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National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21*

Sierra Leone

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission of Sierra Leone
AGMOJ	Office of Attorney -General and Minister of Justice
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
ECOSOC	Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
FCC	Freetown City Council
FSU	Family Support Unit
GoSL	Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone
HRCSL	Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IPCB	Independent Police Complaints Board
JSCO	Justice Sector Coordination Office
LAB	Legal Aid Board
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MDA	Ministry, Department and Agency
MFAIC	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
MGCA	Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MIC	Ministry of Information and Communication
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoHS	Ministry of Health and Sanitation
MoPED	Ministry of Planning and Economic Development
MoWR	Ministry of Water Resources
MPPA	Ministry of Political and Public Affairs
MSW	Ministry of Social Welfare
MTNDP	Medium-Term National Development Plan
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NASSIT	National Social Security and Insurance Trust
NCD	National Commission for Democracy
NCPD-SL	National Commission for Persons with Disabilities Sierra Leone
NEC	National Electoral Commission-Sierra Leone
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NMRF	National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow up
ONS	Office of National Security
PPRC	Political Parties Registration Commission

RSLAF	Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLCS	Sierra Leone Correctional Service
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SSL	Statistics Sierra Leone
TRC	The Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPR	Universal Periodic Review

I. Introduction

1. The Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone (GoSL) is pleased to submit its 3rd cycle National Report to the Human Rights Council (HRC) in compliance with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.
2. This report presents the advances made in the promotion and protection of human rights since the second cycle report was reviewed; the implementation of the accepted recommendations and the challenges faced.
3. This report covers a period of four years, from January 2016 to December 2020.

II. Methodology

4. This 3rd cycle report builds on the Mid-Term report that was submitted by GoSL in July 2019. The two reports were prepared by the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee (IMC) with assistance from the OHCHR, United Kingdom High Commission and the Irish Embassy in Freetown. In preparation to produce the Mid-Term report, consultative workshops on the UPR Recommendations were held in 2016; technical working meetings were organised throughout 2017; a national capacity training workshop was organised in July 2018 and a refresher in November 2018.
5. Between November 2018 and July 2019, the Committee collected data for the Mid-Term Report from Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) using a data collection matrix. The Committee also used desk research and publicly available open sources materials on Sierra Leone's human rights. The Mid-Term Report was reviewed and validated at a national workshop.
6. The 2nd cycle implementation Matrix 2016-2020 was developed to track the progress of implementation of the supported recommendations.
7. A drafting committee within the IMC was formed that met regularly and prepared the report based on the data from the matrix and others sourced through mobile visits to the relevant MDAs.
8. This 3rd cycle Report was prepared through a highly consultative process. Between 13 and 27 November 2020, consultations were held at different periods, involving civil society organisations, human rights defenders, Human Rights Commission-Sierra Leone, members of the Human Rights Committee in parliament from all political parties and other government officials. The objective of the consultations was for stakeholders to contribute to the report by identifying the main human rights advancements, challenges, and national priorities within the reporting period.
9. The draft 3rd cycle report was reviewed and validated during a two-day national workshop organised in Freetown with participants drawn from MDAs, civil society organisations, academics, women's groups, media, youth organisations, and other stakeholders including the UN representative and representatives of development partners.

III. Key developments in the promotion and protection of human rights

10. Since the submission of the 2nd Cycle Report in 2016, these are the key developments that have taken place in the country with human rights implications.

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, declaration of state of emergency and human rights

11. The President, His Excellency Julius Maada Bio, by proclamation dated 24 March 2020 declared a State of Emergency in the whole of Sierra Leone for a period of 12 months as an additional precautionary and extraordinary measure in preparedness to tackle the

COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that the State could lawfully derogate from its human rights obligations, as provided for by Article 4 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as justifiable for tackling the pandemic. Such a derogation is also provided for in Section 29 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act No. 6 of 1991.

12. Before the declaration of the State of Emergency, on 16 March 2020 there was a restriction on freedom of movement in terms of international travels. More restrictions were imposed in July which were all aimed at protecting public health and safety and considered proportionate and necessary. However, between 13 July until 27 November instant, the different forms of restrictions including congregational worship, the imposition of nationwide night curfews, public gatherings lockdowns, inter-district and international flight travels, were all lifted.

13. The Government continues to protect the fundamental human rights and freedoms of individuals. Individuals continue to enjoy the full protection of the law, as there are no incidences of arbitrary arrests and detention; inhumane and degrading treatment; deprivation of property; infringement of privacy; hindrance of freedom of conscience and expression, or no discrimination. Significantly, all the core non-derogable rights have been safeguarded during this period in accordance with GoSL obligation under Article 4 (2) of ICCPR during the state of emergency.

Government's COVID-19 support packages for livelihoods and employment

14. Instructed by the lessons from the Ebola experience, when Sierra Leone recorded its COVID-19 index case on 30 March 2020, the Government immediately responded with a plan, which was also aligned with the National Medium-Term Development Plan (NMTDP), 2019-2023. The strategy is two-pronged: a COVID-19 Health Preparedness and Response Plan, which focused on SAVING LIVES and the Quick Action Economic Response Programme (QAERP) aimed at SAVING LIVELIHOODS. Under the health plan, the number of hospital treatment beds in March 2020 increased from 30 to over 720 by June 2020. A thousand beds were provided and dedicated to COVID-19 cases in addition to a life insurance policy for 11,039 health care workers. As of December 2020, the total number of COVID-19 cases stood at 2,428, of which 1,846 persons recovered and 74 died.

15. In respect of saving livelihoods, vulnerable groups were given safety nets in the form of expanded cash transfer programmes of Le 35,000 to Le 100,000 for households with a quota of persons with disabilities. Workers, both in the informal and formal sectors, were also beneficiaries. Petty traders, market women, low paid workers in the informal sector, totalling about 29,000, received cash injections of Le 1,300,000 per person. Workers in the hotel and recreation sectors were given three months' salary compensation.

