



## **HRCSL ASSEMBLES MDAs AND CSOs TO CONSULT ON THE UPR PROCESS**

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) with support from the UNDP and Irish Aid, on Tuesday 25th August began a two day stakeholder's consultation at the Peace Museum of Ministries, Departments and Agencies and Civil Societies on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

The consultation is to solicit information from Ministries, Departments and Agencies and Civil Societies for the production of a shadow report on the Third Cycle Universal Periodic Review Session to be held in Geneva in May 2021. Chairing the official function before the engagement, the Vice Chairperson of HRCSL, Victor I. Lansana while stressing on the importance of the consultation, referenced the series of reports published by the HRCSL which could be sourced by the MDAs and CSOs to inform the Commission's shadow report. He lauded the support given by the UNDP and Irish Aid for their continued support to the HRCSL.

Speaking about the purpose of the consultation, the Oversight Commissioner for Monitoring and Research, Dr. Gassan Abess said the UPR Mechanisms require National Human Rights Institutions to produce an alternative or shadow report on how it has monitored and observed the implementation of the recommendations as proffered to the government of Sierra Leone by the Human Rights Council and other member countries.

Commissioner Abess said the shadow report mirrors the institutions as to how or what concrete steps have been taken by the government of Sierra Leone in implementing the recommendations, where are the gaps, gains, successes, and further recommendations to the government on how it can successfully implement them.

"The purpose therefore is to elicit information, views, concerns from the stakeholders gathered in a bid to help the Human Rights Commission produce a credible, balanced, objective and evidenced based report". Commissioner Dr. Gassan Abess stated.

The UNDP Resident Representative, Dr. Samuel Gbaydee Doe expressed delight on the consultation process to the implementation of the 177 recommendations accepted by the Government of Sierra Leone during the last UPR of the country's human rights credentials.



He reiterated that the support towards strengthening capacity for human rights protection and promotion in Sierra Leone, particularly the protection and promotion of civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights, is an imperative for the UNDP and its traditional partner, the Irish Aid. "At the heart of all UNDP's support to sustainable development are the rights of people, including vulnerable women and children, survivors of sexual and gender based violence, persons with disability and those in conflict with the

The UNDP Resident Representative informed the stakeholders that the UPR process serves as an accountability and feedback mechanism for participating UN Member States. "This platform therefore provides you the opportunity to openly retrospect on progress made towards the implementation of the 177 recommendations emanating from the Second Cycle Peer Review Process, in fulfillment of Sierra Leone's International human rights obligations".

Dr. Doe made it known that the UNDP valued "this interactive and consultative process which, I am sure, would inform the preparation of the Commission's shadow report and also serve as reference point for the preparation of the State's report to support the Third Cycle review process in Geneva".

He assured of Irish Aid and UNDP unwavering

In her statement, the Chairperson of HRCSL, Patricia Narsu Ndanema called on the stakeholders to focus on the 208 recommendations proffered on Sierra Leone during the last review process in which 77 were accepted and 31 were noted. "Let us reflect on the steps taken by government to implement its UPR recommendations and commitments to promote human rights in the country. Let us also reflect on the challenges faced in the implementation of the recommendations. Our report must reflect the true picture so as to avoid contradictions from other alternative reports". The Chairperson urged.

She called on all to "recommit to building a Sierra Leone that is reflective of a true human rights culture and values. Today, and every day, let us take action to break down the barriers that prevent the enjoyment of human rights. The HRCSL remains committed in its advocacy to ensure that the rights of everyone in Sierra Leone protected and respected at all times".

The head of Civil Society UPR Info, Sulaiman Jabati explained the strides taken by his organization with support from the UNDP in undertaking consultations on the UPR process on 2011. He said they have done consultations on some rights



on labour issues, discrimination against disadvantaged groups, right to education and access to justice.

