



COMPLAINTS HANDLING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The world experienced an outbreak of the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) towards the end of 2019 and Sierra Leone registered its index case of persons infected with the virus on 31st March 2020. Following Presidential directives issued on 18th March 2020 on the need to avoid physical contact with people and restrictions on public gathering as response measures to tackle the spread of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone, the Commission took a decision to refocus some of its activities that require public gathering such as the mobile complaints hearing.

Even in the midst of a pandemic the fundamental rights of the people needs to be upheld and the Commission is charged with the responsibility to promote and protect those rights. As provided in its Act in Section 7 (2)(a) “ investigate or inquire into on its own or on complaint by any person any allegations of human rights violations and to report thereon in writing;”. The Commission needs to continue receiving complaints from the public.

In continuing to provide these services especially in terms of public access to its complaint handling mechanism and to further effectively address complaints of alleged human rights violations and other human rights issues that may occur during this period, the Commission introduced an alternative means of receiving complaints from members of the public through the use of mobile phones. The Commission with support from UNDP/Irish Aid purchased five (5) mobile phones which were distributed to the Commission’s offices at HQ, and the five regional offices. This was to provide easy access for members of the public to make their complaints through phones by SMS, voice calls and WhatsApp audio and video messages.

The introduction of this innovative means of receiving complaints has increased the number of people accessing the Commission’s complaints handling mechanism during the COVID 19 pandemic, whilst limiting the physical presence of people in the Commission’s various offices and thereby reducing any potential risk of the spread of the virus within the Commission’s office premises and to its clients.

In addition to the phones, each office was provided with two (2) sim cards and Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Leone (Le250,000.00) worth of top-up/mobile data from the UNDP – Irish Aid funds to effectively address complaints received.

As a result of this intervention, the Commission received an increased number of complaints within that short period 14th May to 25th June 2020. A total of 49 complaints received and disaggregated as follows;

- Male – 33, Female 17
- Head Quarters 18, Western Area 4, Eastern Region 9, Northern Region 7 and Southern Region 11.

Out of the 49 complaints received;

- 3 is under investigation,
- 15 were referred to partners and are been closely monitored
- 10 were resolved,
- 4 were mediated and outcome was successful.
- 9 are pending



The complaints received borders on various human rights issues but the highest number which accounted for about 22.4% (11) of all complaints received by the Commission were on property rights, followed closely by right to health which accounted for about 20.4% (10) and 14.3% were related to workers' rights.

Among the 49 complaints, the Commission proffered advice to 8 of the complainants on various issues.

Further, specific complaints made by persons in quarantine homes and those by healthcare workers which amounted to about 10 complaints were promptly acted on by the Commission through engagement with NACOVERC/DICOVERC in both Freetown and the various regional headquarter towns. As a result of the Commission's prompt intervention, most of the issues and concerns raised by these complainants were addressed. In a similar issue the Commission responded to complaints regarding the non-provision of sufficient food and essential items to 600 (M420, F180) persons held in quarantine homes and like the previous complaints they were promptly acted upon by NaCOVERC and resolved.

The Commission continues to closely monitor complaints that were referred to it to ensure that the Complainants receive redress.