The independence of the judiciary and upholding of rule of law: The case of the treason trial

16. On 1 July 2020 a treason trial of Major (Rtd) Alfred Paolo Conteh, a former Minister in the past administration was concluded with a not guilty verdict. The trial process helped to underscore the independence of the judiciary as envisaged under the 1991 Constitution and fair trial principles under ICCPR, 1976. Major (Rtd) Conteh on 20 March 2020, was charged with treason, among other charges. After almost three months of trial, on 1 July 2020, a 12-person Jury returned their verdict of not guilty on 11 of the charges including treason. Major (Rtd) Conteh was therefore acquitted and discharged. The state complied with the decision of the court. GoSL prides itself that there are no Political Prisoners in the country.

17. The Government admits that prolonged pre-trial detention is a challenge and is seized of the same issue, especially when the correctional facilities are overcrowded. The reason for this state of affairs is multi-faceted, ranging from procedural challenges in our criminal processes to the paucity of magistrates, judges and State Counsel to hear and prosecute matters, respectively. To change this trajectory, the Government continues to recruit judges, magistrates and State Counsel as part of its commitment to improving access to justice and

justice *delivery*. In 2020, the Government recruited 30 lawyers to work at the Law Officers' Department in the Office of Attorney-General and Minister of Justice. These lawyers will be deployed across the country to assist the courts in the swift and timely dispensation of justice. This is the first time the Law Officers' Department is having this huge recruitment at one go. The Government is also planning to recruit additional judges and magistrates to service the courts in every part of the country.

18. The Government is also finalising the draft Criminal Procedure Act. With a new Criminal Procedure law, the current Bail Regulations, additional magistrates, judges and State Counsel will help stem the tide against prolonged pre-trial detention.

Independent Commissions of Inquiry into corruption of public officers, fair trial, rule of law and ending impunity

19. The President appointed three Chairmen and Sole Commissioners by Constitutional Instruments Nos. 64, 65 and 67 dated 1 August 2018 and 27 September 2018, respectively to look into the activities of officials of the past administration. Unlike previous Constitutional Instruments that were laid before Parliament, these Constitutional Instruments were ratified by Parliament after thorough deliberations by its members culminating into establishing the various Commissions of Inquiry.

20. The Commissioners commenced public hearings based on established principles of fair trial and the rule of law. The inquiries were impartial as the Commissioners allowed the Persons of Interest to defend allegations that were made against them. The Commissions set out all the applicable principles of law concerning the standard of proof and evaluation of evidence.

21. The Government recently published its White Papers on the recommendations of the various Commissions following the handing over of the reports. As the accepted recommendations of a Commission of Inquiry are deemed as judgment of the High Court, the legal remedy available to the Persons of Interest is to appeal the recommendations. As of 20 December 2020, 60 of such appeals were lodged with the Court of Appeal.

Cases of demonstrations, violence, balancing the right to freedom of assembly, association and law and order

22. The Government deeply regrets the violent disturbances in Makeni, Lunsar and Tombo which resulted in deaths, injuries, and wanton destruction of property. The cases have been investigated and prosecutions are currently ongoing in the courts. The State is currently prosecuting 13 and 31 persons for the incidents in Makeni and Lunsar, respectively. A preliminary investigation is being done at the Magistrate's court for offences including conspiracy, murder, arson, malicious damage and riotous conduct.

23. A special investigative committee was set up by the Government to look into the disturbances in Makeni comprising senior officials of Government drawn from different institutions. The Committee produced a report for the attention of the President. The police also conducted their internal investigations regarding the conduct of officers who were deployed at areas where these disturbances occurred. The findings of some of the investigations led to the dismissal of some senior police officers, including Local Unit Commanders, Commanding officers and other personnel.

24. Also, the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) set up a committee to investigate the said violent disturbances to establish whether there is a link between such violence and hate speeches by some social media operatives and whether these incidences had to do with political contestation. The PPRC committee has carried out its investigations and is yet to submit its report.

25. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone also investigated the disturbances and in its report in August 2020 attributed the violations that ensued to some state and non-state actors. The report concluded, *inter alia*, that the lack of professionalism by the police in handling the riots and disturbances was a contributory factor to the violations.

The abolition of the criminal libel laws

26. The Government in October 2020 repealed Part V of the Public Order Act, 1965 that criminalised seditious libel, thereby implementing recommendation to repeal the Public Order Act and Criminal Seditious Libel Laws, and thus guaranteeing the freedom of expression.

Government reversal of policies that banned pregnant girls from going back to school and taking exams

27. The ban on pregnant girls in school that was introduced in 2015 was lifted on 30 March 2020. This is in conformity with recommendation of ending measures that excluded young pregnant girls from the mainstream educational system.

The hands-off our girls' campaign: declaration that sexual violence constitutes a national emergency

28. Launched in December 2018, the Office of the First Lady led a rigorous campaign titled '*Hands Off Our Girls*'. As part of a national response against sexual and gender-based violence and related violations in the country, the Sexual Offences Act of 2012 was amended. Also, the first 'Sexual Offences Model Court' has been set up and launched on 24 July 2020 to try sexual violence offenders. In further fulfilment of the Government's mandate and its determination to address this heinous crime, the Office of the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice has established a team to process speedy trial of cases involving sexual and gender-based violence and related violations. Also, State Counsel have been instructed to oppose bail from perpetrators of sexual offences and to ensure that convicted sex offenders do not benefit from the power of the prerogative of mercy.

29. There has been a sexual amendment (Amendment) Act, 2019. The Act increases the punishment for conviction of rape or sexual offences of minors. Before this, there was a state of emergency on rape and other offences in 2019.

30. According to the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) assessment report of 2020, Sierra Leone has registered remarkable strides in the improvement of policies with human rights implications. The policies calculated in percentage terms are as follows: political rights 92%; civil liberties 88%; rule of law, 58%; freedom of information, 85%; Gender in the economy, 61%; spending on health, 68%; completion of primary education by girls, 68%; and controlling of corruption 79%.