Daire Courteny, the Charge d'Affaires, Embassy of Ireland Said the Embassy of Ireland has proudly supported the Human Rights Commission for the past year alongside the UN Development Programme. "We are delighted to work with UNDP, an organisation that is highly committed to development and human rights. The project has focused on building the capacity of the Human Rights Commission to promote and protect human rights in Sierra Leone; it is fantastic to see events such as this, which the project has helped to enable". She stated. She furthered that human rights have always been a core part of Ireland's work in Sierra Leone noting that human rights are a core part of sustainable development that a society cannot prosper unless each of its citizens' rights are upheld. "We see that same understanding here in Sierra Leone, where human rights hold a place of particular importance in society. I am pleased to see the consultations for the Shadow Report take place here in the Peace Museum, a place perhaps more than any other that remind us why human rights are so important, so fundamental, and how a country can suffer when they are not treated as such". She noted.

The Charge D'Affaires mentioned that Sierra Leone has made great strides in the past 20 years, in the face of significant challenges. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission formed the basis for important achievements, including the establishment of the Human Rights Commission. "The Commission has built its own capacity over the years and established itself as a key part of the human rights and governance structure of Sierra Leone. We also see a vibrant civil society in Sierra Leone. The importance of NGOs and CSOs in promoting and defending human rights and contributing to development cannot be understated".

She continued that "we are coming to this review in strange circumstances. There is sometimes a tendency, in a crisis like COVID-19, to focus on the crisis at the exclusion of all other priorities. And of course, COVID-19 has posed its own challenges for human rights. But we must strive to preserve human rights no matter the situation at hand. In fact, we have seen some very encouraging moves in recent months in this respect. Despite the ongoing pressure of COVID-19, Parliament has repealed Part V of the Public Order Act, removing criminal libel provisions from law. The Government has also continued to prioritise upholding the right to education for every child, by working tirelessly to ensure that schools can reopen in 2020 despite the pandemic. And Civil Society



Organisations are working as hard as ever to promote and defend human rights. Of course, there are still serious challenges to be addressed". She averred. With that in mind, she hoped to see constructive and comprehensive engagement with the UPR process as it represents a core tenet of the global human rights framework.

The UPR is a unique interactive and state driven mechanism established by the General Assembly Resolution 60/251 on the 15th March 2006 to monitor and evaluate the human rights records of states around the world. Once every four and half years, states are being reviewed and reminded of their human rights obligations and commitments towards the protection and promotion of human rights in their respective countries.

Sierra Leone became a state party to the UPR in 2007 and went through its 1st review cycle on 5th May 2011 by the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva. On 22nd September 2011, the final report was adopted by the HRC during its 18th Session. The report proffered 129 recommendations to the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) out of which the Government accepted 126 with the exception of recommendations relating to gender identity and orientation. Among the recommendations accepted, government indicated that 57 were already implemented or were under implementation.

On 27th January 2016, the government was reviewed for the second time at the 24th Session of the HRC in Geneva. The report proffered 208 recommendations by HRC to the government. A total of 177 recommendations were accepted by the Government for implementation while 31 recommendations were noted. Sierra Leone is expected to provide update on the status of implementation of the 117 accepted recommendations to the HRC in its 3rd Cycle review that is due in May 2021.

HRCSL have the statutory mandates not only to provide technical support to government in the compilation of its periodic report but also to submit its own alternative periodic report to HRC. As a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) HRCSL is required to submit an alternative report as stated under resolution 16/21 and decision 17/119 of Human Rights Council which is used to corroborate issues in the state report. In other words, HRCSL is required to submit its own report (alternative report) that will be used by HRC to crosscheck and substantiate whatever claims that would be made by the Sierra Leone Government Report.



HRCSL as an institution, on 25th June 2018 engaged MDAs and CSOs in a round table discussion on UPR reporting skills/ mechanisms and distributed HRCSL UPR matrix for them to provide information about the status of implementation of the Second Cycle UPR recommendations relevant for the compilation of the UPR Mid-term Report.

The information gathered from Stakeholders will not only be used for the compilation of the Commission's Alternative Report but also to provide technical support to government as part of its function under Section 7 (2) (e) of HRCSL Act of 2004, pertaining to 'advise Government concerning preparation of periodic reports required by international human rights treaties or agreements to which Sierra Leone is a party'.