



HRCSL ENGAGES 500 YOUTHS ON HUMAN RIGHTS, ELECTIONS & NON-VIOLENCE

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) on 17th and 19th May engaged 500 young people in the western area on 'Human Rights, Elections and Non-violence.' As the country heads to the polls on 24th June, the Commission has identified youths on the edge as potential risks to the enjoyment of human rights during the electioneering period. These vulnerable youths are often used by politicians to create disturbances during elections.



The engagement that targeted youths from Ghettos, Car Wash points, Hook-up Girls, Bike Riders, Cliques, and Ataya Bases was geared towards understanding the issues igniting the participation of youths in election violence and establishing Human Rights Non-violence Ambassadors. It was also an opportunity for the Commission to undertake one of its functions 'awareness raising' among youths who according to the current statistical data form one-third of the country's population among which 70% are either underemployed or unemployed and 50% are illiterate. This underpins the fact why these groups



of persons are being misled which eventually leads to their involvement in crime-related acts.



According to the Commission’s monitoring reports, this group forms the greatest number of people in detention. The Commission, therefore, considers it a duty to engage this set of persons to create awareness among them, particularly to avoid violence during the upcoming election.

The Chairperson of HRCSL Mrs. Patricia Narsu Ndanema said the Commission’s mandate is to ‘protect and promote’ human rights of all in Sierra Leone. She said one can only enjoy human rights when you have freedom. She added that the Commission decided to engage young people in non-violence because it wants to prevent a situation wherein the action of a few people will affect the rights of the majority. “The Commission believes and trusts in youths present here, we don’t want any violence in the elections,” she said.

National Youth President, Tejan Z. Kellah thanked the Commission for bringing youths together to talk about peace and non-violence in elections. He said this



has been the best engagement so far by the Commission with young people. Addressing his colleagues, Mr. Kellah said “We all have roles and responsibilities, and as youths, it is our right to go out and vote on Election Day. But we should also ensure there’s no violence during and after the polls.” He added that youth should be law-abiding if they want their rights to be respected. He urged participants to be ambassadors of peace and non-violence in their respective communities and hangouts.



Bike Riders in Sierra Leone form a huge community among the youth population. They have been identified among the youth category as a critical group that can be used to engage in violence.

According to the Bike Riders Association (BRA) President Umaru Talie Bah, they have one thousand, two hundred and fifty-six (1,256,000) registered riders across the country. He thanked the Commission for including them in the engagement and committed to ensuring that Bike Riders do not engage in violence during the elections and after the elections.



The BRA East District representative Mohamed S. Turay stated during the engagement that “The peace of this country is in the hands of Bike Riders. We have had a lot of criticism over the years but I want to say we are the most peaceful in society. Bike riders suffer the most when there is no peace in a country and our responsibility is to serve as ambassadors of peace,” he said.



Assistant Inspector General of Police Sylvester Koroma, Regional Commander-West spoke on the responsibility of the police which is to maintain law and order. “Our message to you is simple, enjoy your rights as much as you can and stay away from violence during and after the elections. It is our work to ensure that citizens enjoy the peace and no one will take that entitlement away from them,” he stated.

Youth leaders from the various targeted groups made a commitment pledge to not involve in violence before, during, and after the elections and also educate their colleagues.



The Commission unveiled its human rights and non-violence in elections theme song done by the youths.

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