



**STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF HRCSL ON THE PRESENTATION OF THE  
REPORT ON THE STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN SIERRA LEONE 2016, TO THE  
HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT**

Honourable Speaker of Parliament, Honourable members of Parliament, colleague Commissioners and staff of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the Commission is grateful that it has been given the opportunity to have audience with you and present the Commission's 10<sup>th</sup> annual State of Human Rights report.

On 14<sup>th</sup> August 2017, Freetown and its environs experienced a torrential rainfall which caused a mudslide at Regent and devastating floods in other areas claiming hundreds of lives, hundreds more missing, feared dead and many more injured. Several homes and billions of Leones worth of property were destroyed, thus rendering thousands more homeless. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone recognizes the efforts made by Government of Sierra Leone to give a dignified burial to the hundreds who lost their lives, and provide care for the thousands of survivors as well as relocate those displaced by the twin disasters. On behalf of the Commission, I wish to extend the Commission's heartfelt condolences to the families of all those who lost their lives as a result of these national disasters. The Commission also empathizes with those who lost their homes and other property.

The Commission recognises the ongoing efforts by government and its development partners to address the aftermaths of the twin disasters of mudslide and floods which have impacted negatively on the enjoyment of the rights to shelter, education, health, clean and safe drinking water, among others.

Honourable Speaker Sir, in compliance with Section 24 (1) of the Human Rights Commission Act (No. 9) 2004, this tenth report catalogues the activities undertaken by the Commission in the protection and promotion of human rights as well as the ways in which fundamental rights and



freedoms in the Constitution and international and regional agreements to which Sierra Leone is a party were observed or violated in the year under review.

On the 27th January, during the 24th Session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Geneva, the human rights record of Sierra Leone was assessed by the Human Rights Council for the second time. The Commission observed the unfolding of the UPR process and noted that out of 208 recommendations proffered by member states, government accepted 177 and noted 31 of them. The Commission commends government for this wonderful initiative and urges it to take steps to address the 31 recommendations it noted as well as implement the 177 it accepted.

Honourable Speaker, we are pleased to inform you that the Commission was re-accredited Grade “A” status in October 2016 by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions following a review of its operational and legislative compliance with the Paris Principles that sets out the requirements for a fully functioning National Human Rights Institution. This has earned the Commission respect and visibility at the highest level in international and regional human rights arena. The Commission is committed to maintaining this status and therefore calls on government for its support in accordance with the Paris Principles.

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone notes with satisfaction that a good number of its recommendations (among them, the inclusion of the Commission as a Constitutional entity) to the Constitutional Review Committee were included in the final draft of the revised Constitution published in February. The Commission therefore calls on government to ensure that these recommendations are endorsed and adequate resources provided for their implementation.

The Commission recognizes government’s efforts in implementing the President’s Recovery Priorities intended to stimulate sustainable socio-economic transformation in Sierra Leone following the Ebola epidemic. Phase 2 of the President’s Recovery Priorities is to address seven



priority areas, including the provision of water, geared towards transitioning the economy back to the Agenda for Prosperity. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone particularly notes the strides made by government and its development partners in providing access to affordable, clean and safe water for drinking and other purposes in the district headquarter towns in the north, Bo city and Pujehun in the south, Kenema city and Kailahun town in the east and some parts of Freetown and its environs, but some challenges still abound. The Commission urges government to look into those challenges as their persistence affects the enjoyment of other human rights such as the right to education, health, security of person and human dignity, particularly for children, women, older persons and persons with disabilities.

Honourable Speaker Sir, the health and education sectors are among the hardest hit during the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic. However, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone lauds the steps taken by your government to strengthen the health and educational sectors in order to put the country back on track towards full socio-economic recovery via the President's Recovery Priorities.

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone notes government's continued efforts in implementing the second phase of the Ebola Recovery Strategy for Sierra Leone whose objectives include restoring healthcare services to communities. However, the Commission is concerned that in spite of Government's best efforts in restoring healthcare services, the health sector continues to face some challenges including the non-availability of some essential drugs, inadequate number of health personnel and poor remuneration for staff. This affects the efficient and effective implementation of the free health care service.

The Commission commends the government of Sierra Leone for the smooth transition from the two-term academic year in the aftermath of the Ebola outbreak, and a return to the normal three-term academic year. However, the educational sector is still grappling with poor infrastructure and the lack of trained and qualified teachers especially in the rural areas of the



country. The school feeding programme which was intended to increase pupil enrolment and retention in schools is yet to meet its full potential. The Commission calls on government to strengthen the education sector by building more classrooms, ensuring that teachers are trained and providing incentives for them to take up teaching jobs in the rural areas.