IV. Implementation of recommendations from the previous cycle

A. Ratification of international/regional/thematic human rights treaties and cooperation with treaty bodies (SDG 16)

Recommendations 111.1–111.25, 111.35, 111.36, 111.38, 111.61

31. Sierra Leone's commitment to engaging with the UN human rights system remains strong. Sierra Leone has signed all the nine fundamental human rights treaties and submitted initial and/or periodic reports on five of the seven ratified treaties, namely: CAT, CCPR, CEDAW, CERD, and CRC. After the second cycle review in 2016, the GoSL has also submitted its Initial Report on the status of implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the Committee of Experts on Disability. Also, the Government has increased budgetary allocation to the National Commission for Persons with Disability to implement activities that will better the lives of persons with disabilities.

32. The ILO standards on rights of workers and rights at work have received the attention of the GoSL. Parliament on 16 July 2019 ratified the following seven ILO Conventions, and instruments of ratification of same has been deposited with the UN treaty depository. The

Government has set in motion a process to domesticate the ILO treaty into the national legal system. The ratified ILO standards are:

- Protocol 029 of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention 1930;
- Convention 102 Social Security (Minimum Standards) 1952;
- Convention 150 Labour Administration;
- Convention 160 Labour Statistics 1985;
- Convention 189 Domestic Workers 2011;
- Convention 97, Migration for Employment; and
- Convention 143 Migrant Workers.

33. GoSL plans to ratify several Optional Protocols in the coming years. An objective of the on-going constitutional review process is, *inter alia*, to also incorporate some of the principles of international human rights espoused by the said Optional Protocols into the new constitution and thus make them as part of the supreme laws of the land. The Government is seeking donor support to enable it to prepare and submit the outstanding reports. A timetable for the submission of the reports supra is to be drawn in 2021 which will guide the GoSL.

34. On the eve of the August 2017 flood and mudslide disaster in Freetown, Sierra Leone honoured its invitation by receiving the *UN Special Rapporteur on the Implications for Human Rights of the Environmentally Sound Management and Disposal of Hazardous Substances and Wastes* to conduct a human right monitoring and assessment study in Sierra Leone. This was the first of such visit to Africa by this current mandate holder. Despite the disastrous floods and mudslides of 14 August 2017, Sierra Leone continued with the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur from 14 to 25 August 2017. The Rapporteur assessed steps taken by the Government to protect the human rights implication in the management of hazardous substances and wastes throughout their life cycle. The UN Special Rapporteur has since submitted his report to the UN Human Rights Council on 11 September 2018.¹

35. On 12 March 2018, Sierra Leone submitted to the *Rapporteur on Follow-up of the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* the Government's response to Paragraphs 11 and 33 (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the Concluding Observations to the examination of the sixth periodic report of Sierra Leone.

36. Early 2020, Sierra Leone also responded to a questionnaire from the *United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disability/older persons with disabilities*.²

B. Constitutional review process and legislative framework on human rights (SDG 16)

Recommendations 111.39, 111. 40, 111.42, 111.43, 111.44, 111.51, 111.55, 111.62, 111.63

37. Since TRC recommendation for a new constitution in 2002, there has been an on-going process to adopt a new constitution to address emerging human rights and other issues in the country. A referendum was planned on the proposed constitution before the general and presidential elections on 7 March 2018. However, the Government White Paper on the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) recommendations were only published on 10 November 2017 in the Sierra Leone Gazette Vol. CXLV111 No. 79, leaving little or no time to hold the planned referendum because of the elections. On assumption of office, in 2018, the current GoSL is very committed to the CRC process; and recommendations of a White Paper is currently before cabinet.

38. There are norms and principles of international law that the CRC recommended to be included in a new constitution. The CRC recommended that the fundamental principles of State policy contained in Chapter II of the 1991 Constitution (section 14) should not only be central in the governance of the State but should be made justiciable to improve the realisation of human rights.

39. Some of the recommendations by CRC, which are accepted include, abolishing the death penalty; reducing the detention period before being brought to court to seven days from ten days for capital offences and forty-eight hours from seventy-two for other offences, respectively; that protection from inhumane treatment is absolute and cannot be derogated from under any circumstance; that discrimination is prohibited and not only discouraged; and that the State will adopt legislative and other measures to implement the principle that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointed bodies shall be of the same gender, and the criminalisation of FGM.

40. As demonstrated in the national reports Sierra Leone submitted to the First and Second Cycle reviews, significant work has been undertaken, including the passing of the undermentioned instruments, to implement many of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and to provide legislative safeguards for human rights:

- The Human Rights Commission Act, 2004 and the establishment of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone;
- The three Gender Acts, passed in 2007, namely the Domestic Violence Act, the Devolution of Estates Act and the Registration of Customary Marriages and Divorce Act;
- The Persons with Disability Act of 2011 and the establishment of the National Commission for Persons with Disability;
- The Legal Aid Act, 2012 and the establishment of the Legal Aid Board;
- The Sexual Offences Act 2012; as amended by the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019;
- The Right to Access of Information Act, 2013 and establishment of the Right to Access Information Commission;
- The amendments of the 1973 citizenship laws in 2006 and 2017 by the Sierra Leone Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2006 and the Citizenship Amendment Act 2017;
- The Sierra Leone Water Company Act, 2017;
- The Natural Water Resources Management Agency Act 2017;
- The Guma Valley Water Company Act, 2017;
- The Child Rights Act, 2007 and these main policy decisions:
 - The establishment of the National Commission for Children;
 - The adoption of many policies on child labour, youth unemployment, a moratorium on the death penalty, memorandum of understanding on FGM.

C. Realisation of civil and political rights (C&PR) – (SDG 5 and 10)

Recommendations 111.64, 111.90

41. Sierra Leone is a party to the ICCPR. The country is also a Party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, which contains Civil and Political Rights. Indisputably, some rights provided for by the ICCPR have assumed the status of Customary International Law which binds Sierra Leone, as Member State of the UN. Chapter III of the 1991 Constitution provides for the protection of almost all the rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); notably, rights such as the right to life, liberty, the prohibition of discrimination, freedom of conscience (no political prisoner), expression, assembly and association, the prohibition of torture, slavery and slave trade are all prohibited under the constitution. The GoSL is therefore enjoined by its obligations under international law and its constitution to realise civil and political rights.

