

## CELEBRATING TWENTY YEARS: THE SUCCESSES AND VISION FOR THE FUTURE

On 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary dubbed with the theme “**Celebrating 20 Years of Excellence and Independence in the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights in Sierra Leone.**”

The event was commemorated to mark the annual International Human Rights Day celebration on December 10th. In an atmosphere marked with grit and elegance, the Freetown International Conference Center at Aberdeen in Freetown hosted almost four hundred (400) guests including awardees and staff.

This was the Commission’s first awards event, which recognised the work of eminent personalities in Sierra Leone who have been on the journey of ‘Making Rights Real’ in Sierra Leone.



In 1991 a Constitutional Review Commission was set up by the Late President Joseph Saidu

Momoh was chaired by Dr. Peter Tucker, who was responsible for reviewing the 1978 One Party Constitution. Amongst many of the recommendations of that Commission in its Report dated March 1991, it was recommended that a National Human Rights Commission be established and responsible for protecting and promoting human rights in the country.

Furthermore, at the end of the civil war in Sierra Leone in 2002, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up to document the atrocities of the war and give an opportunity to victims to freely recount their experiences of the war. The Commission made recommendations to the government and other stakeholders for implementation and to prevent a recurrence.

One of these was to establish a National Human Rights institution consistent with the recommendation of the Lome' Peace Agreement.

By an Act of Parliament in 2004, the government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabba enacted and established the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone by Act No. 9 of 2004. The Commission through its Act has a broad mandate to protect and promote the human rights of all in Sierra Leone with powers to hold accountable duty bearers for human rights violations.

The Chairperson in her statement at the awards night said the Commission has been working towards that mandate in line with its vision of seeing a Sierra Leone where the culture of human rights prevail and the people respect the rule of law and live in peace and dignity. She paid glowing tribute to the pioneering Commissioners and formidable staff for laying a solid foundation and noted that 'their dedication and hard work paved the way for the Commission's growth.'



The Chairperson highlighted the accreditation of the Commission as a Grade 'A' NHRI on three consecutive assessments (2011, 2016 & 2022), maintaining strategic executive positions in regional and international human rights networks under the Africa Union and also ECOWAS, the progressive establishment of regional offices across the country; Northwest regional office in Port Loko and Complaint House at Fort Street in Freetown, referral partnership forum to look at cases referred to partner institutions, the establishment of new Directorates, as well as the establishment of 78 Human Rights and Peace Clubs in Schools as some of the successes recorded in the past 20 years.

The keynote address was delivered by the First Chairperson of the Commission Justice Jamesina E. L. King of the High Court of Sierra Leone. She explained the journey and commended the Commission for playing the lead role in the protection and promotion of human rights in Sierra Leone for the past 20 years. She recognised the pioneers of the establishment of the



Commission, citing the government of the late President Dr Ahmed Tejan Kabbah and members of parliament for passing the HRCSL Act of 2004.



“As we celebrate this milestone, I want us to reflect on the achievements and also the challenges the Commission has experienced during the last 20 years. This will enable us as an institution to determine what was done right and what could be done better. It is an opportune time to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and events which have changed over the years,” she said. Justice King added that since the operationalisation of the Commission, Sierra Leone has made significant strides in the protection and promotion of everyone nationwide.

Awards were given to human rights defenders, institutions, companies, partners, the media, former long-serving staff and current long-serving staff in recognition of their role in promoting the work of the Commission. The awardees and guests applauded HRCSL for the remarkable event.

Moving forward, the Commission will continue its collaboration with key stakeholders nationally and internationally, enhance its gains over the years



and strive to meet matching trends of human rights globally to create an atmosphere where everyone can enjoy their human rights.

