



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE

PRESS STATEMENT ON THE PROLIFERATION OF HATE MESSAGES AND DIATRIBES

Freetown, Friday, 28th August 2020

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) is the statutory body responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights of all in Sierra Leone pursuant to Section 7 (1) of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone Act of 2004. For such mandate to be smoothly carried out, and for the enjoyment and fulfillment of any right- be they civil and political; economic, social and cultural; and development rights; peace and national security must be paramount and must go undisturbed.

The HRCSL in its general monitoring role has been monitoring different social media platforms which have recently been flooded with hate messages and diatribes from Sierra Leoneans both within and outside the country with the aim of inciting civil and political unrest and ultimately bringing the State to a standstill. The HRCSL hereby vehemently and roundly condemns all forms of hate messages and diatribes and all the pioneers and promoters of same and as such calls on those persons behind such unpatriotic practices to desist from such acts forthwith.

The HRCSL has been one of the foremost defenders of free speech as it consistently called on successive governments through its Annual State of Human Right Reports, strategic and media engagements to repeal the criminal and seditious libel law contained in the Public Order Act of 1965- a call that has now been recently adhered to by government. HRCSL however abhors messages of hate and division as they do not constitute the free speech envisaged by the repeal nor do they constitute the spirit and intendment contained in section 25 subsection (1) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 19 (1) & (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Accordingly, Article 20 (1) & (2) of the ICCPR clearly prohibits propaganda that promotes war and any advocacy that promotes violence. Similarly, Subsection (2) of Section 25 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991 provides for exemptions in respect of freedom of expression where the circumstance has to do with security of the state, public safety, public order, morality and health; and for the purpose of protecting the reputations, rights and freedoms of other persons, etc.

The HRCSL uses this opportunity to remind government of its primary state obligation to provide security for its citizens and everyone staying in Sierra Leone as provided by Section 5 (2) (b) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 for ease of reference;

5 (2) It is accordingly declared that -

- (b) ***the security, peace and welfare of the people of Sierra Leone shall be the primary purpose and responsibility of the Government, and to this end it shall be the duty of the Armed Forces, the Police, Public Officers and all security agents to protect and safeguard the people of Sierra Leone.***



The HRCSL therefore urges the Government and its relevant agencies to ensure that the security of the State and its people is safeguarded at all times within the confines of the laws of the land and international covenants and protocols to which Sierra Leone is a State Party.

In a similar vein, the HRCSL again uses this opportunity to call on citizens to abide by the provision contained in **Section 13** of the Constitution which provides mandatory *Duties of the Citizen* which includes but not limited to:

“a sense of nationalism and patriotism so that loyalty to the State shall override sectional, ethnic, tribal or other loyalties; protect and preserve public property...; ensure the proper control and upbringing of his children and wards; render assistance to appropriate and lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order.”

Additionally, HRCSL draws the attention of everyone to the provisions contained in Article 29 (3) & (4) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) thus: (3) *“Not to compromise the security of the State whose national or resident he is;”* and (4) *“to preserve and strengthen social and national solidarity, particularly when the latter is threatened”*.

HRCSL therefore calls on every citizen at home and abroad to desist from producing and promoting all forms of hate messages and diatribes and to be law abiding, discipline and participate in and defend all democratic processes and practices responsibly as per law required.

HRCSL takes this opportunity to assure the general public of its unwavering commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights of all.

END

Signed:

Patricia Narsu NDANEMA
Chairperson