



MONITORING OF QUARANTINE FACILITIES IN THE WESTERN AREA AND REGIONS

On 31st March 2020 Sierra Leone registered its first case of COVID 19 and this created major concerns and worries among citizens. The nation was however proactive and the government began to put in place measures to prevent the virus from spreading in the country. Among these measures was the declaration of a State of Emergency, the setting up of the Emergency Response Centre (EOC), instituting inter-district lockdowns which restricted movement from one district to the other. Checkpoints were erected at strategic district entry points; only persons with passes were to be allowed passage.

These measures were enforced all over the country with the aim of keeping the spread at its lowest ebb. Despite the stringent measures taken by the government, the virus still found its way into the communities which saw a steady increase in the number of cases recorded daily. This spread increased the level of concern of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone as a result of the impact it had on the enjoyment of human rights, particularly for persons in quarantine and those crossing checkpoints. Reports from the media and other platforms including those from people in quarantine suggested that the enjoyment of human rights were at risk and therefore needed the Commission's response.

In accordance with Sections 7(2) (a)) of HRCSL Act (No. 9), 2004 that gives the Commission the responsibility to investigate and or inquire into complaints brought forward by the general public or on its own volition on alleged human rights violations; and 7(2) (f) of the same Act which gives it authority to monitor public facilities on human rights compliance, the Commission with funding from the UNDP - Irish Aid between the 17th August and 25th September, undertook the monitoring of quarantine facilities in six districts for two weeks simultaneously. The two weeks was to be in tune with the stipulated period for persons to be quarantined. Checkpoints were also monitored in the regional district headquarter towns.

In all six Districts, there were 14 Government quarantine facilities monitored and 26 Private facilities. In the Regions, a total of 12 check points were monitored. In the 40 Quarantine centers and checkpoints that were monitored, a total 500 (F – 290 and M - 210) people were visited. Although the right to movement was restricted for justifiable reasons, HRCSL observed that there were challenges in the enjoyment of the rights to health, hygiene and food. This contravenes Articles 11 and 12 of ICESCR, 24 and 27 of CRC, 15, 16 and 20 of Maputo Protocol, 12 and 14 of CEDAW and 25 of the UDHR. In addition to these, provision of safe drinking water, adequate and quality food particularly for children, toiletries were challenges at all quarantine places visited, delays in releasing results of persons tested for alleged Coronavirus by the EOC, neglect and abandonment of patients/victims was noted at some quarantine facilities, no social distancing and wearing of face masks respected by the patients/victims at the FBC Asymptomatic Centre. Most quarantine victims/patients were not wearing face masks, staff at the FBC Asymptomatic centre complained of poor conditions of service and non-payment of allowances.

After these engagements the Commission engaged the EOC with its findings and recommendations. The EOC as a matter of urgency addressed the issues raised by the



Commission by providing the necessary items that were lacking in the centres and those who have over stayed in the centres were released to go home after testing negative. Wearing of face marks and social distancing were instituted though it is still a challenge.



The monitoring team at the Ahmadiyya Secondary sch, Kenema