Seawright mining company in their community. The team held an engagement with them in their community Centre Barry during which a plethora of concerns were put forward, vis-a-vis the operations of the mining company in their community. Their concerns included, the destruction of their farms by the company and the fact that they could no longer engage in their small-scale mining activities, which had been a major source of livelihood for them; they no longer enjoy sound sleep due to the operation of the heavy-duty machines and blasting exercises; and that, the company only employed four (4) members from the Masundu community and two (2) from the Boroma Community; that, they were experiencing mosquito infestation.

The team having listened and noted the concerns of the community people held an engagement with the management of Seawright Mining **See page 11**

HRCSL Launches Public Inquiry Report into Conduct of Law Enforcement Officials



Leone. Panels consisting of HRCSL Commissioners and hired legal experts heard cases, cross-examined witnesses, and reviewed evidence submitted by complainants, interested parties, and law enforcement officials. This rigorous process ensured that each case was treated with due diligence and fairness.

The inquiry findings revealed alarming patterns of human rights violations by law enforcement officials. Specific instances of abuse, unlawful treatment, and rights violations were documented, and the HRCSL has called for appropriate compensation for victims.

The HRCSL has requested a compensation amount of 305,100 New Leones from the Sierra Leone Police and 170,000 New Leones from the RSLAF to be paid to the victims of these violations.

Vice Chairperson of HRCSL, Victor Idrissa Lansana, expressed gratitude for the support of OSIWA, UNDP, Irish Aid, and the Government of Sierra Leone, noting the importance of these partnerships in enabling the Commission to undertake this essential inquiry.

Commissioner Lansana stressed the importance of accountability and adherence to the legal framework established by the HRCSL Act and Complaints Rules of 2008. He added that the report's findings and the Commission's recommendations are aimed at improving the conduct of law enforcement agencies and ensuring that such violations are prevented in the future.

The HRCSL has outlined clear directives for law enforcement agencies to follow, urging the agencies to pay compensation to victims as a step toward reparations. The Commission also reiterated the need for institutional reforms to ensure that law enforcement personnel respect human rights and uphold the rule of law in their operations.

started the Public Inquiry into the Conduct of Law Enforcement Officials. The objective was to establish the facts surrounding alleged human rights violations by law enforcement officials (LEOs), particularly in their role in maintaining law and order. The inquiry was launched to promote accountability and transparency in the law enforcement sector.

Under the HRCSL Act (No. 9) of 2004, specifically Section 7 (2)(a), the Commission is mandated to conduct inquiries into allegations of systemic human rights violations. The inquiry covered five key law enforcement agencies: The Sierra Leone Police, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, the Road Safety Corps, the Sierra Leone Correctional Service, and the Metropolitan Police. The investigation spanned from 2015 to 2021.

HRCSL Director of Climate Change and Information Services, Abu Bakarr Kamara, who also heads the Public Inquiry Secretariat, explained that strategic consultations were conducted with civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, and law enforcement agencies before the inquiry. Community engagements, town halls, media engagements, and roundtable discussions across the country helped inform the inquiry process, ensuring that voices from various sectors were heard.

Throughout the inquiry, a total of 178 complaints were received, with 133 deemed admissible. These complaints included a wide range of alleged abuses, including police brutality, unlawful detention, and excessive use of force.

The public inquiry took place across three regions of Sierra



Celebrating Twenty Years: The Successes and Vision for the Future

established and responsible for protecting and promoting human rights in the country.

Furthermore, at the end of the civil war in Sierra Leone in 2002, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up to document the atrocities of the war and give an opportunity to victims to freely recount their experiences of the war. The Commission made recommendations to the government and other stakeholders for implementation and to prevent a recurrence.

One of these was to establish a National Human Rights institution consistent with the recommendation of the Lomé' Peace Agreement.

By an Act of Parliament in 2004, the government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabba enacted and established the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone by Act No. 9 of 2004. The Commission through its Act has a broad mandate to protect and promote the human rights of all in Sierra Leone with powers to hold accountable duty bearers for human rights violations.

