



# THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE

## REPORT ON THE VISIT TO HAWA HUNT AT THE FREETOWN FEMALE CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

On 13<sup>th</sup> February 2025, a team from the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) comprising of a Manager and three Assistant Human Rights Officers, undertook a specific monitoring visit to the Freetown Female Correctional Centre (FFCC). The purpose was to obtain first-hand information on the conditions of detention of Hawa Hunt, who was detained on charges of cyberbullying.

This visit falls within one of the functions of the Commission as provided in **Section 9 (1) of the HRCSL Act No. 9 of 2004** which gives the Commission access *'to all government offices, facilities and places of detention, including prisons, police cells, remand homes and probation facilities, in order to investigate a human rights matter initiated by the Commission or brought to the attention of the Commission'*.

HRCSL focused on assessing how her human rights were respected in relation to the following:

1. Admission/Accommodation
2. Right to legal representation
3. Freedom from torture, inhuman and degrading treatment
4. Right to health
5. Right to food/water
6. Access to other basic essentials
7. Access to Justice
8. Contact with the outside world

The team engaged Hawa Hunt in the presence of one female Correctional Service personnel who observed from a distance. The team also inspected her cell.

The findings from the monitoring visit were as follows;

1. **Admission / Accommodation:** The FFCC informed HRCSL that Hawa Hunt was received in their facility on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024, although she believes it was on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2025. She has been in detention since then.



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Hawa is currently detained in a cell designed for two inmates, but shared with three other inmates. She received a new foam mattress upon arrival, as the two existing beds were already occupied. HRCSL however observed that other cells of the same size had more than four inmates and only two or three of those inmates slept on the beds whilst others slept on foam mattresses.

Hawa Hunt complained of the poor ventilation and excessive heat in the cell particularly after they have been locked in. According to **Rule 13 of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules)** “... all sleeping accommodation shall meet all requirements of health, due regard being paid to climatic conditions and particularly to cubic content of air, minimum floor space, lighting, heating and ventilation”.

2. **Right to Legal Representation:** She has legal representation and unhindered access to her Lawyer.
3. **Freedom from torture, inhuman and degrading treatment:** She informed HRCSL that she had not been subjected to any form of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment since her transfer to the FFCC. The team also did not observe any evidence of physical torture.
4. **Right to health:** Regarding the right to health, she reported being informed of available healthcare services at the FFCC. However, she said she has not required medical attention because she had not fallen ill while in detention. She said she was given disinfectant (Dettol) upon request when she developed rash after the use of water provided at the FFCC. She informed HRCSL that she is allowed to do her physical exercises daily. She further informed HRCSL that she had concerns about her mental state as she craves to re-join her family in Canada. The FFCC has been providing counselling services to her and other inmates to address this concern.
5. **Right to food/water:** She said she is being provided food and drinking water. Food is provided twice daily by the FFCC but she stated that she is not satisfied with the quality of the food. However, she informed HRCSL that she is given the opportunity to get food and drinking water of her choice through the correctional officers.



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6. **Access to other basic essentials:** She stated she has been receiving supply of toiletries since her admission into the facility like every other inmate.
7. **Access to Justice:** She informed HRCSL that her matter has been closed at the Magistrate Court and been committed to the High Court but she is presently awaiting indictment to appear at the High Court. According to the FFCC, her last court appearance in the Magistrate's Court was on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2025. **Section 23 (1) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991**, states *"Whenever any person is charged with a criminal offence he shall unless the charge is withdrawn, be afforded a fair hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial court established by law."*
8. **Contact with the outside world:** She informed HRCSL that family members and friends were being allowed to visit her on a regular basis and has not been prevented from enjoying this right. Also, that she communicates regularly with family members abroad who could not pay her a visit, through the FFCC.

## Conclusion

HRCSL noted that except for 'Accommodation' and 'Access to justice' rights, her enjoyment of all other rights listed above are in compliance with national, regional and international standards and best practices.

## Recommendations:

1. HRCSL urges the Law Officers Department to expedite the preferment of her indictment in order to ensure speedy trial as stipulated in Section 23 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991.
2. FFCC should comply with Rule 13 of the Nelson Mandela Rules to improve ventilation in the cells.
3. FFCC should continue to provide her with counselling services to improve on her mental health and wellbeing.