



INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY MESSAGE

By HRCSLs Chairperson Patricia Narsu NDANEMA

Freetown, 10th December 2022

The honorable Attorney General and Minister of Justice, the UN Resident Coordinator, Senior Human Rights Adviser to the UN, H.E. the Ambassador of Ireland, the Western Area-Commissioner Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL), the representative of the European Union, Traditional Leaders, Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), pupils, students, Commissioners and Staff of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone warm greetings to you all.



The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone and its partners joined the United Nations and the rest of the world on Saturday 10th December to commemorate the 74th International Human Rights Day since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 by the UN General Assembly.



Ahead of the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 2023, the Commission joins the international community to launch the year-long campaign to showcase the UDHRs **legacy, relevance and activism**.

Distinguished partners, since the UDHR came into existence in 1948, human rights have, in real terms, become more recognized and more guaranteed across the world, through the ratification of various human rights instruments and also promotional activities aimed at building the culture of human rights for all. To this, the Commission can attest in relation to strides taken by the government for human rights protection and promotion.

This year's International Human Rights Day theme is: **"Dignity, Freedom and Justice for All"** with the call to action for us all to **'#StandUp4 Human Rights'**. Although HRCSL has the statutory mandate to protect and promote human rights, we recognize that this mandate cannot be done by the Commission alone - it is the collective responsibility of all of us in **'Making Rights Real'**.

To this year's theme, the Commission and its partners have added **"Human Rights and Elections-#StandUp4HumanRights"**. This localized theme was adopted against the backdrop of the country's upcoming general elections, and have seized this occasion to focus on the critical human rights issues in the electoral processes.

As an independent national human rights institution mandated to protect and promote human rights, the Commission commemorates this event by strongly calling on everyone to observe, respect and defend human rights not only on December 10, but throughout the conduct of the 2023 electoral processes.

As Sierra Leone prepares for the multitier elections, we must have in mind that electoral processes are expressions of people's political will. This simply means that the right to express diverse ideas must be firmly guarded during election periods as guaranteed in Article 19(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Sierra Leone is a state party. It is however worthy to add that while we enjoy this right, it must be done within the confines of the law.

HRCSL recognizes Government's commitment to promoting free speech by the repeal of Part 5 of the Public Order Act of 1965 which hitherto criminalized free speech and by enacting a



new Independent Media Commission Act of 2021 which among other things empowers the Independent Media Commission to regulate the media towards professionalism. While HRCSL also welcomes the Cyber Security and Crimes Act of 2021, it calls on Government and its partners to conduct successive trainings for the police, state counsels and the benchers on the content and implementation of this Law and to also engage in strategic nationwide public awareness raising programs especially so as we fast approach the heats of the elections.

On behalf of the Commission, let me use this opportunity to call on all state and non-state apparatus more especially the Election Management Bodies (EMBs), Security Forces, the Judiciary, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the media to focus on conflict prevention and mitigation messages before, during and after the electoral processes.

We must all be wholeheartedly committed to collectively harness efforts towards ensuring that the fundamental human rights of every individual are respected throughout the electoral processes, and that everyone exercises his or her civic responsibilities without hindrance and in a manner that is consistent with national, regional and international human rights standards.

In light of the above, HRCSL uses this opportunity to call on stakeholders including:

- ***The Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone*** to conduct free, fair and credible elections;
- ***The Security Sector*** to adequately train their personnel on elections and security and provide a professional security cover for the 2023 elections;
- ***The Political Parties Regulation Commission*** to properly regulate the conduct of political parties for an inclusive election;
- ***Political Parties*** to put out policies and intended programs designed to win the hearts and minds of the people and not to sponsor violence or embark on preaching hate messages;
- HRCSL calls on the **Judiciary** to expeditiously adjudicate potential petition matters as and when they are filed in court in order to prevent tension
- ***Civil Society Organizations*** to put the interest of the nation at the center of all their advocacies and not their individual interests at the detriment of the State;
- ***The Media*** to bless the nation with credible media coverage giving opportunity to all sides of the story and not creating tensions



- **Religious and Traditional Leaders** to provide a more vibrant the traditional role of helping to maintain the peace and swiftly intervening between and amongst political parties/actors to deescalate political tensions;
- **The International Community** to be dependable and independent moral guarantors for a peaceful outcome of the elections;
- **Citizens** to exercise their rights to vote and be voted for and avoid violence and hate speeches especially on social media;
- In general, **the Government** to provide the enabling environment for citizens to enjoy their rights to vote and be voted for and all the antecedent rights and privileges that come with such rights.

HRCSL will continue to robustly monitor the electoral process with the help of its partners and a Special Elections Report to be produced thereafter.

In conclusion, HRCSL commits itself to remain committed to its mandate of protecting and promoting human rights during the electoral processes and beyond.

As I take my seat, I am pleased to inform all that the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone was in October 2022 re-accredited as a “**Grade A**” National Human Rights Institution by the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) being the accredited body of the United National Human Rights Council (UNHRC) that assesses the operations of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in relation issues of pluralism, independence, government’s support to the work of the Commission to name just a few.

The HRCSL acknowledges the contributions of its partners in making this happen. I particularly recognize the Government of Sierra Leone, the Embassy of Ireland, the UNDP, our Human Rights Working Group, our District Human Rights Committees among others for their endless financial and moral support to the Commission’s operations.

I thank you all for listening and wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

Patricia Narsu Ndanema
Chairperson