Right to life – abolition of death penalty**Recommendations 111.1, 111.2, 111.91 - 111.98**

42. These recommendations call for the abolition of the death penalty from the statute books of Sierra Leone. These recommendations are in line with existing Government policy. From 2016 to 2020, there are 84 condemned persons on death row but none has been executed. This is because of a *de facto* moratorium in place since 1998 when the last executions took place. Although it is a recommendation by the CRC, and yet to be implemented, GoSL has already made firm commitments towards this end. On 17 December 2020, the President stated the clear intentions of his government to abolish the death penalty.

Equality and Non-discrimination**Recommendations 111.27, 111.47, 111.64, 111.65–111.72, 111.77–111.79, 111.86–111.90**

43. These recommendations are in line with existing government policies and existing laws to strengthen women's empowerment, end discrimination and violence against women, promote parity between men and women, protect victims of Ebola and health workers, and protect persons with disabilities from stigmatisation and protecting the rights of children.

44. Gender discrimination is largely a result of long-standing social and cultural norms and gender stereotyping that dictate relationships, roles, and responsibilities between men and women, as well as access to power, resources, and privileges. These are further reinforced by a range of discriminatory laws, including statutory³ and customary laws. Even when national laws are enacted to address these inequalities,⁴ effective enforcement has always been the major challenge for some sociological reasons.

45. Sierra Leone has legal standards that are in line with the key provisions of the CEDAW. Over the past decade, it has enacted a series of legislation and formulated policy instruments geared towards this. Between 2007 and 2009, it enacted the Domestic Violence Act, 2007, the Devolution of Estate Act, 2007 and the Registration of Customary Marriages and Divorce Act, 2009, ground-breaking laws for gender equality. This was followed in 2012 with the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act which was amended in 2019.

46. Sierra Leone signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in September 2008 but has not ratified it. The Ebola Virus Disease in 2014 and the concurrent economic meltdown hampered the ratification process. With the election of a new government, came the Corona Virus pandemic. However, the Government has responded positively to the implementation of its contents.

47. On 23 March 2017, the Government launched its new National Land Policy to address land-based discrimination, especially against women. The National Land Policy 2017 guarantees equal rights for both women and men, and the elimination of all forms of discriminations against women regarding equitable access and control over land resources. The policy calls for the amendment of the Sierra Leone Constitution to include provisions that ensure that women have the right to full and equal protection by the law and have the right not to be discriminated against based on their gender or marital status.

48. The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MGCA) has, since the last review, implemented a National Gender Strategic Plan. A National Steering Committee was set up for the implementation of the National Action Plan on Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820. Also, Sierra Leone is on the board of Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact and committed to undertake the following relevant policy actions including those in the national Gender Strategic plan has been finalised.

49. The SLP has adopted an accelerated promotion policy for women and offers women officers' priority for training opportunities to participate in international peacekeeping missions. In February 2019, RSLAF conducted a 300 all-female recruitment and training programme. This is a cadet officer programme that offers women, especially those with Professional Qualifications (such as Medicine, Law, Accounting, Vocational Skills, etc.) to join the officer ranks of RSLAF.

50. The Local Government Service Commission, the body responsible for the Local Councils has made strides incorporating women as pillars in the Commission. The Commission has five (5) Commissioners, three (3) of whom are women. The Local Government Act, 2004 stipulated that 70% of Ward Committee Members should be women.

51. On 3 December 2020, the GoSL launched the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Policy. The policy aims at changing social norms and perspectives and at the same time guaranteeing equality, inclusion, and access to rights, resources and opportunity for all.

52. The GoSL, through the MGCA, has begun the review of the Child Rights Act, the Child Justice Strategy 2014-2018, and the Adoption Act 1989 to address emerging issues in child protection. This will also take care of conflicting provisions in child protection related laws.

53. The National Commission for Persons with Disability in collaboration with Human Rights Commission developed a Complaints Handling Manual to record, investigate and help in promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. This Manual, together with the Access to Information Act, has increased the accessibility to public information by persons with disabilities. The draft Building Code, if adopted, will make public and private facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. The Persons with Disability Act, 2011 continues to be enforced through a Draft Inclusive Education Policy.

54. The Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) dedicated an entire Cluster Policy (Cluster 5) on empowering women, children, and persons with disabilities. To ensure that children with disabilities are not excluded from enrolling, the MBSSE is leading efforts to provide schools with disability-friendly facilities. This includes providing ramps, making toilets more easily accessible by pupils with disabilities, and making teachers more aware of the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. GOSL pays school fees for persons with disability at the tertiary levels in addition to the Free Quality Education Scheme that covers their fees at primary and secondary levels. The above approach in the MTNDP is consistent with UN Agenda 2030 (SDG) and AU Agenda 2063 driven by the principle of leaving no one behind.

55. The Sierra Leone Citizenship Act, 1973 as amended by the Sierra Leone Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2006, now accords citizenship to any child born of a Sierra Leonean mother even when the father is of a different nationality. So, for a woman to transfer her citizenship to her children she must be a citizen of Sierra Leone.

56. NaCSA continues to provide protection and assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in the areas of (i) conduct of asylum procedures; (ii) provision of livelihood support; (iii) birth registration and (iv) residence and work permit for locally integrating refugees; and (v) issuance of birth certificates to refugee children to avoid the risk of being stateless through birth registration and documentation.

Reversal of Policies that ban pregnant girls from returning to school and also taking examinations

Recommendations 111.69, 111.73–111.76, 111.200, 111.201

57. On the 30 March 2020, the GoSL through its MBSSE lifted the ban on pregnant girls from participating in school education and this has been replaced by a new policy. The new policy of “*radical inclusion and comprehensive safety*” which under its treaty obligation under the ICESCR article 2(1) encourages a progressive realisation of universal education for all children without any discrimination.

