



HRCSL ENDS NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone on Wednesday October 25 to Thursday October 26 ended a two days National Conference on Business and Human Rights with the theme 'building a culture of human right within the business community in Sierra Leone' held at the Miatta Conference Centre.

On 16th June 2011, the UN Human Rights Council endorsed the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights for implementing the UN "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework, providing – for the first time – a global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse impacts on human rights linked to business activity. The HRCSL also developed in partnership with the Irish Human Rights Commission and the Danish Institute its own guidelines in 2013 as a clear and consistent roadmap for monitoring the operations of business enterprises in Sierra Leone in line with its statutory mandate.

Sierra Leone' business sector boomed before the outbreak of Ebola and the country is attracting more businesses in various fields of mining, agro-business, industries, construction companies and factories. It is no doubt that the operations of these businesses have human rights implications in relation to labour issues, environment, security and employment. However, as part of monitoring the compliance of businesses to the guiding principles, HRCSL first undertook a baseline survey of businesses and later administer questionnaires and train companies and landowners on business and human rights. These activities helped to provide a clear and consistent roadmap for monitoring the operations of business enterprises in Sierra Leone, in line with its statutory mandate.

During his address at the official opening of the conference, Patrick Morlai Koroma who chaired the session said the conference was as a result of a monitoring report published in 2013 identifying human rights challenges in the operations of mining companies. He called that businesses should be accountable or else they can cause harm and also abuse the rights of individuals where they operate.

The Chairman of HRCSL, Rev. Dr. Usman Jesse Fornah gave a brief background to the creation of HRCSL which he said was established in 2004 to protect and promote the rights of Sierra Leoneans. The Chairman called for strategic engagement with businesses to respect and protect the rights of their workers and the host communities that they operate. There were statements made by the European Union, the United States Ambassador, Maria Brewer the UK High Commissioner, Guy Warrington and the Inspector General of Police, Francis Munu. There were statements also from institutions like the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice and the Chamber of the Chief Justice.

The Attorney General and Minister of Justice delivered the keynote address on behalf of the President of Sierra Leone, Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma.