

**List of issues prior to reporting**  
**Human Rights Committee**  
**Submission on 6 May 2024**

**1. Authors of the report**

This report was prepared by the Human Rights Defenders Network - Sierra Leone (<http://hrdnsi.org/>) and the International Service for Human Rights ([www.ishr.ch](http://www.ishr.ch)). This report focuses on the situation of human rights defenders.

- The Human Rights Defenders Network – Sierra Leone (HRDN-SL) is a coalition of human rights civil society organizations and individuals working for the protection and promotion of human rights in Sierra Leone. HRDN-SL was established pursuant to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders as a local chapter of the West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (WAHRDN) based in Togo and through technical support from the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) based in Geneva. Contact: Alphonsus B.M Gbanie, Executive Secretary of the Human Right Defenders Network Sierra Leone, [hrdefenderssl@gmail.com](mailto:hrdefenderssl@gmail.com).
- The International Service for Human Rights is an independent, non-profit organisation promoting and protecting human rights. Founded in 1984, ISHR has offices in Geneva (Switzerland) and New York (United States), as well as a permanent presence in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire). Contact: Adélaïde ETONG KAME, Senior Programme Manager (Africa), [a.etong@ishr.ch](mailto:a.etong@ishr.ch)

**2. Situation of human rights defenders in Sierra Leone**

- In Sierra Leone, in line with articles 19, 21 and 22 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the rights to freedom of expression, association and reunion are guaranteed by the Constitution through Chapter III, Sections 25 and 26.
- However, around the presidential election which took place in June 2023, the freedoms of expression and assembly were restricted. Indeed, ahead of the elections, street rallies as well as campaign events by political parties were prohibited on security grounds by the Political Parties Registration Commission in more than one venue.
- In addition, earlier, in April 2023, the Special Investigation Commission (SIC) released its report on its investigation into the killing of six police officers and at least 27 protesters and bystanders during August 2022 protests<sup>1</sup>. The protests were described as attempts to overthrow the government and lacked to recommend investigations be conducted on the excessive use of force by security forces. In June 2023, such protests happened again and this time the security forces allegedly shot one of the protesters, though it denied

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/sierra-leone/report-sierra-leone/#endnote-2>



responsibility and 66 were arrested. Similarly in September 2023, security forces dispersed protests in Freetown during which two people died of gunshot wounds and 72 people were arrested.

- Finally, in October 2023, the government finalised a policy which aimed to ensure that work done by NGOs falls in line with national development priorities.
- In relation to article 19 of the Covenant, for the first time in 18 years, Sierra Leone lost 28 places in Reporters Without Borders' ranking on freedom of expression, from 46 to 74 out of 180 countries regarding press freedom.
- Since 2016, HRDN-SL and its partners with support from Irish Aid, have conducted training workshops, consultations and sensitisation and legal review on the draft protection law for HRDs and on the process of being translated into legal drafting language for the attention and action of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice (AGMJ). However, the office of the AGMJ has halted the process until they are through with the review of the Human Rights Commission for Sierra Leone Act, 2004.

### **3. Questions to the Sierra Leone**

- Through other mechanisms, most recently the UPR in 2021, Sierra Leone accepted to adopt a law protecting defenders which has been in the works since 2016. What is the State's concrete plan to finally strengthen the legislative protection of defenders through the adoption of a national law protecting and promoting their rights in line with the UN Declaration on HRDs?
- We note the systematic responses by the State to various UN human rights mechanisms on the situation of the LGBTQI community. What actions has the state taken to review the Offences Against the Persons Act, of 1861, and the protection of the LGBTQI community?
- An independent and well-resourced (financial and human resource) human rights commission is a foundation of state commitments to the promotion and protection of the rights of its citizens. What are the state's concrete plans to ensure that the HRCSL is financially independent and has its own independent office space?