58. Accordingly, the new policy “is building a radically inclusive Sierra Leone where all children – regardless of class, ethnicity, tribe, disability, location, gender reproductive or parental status – can live and learn in safety and dignity.” The Free Quality School Education (FQSE) framework lays out an overarching vision and holistic set of principles, towards a Sierra Leone where all children are entitled to meaningful and equitable opportunities to learn and prosper. This is an eloquent testament to the Government’s commitment to accessible and quality education (SDG 4), and gender equality (SDG 5).

Criminalising FGM or policies aimed at eliminating the practice

59. There is a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government⁵ and the 'Sowei' Council⁶ is in place as a strategy to ending FGM, which calls for girls under the age of 18 years not to be circumcised. The Government is using the free quality school education as an entry point to sensitise girls of the harms of FGM and eventually eliminating its prevalence. The Government is also working closely with campaigners on ending FGM to engage the practitioners and to work towards finalisation of the National Strategy for Reduction of FGM. Despite the MoU that children should consent to initiation, the practice is on-going regardless.

60. In this regard, much has been done through collaborative engagement between state and non-state actors with the MGCA taking the lead in reaching to the general public on the continuous promotion of awareness against FGM in the Country. Girls and women aged between 15–49 years who have undergone FGM dropped from 89% in 2011 to 86.1 % in 2019.

Protection of refugees and prohibition of slavery and trafficking

Recommendations 111.161, 111.56

61. The Refugee Protection Act 2007 shows the commitment of the government in providing favourable protective regime to asylum seekers and refugees. At present, the MFAIC is hosting the Refugee Protection secretariat and has already put in place mechanisms to amend the aforementioned Act.

62. The GoSL has enacted the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, 2005 which is an act that suppresses the trafficking in persons and guarantees the protection against slavery, servitude, forced labour or human trafficking in section 19 (1) of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. The GoSL has trained 103 officials and there is a trafficking in persons task force co-chaired by the AGMOJ and MGCA, with the latter providing the secretariat. In February 2020, two women were convicted for child trafficking and money laundry and sentenced to 20 years for trafficking.

Freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion

Recommendations 111.157, 111.165

63. The 1991 Constitution fully protects the rights of journalists to practise their profession unfettered. In October 2020, just after the repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act, 1965 that criminalised seditious libel, the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice entered a *nolle prosequi* in all matters in which accused persons were standing trial for such offences.

64. Parliament has also enacted the Independent Media Commission Act, 2020. The object of the IMC Act 2020 is to ensure free and responsible media and to guarantee the protection of the reputation and human rights of others. It is envisaged that the IMC Act with its enforcement powers would naturally serve as an alternative for civil redress to complaints emanating from both traditional and new media.

Right to vote and participate in the public affairs

Recommendations 111.169, 111.168

65. Further to recommendations of the European Union Election Mission in 2012, NEC has set up a committee encompassing various institutions of Government. As recommended by the EU Mission, NEC has reverted to the district tally centre process; and the same is embedded in the NEC Strategic Plan 2020-2024, which was launched on 18 November 2020. Regarding the conduct of effective and sustained sensitisation and awareness-raising campaign on gender mainstreaming, NEC has established departments for sensitisation, gender and disability departments.

Women empowerment and political participation

66. GoSL launched the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment policy on 3 December 2020. Even before the launch of the policy, the Government had already taken deliberate actions to ensure gender parity. The MFAIC, the Deputy Inspector General of

Police, the MGCA, the Ministry of Fisheries, the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs and the Auditor General, are some of the highest offices of the land held by women.

67. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament increased from 12.4% in 2012 to 12.9% in 2018. The proportion of female mayors and local councillors and chairpersons increased from 18% to 28.6% over the same period.

68. According to Cluster 5 of Sierra Leone's MTNDP, 2019-2023, a key target is to ensure that more women are in a leadership position than there were in 2018 when the plan was launched.

69. The Government continues to appoint women to senior governance positions. In line with the Chiefs of Defence Staff Conference at the UN in New York concerning 20% increase in female intake in RSLAF, 328 special female officer cadets were recruited.

70. The Sierra Leone Police continues to implement its Gender Mainstreaming policy through accelerated promotion scheme for female personnel. This serves as incentives for women to join the SLP. In the Sierra Leone Correctional Services (SLCS), equal opportunities exist for both male and female applicants to sit entrance examination, go through the same interview process and successful candidates employed.

D. Realisation of economic, social and cultural rights (ECOSOC) – (SDG 1, 3 and 8)

71. The GoSL accords recognition to the now established principle of interconnectedness of all human rights and therefore attaches enormous importance to ECOSOC rights as well. Under the 1991 Constitution, ECOSOC rights are placed in Chapter II as fundamental principles of state policies, although aspirational, it is normative. The CRC recommends that some ECOSOC rights are made enforceable in the new Constitution to be adopted.

72. Sierra Leone ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) in 1983 which not only guarantees social and economic rights but also makes them justiciable. In 2015, the GoSL submitted its report to ACHPR and intends to submit its delayed periodic reports. ICESCR was ratified as far back as 1996 and the GoSL plans to submit an initial and periodic reports.

73. An underlying policy consideration of development plans adopted by governments, especially since 2002, aims at the progressive realisation of ECOSOC rights within the meaning of Article 2 (1) of the ICESCR, i.e., rights to food, education and work. Cognisant of this, the Government's MTNDP, 2019-2023, has, under Cluster 1, identified programmes and strategies for the progressive realisation of rights to education, water, employment and Housing consistent with SDGs.

Right to adequate standard of living and social security

Recommendation 111.173

74. The Agenda for Prosperity was developed and implemented until December 2018 and was succeeded by the MTNDP (2019-2023). This plan articulates a series of policy actions geared towards poverty reduction and diversifying the economy. Also, the Plan is aligned to the SDGs and AU Agenda 2063.

75. In addition to the formulation of the MTNDP, a comprehensive SDG investment Plan has been developed. It has identified key programmes and projects needed to achieve the SDG targets by 2030.

