



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE

PRESS STATEMENT ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC/LOCKDOWN

3rd April, 2020

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) has been closely following the rapid spread of the COVID-19 around the globe and notes with concern the devastating effect of this global pandemic, which has recorded a rising death toll. As a result, the enjoyment of a number of rights including the rights to health, movement, association, work, education, family etc. continue to be threatened. HRCSL is more particularly concerned about the recent cases recorded in Sierra Leone and also the rising number of cases in our neighbouring countries.

The HRCSL acknowledges the initial and on-going efforts of the Government of Sierra Leone and other stakeholders, including development partners, for providing leadership in terms of preparedness in preventing a further spread of the virus in the country. We further commend the efforts of all, particularly health workers, airport personnel, the naval wing and border security guards. We encourage them to continue their selfless service to the nation.

HRCSL also notes the recent development by government with the declaration of the State of Emergency by the President. We also note that a three days lockdown has been declared by the Interim COVID-19 Coordinator, commencing Sunday 5th April at 06 a.m. to 11: 59 p.m. on Tuesday 7th April, 2020. While the HRCSL applauds government for putting stringent measures in place for the protection and safety of everyone in Sierra Leone, the HRCSL calls on law enforcement agencies to be professional and restrain themselves from violating the rights of citizens and in particular, to desist from the disproportionate use of force.

As we further recognise that these are extraordinary times, we draw the attention of the State to its human rights obligations, to protect, respect and fulfil human rights as enshrined in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant of Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Although a State of Emergency is accompanied by some restriction of rights, it does not however suspend the constitution and the provisions in other international and regional human rights instruments and our local human rights laws. The HRCSL draws the attention of the government that the minimum core obligations must be observed.

The HRCSL during its monitoring of quarantine homes between 17th March and 31st March 2020 noted the level of non-social distancing amongst quarantined persons, movement of non-quarantined persons to these premises and the removal of persons from the homes before the end of their quarantine periods.

With all of the foregoing, and the obvious threat this virus poses, the HRCSL calls on;

- Government to continue providing the Ministry of Health & Sanitation with all budgetary support to address this health emergency taking into consideration the availability of essential drugs and testing kits.
- Government to ensure that persons in quarantined facilities are not only provided with the minimum essentials for their survival and wellbeing but are thoroughly examined and tested at regular intervals before being released.
- We urge the government to trace former quarantined persons and have them tested for COVID-19 in a bid to ensure the protection of the rights to health and life of other citizens.



- Essential service providers of the State to ensure that they supply the basic necessities that people may require during the period of lockdown namely water, ambulances for other health emergencies i.e. pregnant women etc.
- Security personnel to ensure that persons in quarantined facilities are strictly monitored and prevented from interacting with other persons outside the quarantine homes in a bid to ensure that the rights to health and life of non-affected persons are protected.
- Security personnel to increase border patrols and be vigilant along unmanned border crossing points between neighbouring Guinea and Liberia to prevent unauthorised entry into the country.
- Health Workers to execute their duties without discrimination on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation, disability, tribe, region or political affiliation.
- Health workers to be vigilant and diligent in the execution of their duties so they do not contract the virus or transmit it to others in the course of their duties.
- The Naval Services to effectively monitor the flow of movement on the waters of Sierra Leone, thus ensuring that infected persons do not bypass legal entry points.
- Urges the government to speedily make the rules and regulations following the declaration of the State of Emergency for purposes of uniformity and certainty.

The HRCSL takes this opportunity to particularly urge the public to strictly adhere to directives, pronounced and made by the government in order to safeguard their own lives, that of their families and others.

The HRCSL encourages all citizens to respect the right to privacy of infected persons and also desist from sharing false information.

The HRCSL encourages the public to report any complaints of human rights violations that might occur during the lockdown by telephone calls (078 336 304/ 034136379/ 079715837, 077986844/099268116/ 076267555), text /whatsapp, whatsapp video recordings, and on our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/HRCSL>).

HRCSL remains committed to collaborate with government and other agencies in the fight against COVID 19 in Sierra Leone.

Signed
END

Patricia Narsu Ndanema
Chairperson