



PRESS STATEMENT
MONITORING OF THE THREE DAYS LOCKDOWN FROM 5TH- 7TH APRIL 2020
12th April 2020

On 1st April 2020, the Interim National Coordinator for the COVID-19 Response Team announced on behalf of government a three-day lockdown which commenced from 5th-7th April 2020. This was in a bid to track, trace and break the chain of transmission of the novel corona virus.

Pursuant to section 7 (2) (f) of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) Act (No. 9) 2004, HRCSL embarked on monitoring of the three days lockdown. Monitoring was conducted through on-the-spot visits to 94 communities in Western Area Urban, Western Area Rural, Kailahun and in districts where HRCSLs regional offices are located i.e. Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Waterloo.

The HRCSL also received information from its district human rights committee members, calls, and text messages from the general public. HRCSL also conducted media monitoring, took personal videos and collected other videos related to the three days lockdown. The HRCSL also had engagements with security forces and other government officials.

The purpose of the monitoring was to observe compliance to the three days 'Stay Home Directives' and respect for human rights standards including but not limited to the under mentioned;

- I. To monitor compliance of citizens and non-citizens to the 'Stay Home Directives' meant to support government in guaranteeing their rights to health;
- II. Respect of non-derogable rights by law enforcement officials i.e. rights to life, freedom from torture, freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment.
- III. To assess access to clean and safe drinking water as part of corona prevention measures;
- IV. To assess access to health care facilities during the lockdown.
- V. To assess the situation of the destitute, disabled persons, the homeless and other persons considered to be vulnerable;
- VI. To monitor potential police detentions of citizens and non-citizens who might come in conflict with the directives.



FINDINGS

I. To monitor compliance of citizens to the ‘Stay Indoors Directives’ meant to support government in guaranteeing the right to health.

Generally, there was high level of compliance to the ‘Stay Home Directives’ by the public across the country.

Streets in the capital city of Freetown and district head quarter towns were glaringly empty. However, a small number of members of the public were seen outside their homes or close to the streets.

There were others who had issues with law enforcement officers for failure to comply with the directives.

The presence of law enforcement officials was very conspicuous even in hilly and mountainous communities, manning check points and asking questions around authenticity to ply the routes during the lock down. The HRCSL observed high level of professionalism in executing their duties.

II. Respect for non-derogable rights by Law Enforcement Officials as stipulated in Articles 6 and 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) within the given context.

The HRCSL witnessed a few incidents where Law Enforcement Officials, both the Military and the Sierra Leone Police were engaged in beating up citizens who were allegedly non-compliant with the ‘Stay Home Directives’ in some parts of the country. HRCSL’s attention was also drawn to some alleged social media/whatsapp videos displaying military and police officials engaged in treating citizens in an inhuman and degrading manner. After verification of some of the said videos, HRCSL views such heavy handedness as disproportionate and defeats the enjoyment of non-derogable rights i.e. protection from inhuman and degrading treatment, which said right should be upheld at all times.

III. Access To Clean And Safe Drinking Water

As Part Of Corona Prevention Measures,

the availability of clean and safe drinking water was challenging in most communities throughout the three days lock down and this prompted residents in those communities to come out of their homes in search of water supply.

They were instances where they were chased away by the Police officers in some communities. In other communities, police officers and water tank chairmen were seen coordinating the fetching of water from open tanks. However, despite the water challenges in the country during the three days



lock down, the HRCSL notes the intervention of Guma Valley Water Company and SALWACO in making water accessible in some parts of the Western Area Rural and Urban Communities and in the Provinces.

IV. To Assess Access To Health Care Facilities During The Lockdown

Frontline Health Workers:

The HRCSL during engagements before the lockdown was informed about the provisions made for the transportation of health workers to their various work stations. On the first day of the lockdown, it was observed that some health workers found it difficult to access their deployment areas as they had no passes and suffered transportation constraints. On day 2, Connaught Hospital however proactively made use of its two ambulances to transport nurses from the East and Western Areas in Freetown to the best of its ability. The HRCSL however acknowledges the efforts made by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation on day 2 through the provision of a bus to facilitate transportation of health workers.

This intervention nevertheless did not create any significant change to the situation as transportation of health workers was still glaring as a constraint. The HRCSL observed the frequent flow of ambulances collecting and transporting sick people to health centers in some communities they monitored. Attempts made by the Commission to access the services of 117 during the lock down proved futile. The HRCSL was however able to get in contact with them during the evening of the 3rd day on a private number (088 421288).

V. Access To Food For Destitute, Disabled Persons, Homeless And Other Persons Considered As Vulnerable.

Engagements with the Deputy Commissioner of the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) and the Minister of Social Welfare revealed government's plan for disable persons and other needy and vulnerable persons for the three days lockdown in the district headquarter towns in all districts. The HRCSL witnessed the distribution of food and other items by MSW, CSOs and other philanthropists in Freetown and district head quarter towns monitored.

Engagements with homeless disabled persons (i.e. being NaCSA targets) whose sources of livelihood depends on alms revealed that the sum of Le 250,000 (Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Leones) and a bag of 25kg rice each was allocated to them before the lockdown.

On site engagements with the Minister of Social Welfare on day 1 attested to the above. Throughout the three days lock down, the HRCSL observed the



MSW, CSOs and other personal donors at various sites distributing food packs to the needy at market places and other strategic locations where they generally converge in all communities monitored.

VI. To monitor potential police detentions of citizens and non-citizens who might come in conflict with the directives.

The HRCSL monitored 16 police stations in Western Area Urban and Rural, Bo, Makeni, Kenema and Kailahun. It recorded 12 lockdown related arrests which included three pregnant women. The HRCSL facilitated their release in the different stations.

Recommendations

In light of the above findings HRCSL recommends the following:

- I. HRCSL draws the attention of the public that Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Sierra Leone is a state party, provides for states to take measures that will protect the life of their nations in public emergencies. HRCSL therefore encourages the public to adhere to the directives and regulations by government that are meant to protect their rights to health and life, their families and others.
- II. That the leadership of the law enforcement agencies promptly investigate and bring to book any of their personnel found wanting in respect of the allegations of the inhuman and degrading treatment meted against the affected members of the public during the lockdown. The HRCSL has already commenced engagements with the appropriate authorities to ensure impunity is curtailed.
- III. The Ministry of Water Resources and its subsidiary agencies should ensure that safe and clean drinking water is provided in the various communities within Freetown and in the districts and especially during lock down when people's rights to freedom of movement is restricted within the confines of the law.
- IV. Ministry of Health and Sanitation should ensure the provision of transportation and safety gear for frontline health care workers.
- V. Transportation to facilitate their movement should be properly coordinated during such periods. Designated telephone lines should be more effective for easier access by all during lock down periods.

HRCSL strongly encourages all to desist from spreading fake news as this has the tendency to seriously undermine the fight against COVID-19.



HRCSL recognizes the important role played by the media in the dissemination of information during the lockdown and encourages them to continue giving out accurate information.

HRCSL remains committed to the protection and promotion of human rights of all in Sierra Leone even at this difficult moment.

Signed

Patricia Narsu Ndanema