76. The GoSL has, through NaCSA developed programmes aimed to reduce poverty and improving the economy. This programme has several components of poverty reductions, which includes the following:

- Development of systems for implementation of the social safety nets, cash transfers to extremely poor households, and programme management and capacity building. Quarterly cash transfers of (Le 250, 000) each to 50,000 extremely poor households.

- The Pro-Poor Growth for Peace Consolidation (GPC) Programme co-financed by the Governments of Sierra Leone and the Federal Republic of Germany aims at primarily improving the livelihoods of beneficiary communities and contributes to development and consolidation of peace, with a specific focus on employment creation and income generation for vulnerable groups (youths and women) in selected rural communities.
- There is a reparations programme to restore the dignity to severely war-wounded victims by providing reparations to them in the form of rehabilitation grants, complemented with training in income generation and financial literacy. A total of 9,654 out of a residual caseload of 16,219 female war victims of sexual violence were physically re-verified by NaCSA nationwide and 2,250 of this number were provided with rehabilitation grant of One Million Two Hundred Leones (Le 1,200,000) per person.
- Also, NaCSA has programmes aimed at addressing the plight of women, children and other vulnerable groups. Through this, NaCSA solicited funds to ensure that women and children are protected. This had been achieved through the various social protection programmes implemented nationwide with NaCSA providing income support to 2,250 women.

77. Also, the War Reparation Programme, which has now ended, targeted vulnerable widows and were provided with a rehabilitation grant of Le 3.5 Billion. NaCSA has enrolled 10,982 persons living with disability in the unconditional cash transfer system in a dignified manner to remove these people from the streets of the country as well as providing them with the adequate capacity to live a self-reliant life devoid from begging on the streets.

Access to water (SDG 6) **Recommendation 111.176**

78. The GoSL has passed laws to improve access to water. The laws are: the Sierra Leone Water Company Act, No. 4 of 2017; the National Water Resources Management Agency Act No. 5 of 2017; and the Guma Valley Water Company Act No. 6 of 2017. These laws provide for sustainable use and management of the country's water resources. Sierra Leone is also a beneficiary of the MCC threshold programme of USD\$35.5 million grant with increase support to the water sector in the country that is in line with the SDG6. Access to drinking water nationally increased from 51.8% in 2013 to 71.3% in 2017.

79. The GoSL has identified water as the second out of eight priority sectors for development under *Cluster 3 – Infrastructure and Economic Competitiveness* in the MTNDP, 2019–2023. This Plan aims to improve water resources through the following policy targets: to increase the percentage of the population with access to safe drinking water from 59.6% to 80% by 2023; to increase the percentage of the population with access to an improved water source within a total collection time of 30 minutes from 69% to 85% by 2023, and to reduce the percentage of the population with access to unreliable or limited water services from 24% to 7% by 2023.

Right to work: Opportunity of all to work, including women and persons with disabilities (SDG 8) **Recommendation 111.30**

80. The GoSL has already ratified the ILO Child Labour Convention 138 (Minimum Age Convention), Convention 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention), Protocol 029 of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention 1930, Convention 102 Social Security (Minimum Standards) 1952, Convention 150 Labour Administration, Convention 160 Labour Statistics 1985, and Convention 189 Domestic Workers 2011.⁷

81. The GoSL has also put in place the following measures to prohibit and eliminate child labour and promote their welfare: list of hazardous work for children under 18 years of age developed; National Technical Steering Committee on child labour formed; National Task Force on anti-human trafficking formed; National Child Labour Survey conducted in 2011; Awareness-raising/advocacy on child labour on world day against child labour conducted; Child Justice Strategy developed; National Action Plan on the Elimination of the Worst

Forms of Child Labour, including child trafficking, developed and validated, and National Employment Policy developed and approved by the cabinet.

82. The NASSIT Act No.5 of 2001 did not fully address the issue of Migrant Workers, albeit the Ministry of Labour and Social Security has ratified Convention 97, Convention 102 and Convention 143. This said, the NASSIT Act is currently under review with the view to integrating some provisions of the ILO Convention into National Migration Policy. In general, the GoSL National Labour Migration Policy aims specifically to; (i) mainstream labour migration into national development agenda and planning (ii) maximize the positive effect and minimize the negative effects of labour migration on socio-economic development; (iii) develop mechanisms for incorporating migration into the development planning. In addition, the GoSL has established the Wages and Salary Commission with the aim of harmonizing salaries of public servants.

83. The UN provided funds to the SLCS in 2018, 2019 and 2020 to open bank accounts for 290 inmates. This project encourages inmates to embark upon life skills training while at the Centre. The proceeds realised from the training are deposited into their accounts and used on post-discharge.

The right to health and lessons from Ebola (SDG 3)

Recommendations 111.177–111.189

84. The GoSL has taken steps to address recommendation 111.86 through the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) in developing a Comprehensive Programme for Ebola Survivors (CPES) including free health care for all EVD survivors. In terms of lessons learned from Ebola, the MoHS established the Directorate of Health Security and Emergency and is currently engaged in the process leading to the review of the Public Health Act of 1960 to bring it up to date with present realities and making it human rights friendly. The MoHS has also established district-based Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) and has developed emergency response guidelines, and Protocols at national and district levels. These measures mean Sierra Leone is now better prepared to respond to health emergencies and thereby able to protect the rights of its citizens as witnessed during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

85. The GoSL has developed key health improvement policies, including the Basic Package of Essential Health Services (2015), Nursing and Midwifery Policy (2016), Reproductive Health Policy (2017), Human Resources for Health (HRH) Policy and Strategy (2017-2021), and National Nursing and Midwifery Strategic Plan (2019-2023). As of 2020, 2,781 health personnel were appointed, and 1,170 were promoted. As a result of these interventions, the Government has recorded positive outcomes between 2008 and 2017. The infant mortality rate dropped from 89 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2008 to 56 deaths in 2017, and the under-five mortality rate dropped from 140 to 94 deaths during the same period. Several challenges persist, however.