In responding to the mandate of the Commission, the Chairperson said in her statement at the awards night said the Commission has been working towards that mandate in line with its vision of seeing a Sierra Leone where the culture of human rights prevail and the people respect the rule of law and live in peace and dignity. She paid glowing tribute to the pioneering Commissioners and formidable staff for laying a solid foundation and noted that 'their dedication and hard work paved the way for the Commission's growth'.

The Chairperson highlighted the accreditation of the Commission as a Grade 'A' NHRI on three consecutive assessments (2011, 2016 & 2022), maintaining strategic executive positions in regional and international human rights networks under the Africa Union and also ECO-WAS, the progressive establishment of regional offices across the country; Northwest regional office in Port Loko and Complaint House at Fort Street in Freetown, referral partnership forum to look at cases referred to partner institutions, the establishment of new Directorates, as well as the establishment of 78 Human Rights and Peace Clubs in Schools as some of the successes recorded in the past 20 years.

The keynote address was delivered by the First Chairperson of the Commission, a Court of Appeal Judge of the Judiciary of Sierra Leone Justice Jamesina E. L. King. She explained the journey and commended the Commission for playing the lead role in the protection and promotion of human rights in Sierra Leone for the past 20 years. She recognised the pioneers of the establishment of the Commission, citing the government of the late President Dr Ahmed Tejan Kabbah and members of parliament for passing the HRCSL Act of 2004.

Justice emphasised that "As we celebrate this milestone, I want us to reflect on the achievements and also the challenges the Commission has experienced during the last 20 years. This will enable us as an institution to determine what was done right and what could be done better. It is an opportune time to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and events which have changed over the years," she said. Justice King added that since the operationalisation of the Commission, Sierra Leone has made significant strides in the protection and promotion of everyone nationwide.

Awards were given to human rights defenders, institutions, companies, partners, the media, former long-serving staff and current long-serving staff in recognition of their role in promoting the work of the Commission. The awardees and guests applauded HRCSL for the remarkable event. Among the individual awardees included the following: President Ahmed Tejan Kabba (posthumous), Vice President Solomon E. Berewah (posthumous), Dr. Peter Tucker (posthumous), Honourable Justice Edmund Cowan (posthumous), President Julius Maada Bio, Mrs. Fatima Jabbie Maada Bio, Former First Lady Sia Nyama Koroma and Alpha Sesay.

Moving forward, the Commission will continue its collaboration with key stakeholders nationally and internationally, enhance its gains over the years and strive to meet matching trends of human rights globally to create an atmosphere where everyone can enjoy their human rights.

Closing the Gaps in Human Rights Violation in the Extractive Industries

Company the following day. During the engagement, they noted concerns from the community people were shared with the management, who also highlighted their challenges, the commitments they had fulfilled and the pending activities they were working on as a company.



The swift intervention of the Business and Human Rights and Labour Relations Team breached the gap between

the communities and the management and set up an effective operational-level grievance mechanisms to systematically handle and resolve the grievances that existed when the team arrived at first. The timely arrival for the monitoring activity helped diffuse existing and potential problems and provides channels for resolving issues that might otherwise escalate into protests, conflicts or legal disputes. The intervention of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone also served as an important tool to help companies assess the state of community relations and indicate where problems may arise.

In emphasising the need for robust grievance mechanism processes as part of their environmental, social and governance assessment within their institutions, companies will be able to swiftly address challenges of violations that may occur in their offices and places of operations.

The Directorate of Business Human Rights will continue to monitor and engage extractives industries and other businesses to assess their level of compliance with human rights best practices in their everyday operations to ensure that the mission and vision of the commission, which is to have “A Sierra Leone where the culture of Human Rights prevails and the people respect the rule of law and live in peace and dignity” is achieved.

HRCSL Joins Awareness on Breast Cancer

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone on Saturday 26th October 2024 joined the Thinking Pink Breast Cancer Foundation in their annual Breast Cancer Awareness raising marathon.



Yearly, the event attracts hundreds of activists from various walks of life that helps to promote awareness of Breast Cancer. As a national human rights institution, the Commission joined many other organisations in the marathon to promote rights to health. A certificate of appreciation was presented to HRCSL.

The Chairperson Mrs. Patricia Narsu Ndanema receiving the certificate thanked the organisers for their efforts to bring the Commission onboard.



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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