



## HRCSL HOSTS NANHRI DELEGATES

The Human Rights Commission Sierra Leone (HRCSL) on Tuesday 16th November, 2020 at its Tower Hill headquarter, played host to a delegation from the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI).

NANHRI's visit was to update Commissioners and staff of HRCSL on the two-day consultative conference on the decriminalization of minor offences in Sierra Leone. The conference will be organized for Commissioners and staff of the HRCSL, law enforcement agencies, heads of ministries, departments and agencies and Civil Society Organizations on Wednesday 18th and Thursday 19th November 2020 at the Sierra Palm Resort, Beach Road, Freetown.

According to the Programme Officer, NANHRI, Phanice Akinyi Odhacha, the conference will be held to guide the Commission and other stakeholders on how to advocate for decriminalizing petty offenses which will further help to decongest the correctional facilities. She noted that cases like loitering, begging, street trading and prostitution are some of the activities considered in many African countries as criminal offenses.

Phanice stated that they were implementing the project in Sierra Leone, Uganda and Nigeria and added that all the three countries will be expected to develop a roadmap and a national plan on how to decriminalize petty offenses.

Speaking on the method of advocacy, the Communications and Advocacy Officer of NANHRI, Robert Laban said he will be taking participants through advocacy methods that would make them successful in moving the Parliament and other government institutions to join them decriminalize all minor offences in the country.

Responding to the delegates, Commissioner Hassan Samba Yarjah informed them that the HRCSL was working relentlessly to prevent and to take up cases of human rights violation in the country. He welcomed the team and reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to participate in the consultative conference since it will help to remove the limitations to the enjoyment of the rights of everyone in Sierra Leone.

The Oversight Commissioner of Monitoring and Research, Commissioner Dr. Gassan Abess stated that the resistance to change the mentality of law enforcement agencies and citizens on decriminalizing minor offences is strong which has highly contributed to the current overcrowding at correctional centres. He emphasized that the Commission has been advocating for alternative ways of dealing with minor offenses instead of imprisonment and expressed confidence that the conference will strengthen the advocacy and make them successful in decriminalizing minor offenses.