86. The MTNDP prioritises health care improvement in Policy Cluster 1. Under this Cluster, the strategic objective is to transform the health sector from an under-resourced, ill-equipped, and inadequate delivery system into a well-resourced and functioning national health-care delivery system that is affordable for everyone and accessible to all. A total sum of USD\$ 428.38 million is to be spent on health between 2019–2023. In 2015 health expenditure stood at 1.64% of GDP and in 2019 it went up to 1.8%.

87. In December 2018, the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage was officially launched by the GoSL. Full implementation of this Strategy will be followed by Regional launches.

Right to education and human rights education (SDG 4)

Recommendations 111.190–111.204

88. Given the importance the Government attaches to education, there are now two Ministries of Education: The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE). Education is provided for in the Constitution of Sierra Leone. In addition to existing policy objectives, rules, regulations and Acts of Parliament, by recent policy directive, Sierra Leone now enjoys Free Quality School Education (FQSE) for both basic and senior secondary education with a direct impact

on the enrolment in schools across the Country especially for Government Schools (GS) and Government Assisted Schools (GAS).

89. The GoSL has increased from 15% to 21% of its budgetary allocation for education with a phase system to implement the full complement of the FQSE initiative. On the ground, new schools have been approved by the MBSSE, thus providing an opportunity for more school-going children to benefit from what the Government is offering through the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) scheme. School completion for girls and boys have improved during the reporting period. About 90% for girls in 2019, compared to 65.4% in 2015; and 92% for boys in 2019 compared to 48.7% in 2015.

90. Sierra Leone Correctional Services (SLCS) trained 200 personnel including 60 female officers (30%) with support from the UNDP on Infections, Prevention Control (IPC) best practice against COVID-19 across the country. SLCS hosted a beauty pageant for female inmates drawn from the Correctional Centre nationwide who contested at the Reintegration Correctional Centre on the 11 November 2019.

Human rights education

91. Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) Act of 2004, and the National Commission for Democracy (NCD) are the main entities mandated to undertake human rights education in several forms: sensitisation, awareness-raising and advocacy.

92. The HRCSL Act of 2004 enjoins the Commission in promoting and protecting human rights through public awareness and education to create a national human rights culture. This includes providing documentation centre and Truth and Reconciliation Archives. Training and sensitisation by the HRCSL have targeted several segments of the society, students, security forces, traditional rulers, and the business community. Human Rights and peace clubs have been established in most secondary schools to get teachers and students to learn more about human rights.

93. The NCD with the mandate of, among other things, creating and sustaining awareness on principles of constitutionalism, human rights citizenship and accountability, ultimately aimed at consolidating democracy. Some of the means used include the media to educate the people about their rights. The educational programmes are done in the main and mostly spoken vernacular languages of the country. Also, it targets informal settlements or deprived communities. The introduction of civic education helps to promote human rights education.

94. The Legal Aid Board (LAB) has also introduced the community legal empowerment programme which is aimed at educating people on the laws, human rights and the legal processes. This empowerment activity is carried out through the community and school outreach sessions and topics for discussion during each session are determined by the justice needs of the community or school in question. LAB recorded that 40,953 people and school-going children benefitted from the programme in 2018.

95. The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) stands in the forefront of implementing the GoSL's obligations under relevant International Humanitarian Law (IHL) – e.g., the Geneva Convention Act, No. 14 of 2012 which has domesticated the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977.

96. During commissioning and recruit training at the AFTC (Armed Forces training Centre), cadets and recruits are educated on human rights. They are specifically taught the rights of protected categories of persons under the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols. This training programme is additional to existing human rights training programmes within the RSLAF and is encapsulated in an RSLAF's policy document titled "Rights of a Soldier," Version 1 November 2018 (MoD). This document details the rights of a soldier and the rights of civilians relative to the functions of a soldier.

E. Strengthening the National Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) – (SDG 16)

Recommendation 111.54

97. Through the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the GoSL continues to provide budgetary support to the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone. For example, as part of its deliverables in 2019, the MoF strengthened and supported the HRCSL institutional capacity by disbursing a total sum of Le 14,752,294,000.00 towards the HRCSL's responsiveness to human rights complaints, improved human rights culture through public education and strengthening the monitoring and research functions of the Commission. The GoSL continues to meet its obligations under the Paris Principles by ensuring that the HRCSL is adequately resourced with funds and gender-balanced personnel; guaranteeing through an Act of Parliament HRCSL's broad investigative and quasi-judicial mandate, competence, and independence; and ensuring HRCSL continues to carry out its work throughout the country in an unrestricted space. Given the above, the HRC-SL has maintained its grade "A" accredited status as the country's independent national human rights institution.

Anti-corruption commission, accountability and addressing impunity

Recommendation 111.60

98. The GoSL is currently implementing its fourth generation of National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS); being for the period between 2019–2023. NACS has a Steering Committee to oversee the implementation. In addition, NACS has formed Integrity Management Committee in all MDAS to oversee the recommendations of the strategy. The NACS 2019-2023 strategy adopts a three-pronged approach: Enforcement, Prevention, and Education. Since 2018, the ACC has recorded tangible results in tackling corrupt practices, and the establishment of a contributory factor has been the creation of a Special Court for corruption cases with Special Judges to try corruption offences speedily and efficiently. Consequently, there is speedy prosecution of cases and more than 98% conviction rate, thereby minimising impunity in public offices. As at 2019, the ACC has recovered over Le12 Billion lost through corruption and corrupt practices. An estimated additional Le6 Billion to be recovered after cases in the next 6 months will be committed to the provision of social services.

99. On 3 December 2019, the GoSL passed into law the Anti-Corruption (Amendment) Act 2019 with the following objectives:

- Increase the punishment for major corruption offences;
- Power of prosecution or recover misappropriated funds with 10% interest;
- Power of appeal against lenient sentences;
- Broadened the definition of corruption to include accepting, obtaining, receiving and taking advantage;
- Administrative sanctions for all public officials who fail to submit their assets declaration.