The Human Rights Commission appreciates the Attorney General and Minister of Justice and the Chief Justice who together undertook a 'Justice Sector Tour' in Kailahun, Kenema, Bo, Tonkolili, Bombali and Port Loko districts to gauge, at first hand, public perception of the justice system and thus address the human rights concerns raised by the Commission. The Commission notes the deployment of resident Magistrates to every district, the promotion of five Principal State Counsels to Senior State Counsels, the recruitment of seven State Counsels while six Judges were appointed to the High Court and one to the Court of Appeal. This is a positive step in the administration of justice in the country. However, the Commission urges the Judiciary to train Judges, Magistrates and legal practitioners on the recently validated Sentencing and Bail Guidelines for parliamentary approval.

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone recognises the steps taken by the Sierra Leone Correctional Service to construct a separate correctional centre for female inmates in Bo in compliance with the Mandela Rules. The increase in the number of correctional centres nationwide from 17 to 19 will help to reduce overcrowding as the number of inmates in correctional centres far exceeds their holding capacities. However, the inadequate number of personnel to manage the correctional centres remains a challenge. According to the Sierra Leone Correctional Service, the current inmate to officer ratio is 7:1 (seven inmates to one officer) which exceeds the standard inmates to officer ratio of 3:1 (three inmates to one officer). The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone is concerned that the gap in ratio poses a security threat to both officers and inmates. The Commission is also concerned that the Correctional Service, particularly in the rural areas, is faced with the challenge of transporting inmates to and from court sittings due to limited number of vehicles.



The Commission recognizes the strides taken by the Sierra Leone Police to strengthen and improve the capacity of its personnel as evidenced by numerous training activities undertaken both within and without the country. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone also commends the Sierra Leone Police for maintaining discipline within its ranks which has seen a reduction in the number of complaints lodged with the Commission against police officers. The Commission is however concerned that some police detention facilities continue to be characterized by the detention of suspects beyond the constitutional limit, poor sanitary and hygiene conditions, lack of access to medical care and overcrowding.

Honourable Speaker Sir, the Commission was a decade old in December 2016. The Commission wishes to assure you that it is determined to fully carry out its mandate of protecting and promoting human rights for all in Sierra Leone in the midst of increase in demand for its services nationwide.

However, Honourable Speaker Sir, since my election as Chairperson of the Commission, one of the burning concerns of the Commission has been the scaling down of the Leave Allowances of Commissioners and Staff as well as the centralization of the payment of salaries by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. This would have been a threat to the renewal of the Commission's Grade "A" Status by GANHRI in 2020 – 2021, since this centralized payment scheme fundamentally deprives the Commission of its independence in terms of control and direction from any person, body or institution. However, the Commission commends the Attorney General and Minister of Justice for his recent legal opinion which would ultimately lead to a reversal to the Commission's original status quo. The Commission hopes that its independence, as articulated by the Attorney General in his legal opinion, would be strictly adhered to in its entirety.



The Commission's work is further hampered by high staff turn-over, financial and logistical challenges. The annual budgetary allocation is grossly inadequate and delays in the receipt of such disbursement affect the implementation of activities including the production of our Annual State of Human Rights Report. To date, the Commission's remaining subvention for the first half of the year (January – June 2017) to the tune of Le 514,222,800 is still locked at the Bank of Sierra Leone while the subvention for the second half of the year (July – December 2017) totaling Le 946,800,000 is awaiting approval from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development.

In addition, all the vehicles, office furniture, computers, printers and other equipment procured since the Commission's inception have now worn out and need replacement. This is compounded by the limited office space within the facilities the Commission currently occupies in NEC Building and the challenges of maintaining rented offices in the regions. The Commission's worn-out vehicles and the appalling nature of its office space at headquarters could aptly be described as death-traps.

Your Excellency, the Human Rights Commission calls on your noble office to look into these challenges as this will not only further the interest of its international human rights standing, but will also promote compliance with the provisions under the Paris Principles and the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone Act (No.9) 2004, and subsequently enhance the effective protection and promotion of human rights in the country.

Honourable Speaker, the Commission would like to kindly urge government to ensure the implementation of its recommendations in this report and the previous State of Human Rights reports. It is now my pleasure, on behalf of colleague Commissioners and staff, to present to you the Commission's tenth annual report on the State of Human Rights in Sierra Leone 2016.

Thank you for your attention.

**THE END**