



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE (HRCSL)
STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON
ON COMMEMORATION OF THE AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS DAY
21ST OCTOBER 2020

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) being the African continent's normative framework to protect and promote human rights, came into force on the 21st of October in 1986, and the coming into force of the Charter forms the basis for the annual commemoration of the African Human Rights Day (AHRD). This day has been set aside by the African Union to remind African Union Member States of their responsibilities to protect and promote human rights. To this Charter, Sierra Leone is a party. Being a state party to the charter, makes it legally binding on states to implement the provisions in the charter meant for all citizens to enjoy their human rights.

Additionally, this is a day that provides the opportunity for African Leaders to reflect on the declaration undertaken to promote human rights in their various countries by asking themselves the question 'To what extent do we as government meet our human rights state obligations of respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights'. It is also a day for citizens to ask themselves the questions 'To what extent am I upholding my fundamental human rights responsibilities as a citizen'. Rights go with responsibilities thus making the enjoyment of human rights our collective responsibility.

This year's theme is "Silencing the Guns and Deepening the Culture of Human and Peoples' Rights: The Opportunities and Challenges of COVID 19 in Africa". Many will agree with me that this theme is timely and very appropriate to all AU member states, specifically to Sierra Leone.

As part of the AUs and the Network of African National Human Rights Institution (NANHRI) Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which provides for cooperation in the promotion of Aspiration three (3) of the African Agenda 2063 on democracy, good governance, respect for human rights among others, the Fourth Annual Policy Forum on the state of National Human Rights Institutions was virtually held on the 22-24 September 2020 under the theme "National Human Rights Institutions' Contribution to 'Silencing the Guns' in Africa".

At the Fourth Policy Forum, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) served as rapporteur. The role of national human institutions in providing linkages between regional level commitments and actions at the national level and their role in raising awareness at various levels including government, Civil Society Organisations, security forces, the fourth estate, and community engagements on this year's theme was overemphasized. Thus the HRCSLs continued robust actions in doing is manifested in the press conference today considering the pivotal role played by journalist in propagating and disseminating messages on various media platforms.

This year's theme draws the attention of the continent on the effects that guns have had on the lives of African people and how the sounds of guns have prevented the enjoyment of human rights and subsequently development programmes.



As a country, we have had the bitter taste of the sounds of the guns for a period of 12 years and, as a Commission with the mandate to protect and promote human rights and also as a peace consolidation structure we continue to raise your awareness on the negative consequences on the sound of the guns.

To be in tune with the continental theme, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) has localized the theme for this year to address the current trend of affairs in the country, it reads: Silencing the Guns, Silencing the Inciting Hate Messages, Silencing the Violence and Deepening the Culture of Human and Peoples' Rights.

Within the cause of the year, the HRCSL has been monitoring social media networks and notes the unfolding negative events from such messages. HRCSL considers such acts, as potential recipes for unrest, a threat to peaceful co-existence and a pathway for the erosion of the enjoyment of human rights and national development.

The Commission continues to call on all Sierra Leoneans at home and abroad to desist from sending inciting and hateful messages, diatribes that have the potentials of creating unrest, regional and tribal divide that might be worse than the sounds of guns. Let us take our minds back to the level of devastation that this country was plunged into during the 12 years of civil unrest.

The HRCSL draws your attention that our human rights exist for us to enjoy them, but also strongly draws your attention to your responsibilities as citizens. As you listen to this statement from the Commission, I encourage you all to read and reflect on all provisions highlighted in Section 13 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 that details who a good citizen is, referencing Section 13 (f) which stipulates that a good citizen should 'make positive and useful contributions to the advancement, progress, and well-being of the community, wherever he resides'. Also reflect on the provisions highlighted in Chapter 2 of the African Charter on Human People's Rights on the duties of a citizen, with specific focus on Article 29 (7) which stipulates for ease of reference: 'To preserve and strengthen positive African cultural values in his relations with other members of the society, in the spirit of tolerance, dialogue and consultation and, in general, to contribute to the promotion of the moral well-being of society'.

Having reflected on the said provisions, ask yourself the questions 'I am a good citizen?' What contributions am I making to silencing the guns in Africa and Sierra Leone in particular? Am I amongst the groups of people building tensions through the hate messages oral and written that pose a threat to state security and subsequently the enjoyment of rights? If you are not a good citizen, further ask yourself the question 'What do I stand to gain in bringing political and social disorder in my country? Am I leaving a legacy for my children, my community and the country as a whole? The above questions are food for quick serious thoughts in order to ensure the peace and stability we have continued to enjoy over the years.

HRCSL commends the efforts of the government in the fight to keeping the COVID 19 at its lowest ebb and continues to call on all Sierra Leoneans to respect and uphold all the



precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Remember how the enjoyment of rights will be seriously affected with the increase of C-19 in our midst.

HRCSL continues to reaffirm its commitment to the promotion and protection of the human rights of all in Sierra Leone and commends the people of Sierra Leone for keeping to the COVID 19 precautionary measures.

Signed

END

Patricia Narsu Ndanema
Chairperson