



**STATEMENT BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE ON
THE STUDENTS' PROTEST AT THE INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
AND MANAGEMENT**

13th April, 2021, Tower Hill, Freetown

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) is concerned about the spontaneous violence that erupted on 12th April, 2021 between protesting students and the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) at the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) Campus following the publication of a partial list of would-be graduates published by the college administration on the said date.

As a statutory institution mandated to protect and promote human rights of all in Sierra Leone, HRCSL has been monitoring both mainstream and social media and has subsequently engaged key stakeholders to fully grasp the factors that led to the protest.

The HRCSL undertook a fact-finding mission to the college campus (IPAM), the Central Police Station and the Kingtom Police Hospital. Engagements were held with the Students Union Executive and other students who are not necessarily members of the Student Union Government, the Deputy Registrar, Examination Officer, the Senior Assistant Finance Officer, Lockup and Crime Officers at Central Police Station, and the Medical Superintendent at the Kingtom Police Hospital. HRCSL also engaged detained students at the Central Police Station and visited one female student at the Kingtom Police Hospital.

During the above engagements, HRCSL noted the following findings:

- That a partial list of would-be graduands was published by the college administration which contained about 350 names when over a thousand students are expected to graduate.
- Following the protest, a second list was published later in the afternoon but was also found to be faulty as students who had left the University were also included on the list while the actual students were not listed.
- There were issues of missing grades and also reference examinations which were in fact only conducted on Saturday with only four days left to the proposed graduation ceremony



scheduled for the 14th April, 2021. In addition, there were issues of outstanding reference exams to be taken.

- There were students who were yet to fulfill their financial obligations with the University.
- There were insufficient academic gowns in supply by the college administration which some students had already paid for and this further infuriated the students.
- The students failed to exhaustively engage the relevant stakeholders in the university and then took the laws into their hands.
- The police on the other hand failed to apply professionalism in handling the situation on their arrival at the scene. For instance, a female student was seen manhandled by several police officers as captured in a video widely circulated on social media.
- Five students were arrested and detained including the female student mentioned above.
- There were delays in the publication of sessional and final results which created uncertainty on the part of the students as to their status / level in their respective courses of study.
- There were also delays in the verification of entry requirements / results.
- That the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) had agreed with the Academic staff of the University to improve the conditions of service of lecturers with an increment of 75% to be applied incrementally effective end of April 2021.

Recommendations:

In light of the above findings, HRC SL recommends as follows:

To the IPAM Administration / USL:

- That the University should postpone the graduation ceremony until the outstanding issues have been substantially settled so as to avoid any further incident and give opportunity to parents and sponsors to witness the graduation of their children / beneficiaries.
- That exam scripts should be marked on time and grades published to allow students know their status as they progress from one level to the other and final grades verified and published way before date of graduation.



- That both academic and administrative staff should endeavor to be professional in ensuring that students' grades do not go missing. To this end, the University should ensure that the grading system is digitized as it obtains in many other Universities.
- With the conditions of service being improved by government, HRCSL expects quality service delivery to the students from lecturers and the administration as a whole.

To the Sierra Leone Police (SLP):

- The SLP should immediately release all the students in their custody on bail pending any investigations.
- That time and again, HRCSL calls on the SLP to be always professional in their line of duty and refrain from using excessive force in quelling down riots and protests.
- That extreme care be exercised in dealing with women and girls at all times in such situations.
- That the SLP should immediately institute an internal investigation into the conduct of those police officers who were seen in the video manhandling a female student and if found wanton should immediately be dismissed from the SLP and this should be communicated to the public.

To the Students:

- Students should use existing structures within and without the university (eg. HRCSL) in seeking redress and should always resist any temptation to take the law into their hands. To this end, students are admonished to read Section 13 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991 with specific reference to paragraph (j) which states as follows: ***“Every citizen shall ... render assistance to appropriate and lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order.”***
- Students should treat their academic work with the seriousness it deserves and endeavor to meet their financial obligations on time which they normally sign up to upon admission.

In light of the findings and recommendations above, HRCSL unreservedly condemn every form of violence and unprofessional conduct that have the potential to undermine the enjoyment of



fundamental human rights as enshrined in the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 and other regional and international instruments. HRCSL calls on the police in particular to exercise restraints as professionals whenever engaging the public as required by ‘UN Guiding Principles on the Use of Firearms’ and also the ‘UN Code of Conducts for Law Enforcement Officials’.

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone remains committed to the protection and promotion of human rights of all throughout Sierra Leone.

END

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Victor I. Lansana", is positioned above the typed name.

Victor I. Lansana Esq.

Vice Chairperson (HRCSL)