100. According to Afro Barometer Corruption Perception Survey of 2018, citizens' belief in government's effort in the fight against corruption jumped from an all-time low of 40% to over 66% in 2018⁸. As at 2019 Sierra Leone scored 13 out of 20 in MCC scorecard and got 81% in the same year compared to 79% in 2018.

F. Administration of justice, access to justice and rule of law (SDG 16)

Recommendations 111.71, 111.72, 111.136, 111.141, 111.142, 111.152

101. The Judiciary has had more judges appointed to address the acute shortage of judicial personnel and increase the capacity of courts to handle and reduce a backlog of cases. As of 2019, most districts have a Resident Magistrate and for the big cities or provincial headquarter towns, there are two resident magistrates. In 2016, 10 High Court judges, one

Court of Appeal Judge and one Supreme Court judge were appointed. In March 2019, four Supreme Court Judges and four Court of Appeal Judges were appointed. Among the Court of Appeal Judges, two or 50% of the newly appointed judges were female. The absence of a resident judge in the North-western region is a concern under consideration by the GoSL.

102. Prolonged pre-trial detention, overcrowding and arbitrary refusal of the right to bail can infringe on the rights of detainees in contravention of the Mandela Rules on the treatment of prisoners. To address these concerns and ensure access to bail for accused persons, the Judiciary, with support from UNDP, developed a Bail Regulations, 2018, which was published as Constitutional Instrument No. 5 of 2018 in the *Supplement to the Sierra Leone Gazette Vol. CXLIX, No. 63 dated 12 July 2018*. The Judiciary has conducted training on the 2018 Bail Regulations for judges and magistrates and conducted bail sensitisation activities for the public.

103. Attempts have been made by the Sierra Leone Correctional Service (SLCS) to decongest the Correctional Centre. In 2018, the overall national inmate population stood at 5000 and in 2019 it went up a bit and declined to 4300 in 2020. Funds have been sought to further decongest some of the Correctional Centres in the regions. The Chief Justice of Sierra Leone organised Criminal Court Sessions in 2020 on how to decongest the inmate population in the provinces.

Women, girls, access to justice, and gender-based violence (SDGs 5, 10 and 16)

104. As a preventive measure, the GoSL formulated the National Male Involvement Strategy for the Prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. It aims at, among other things, eradicating sexual and gender-based violence, promoting gender equality and upholding the rights and dignity of women and girls. The strategy adopts a socially transformative approach that focuses on the participation of men and boys as change agents and champions for protecting women and girls in their families, communities, schools and workplaces. It treats men not just as perpetrators of violence but as allies in changing power relations and systems in society that sustain gender inequality and violence.

105. In 2019, the Government reviewed the Sexual Offences Act of 2012 and enacted the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2019 to increase the maximum penalty for Rape and Sexual Penetration of a child from 15 years' imprisonment to a sentence of life imprisonment and introduced the new offence of aggravated sexual assault and an alternative conviction of aggravated sexual assault. Also, a 'Sexual Offences Model Court' has been set up to try sexual violence offenders. In 2020, the GoSL instituted a free health line for rape and SGBV victims to report the incidences. Between April and October, 2020, a total of 48,147 calls were processed.

106. In further fulfilment of the Government's mandate and its determination to address this heinous crime, the Office of Attorney-General and Minister of Justice has established a team to process speedy trial of cases involving sexual and gender-based violence and related violations. Also, State Counsel have been instructed to oppose bail from perpetrators of sexual offences and to ensure that convicted sex offenders do not benefit from the power of prerogative of mercy. The FSU of the SLP is being strengthened to adequately respond to sexual and gender-based violence cases.

107. From 11 to 20 May 2017, the Decentralisation Secretariat in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) held consultative meetings with all 149 Paramount Chiefs in the country. These meetings addressed issues of violence against children and women. The Paramount Chiefs prepared action plans on how to prevent violence against children and women and promoting children welfare in their communities.

108. LAB provides free legal advice and representation in civil and criminal matters for indigents especially women, Ebola survivors and those in rural communities who face real prospects of discrimination. In this regard, the work of LAB contributes to enforcing laws and policies that promote gender equality. Between May 2015 to December 2018 a total of 214,476 people (including 39,834 children and 30,009 women) including non-Sierra Leoneans benefited from services provided by LAB.

109. LAB introduced Alternative Dispute Resolution or Mediation mechanisms in March 2016. The service is provided in every district in the country following the recruitment and deployment of 35 Paralegals. LAB recorded 97,838 people benefited from ADR services since its inception in 2016. This accounts for 46% of beneficiaries of the scheme. A total of 48,452 people have benefitted from ADR in 2018. This accounts for 45% of beneficiaries of the scheme for that period. From that total figure, 23,789 children benefitted from the ADR service in 2018. This accounts for 49% of beneficiaries.

110. The GoSL is pleased to report that the ADR scheme is helping to reduce the pressure on the police and the courts' time. This is because community-level disputes in civil matters which were reported to the police or courts for adjudication are now reported to LAB mediation centres. Moreover, the police and the courts are also referring civil matters to LAB for mediation. This scheme has contributed to improving access to justice.

G. Establishment of the Independent Police Complaint Board, use of force and human rights (SDG 16)

Recommendations 111.150, 111.151, 111.191

111. The IPCB, an independent civilian oversight body for the Police, was created by the Police Council in the exercise of the powers conferred upon it by Section 158 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone. This was done by Constitutional Instrument No. 11 of 2013 published as a Supplement to the Sierra Leone Gazette Vol. CXLIV, No.32 of 11 July 2013. The Police Council made the IPCB Regulations, 2013, which brought into being the Independent Police Complaints Board.

112. In 2019, IPCB trained over 420 Community Residents on Civilian Oversight Mechanism for the Sierra Leone Police targeting Senior Police Officers, Civil Society Activists, Human Rights Defenders, Paramount Chiefs, Journalists, and other Oversight bodies for the SLP in the 14 districts. In the same year, the IPCB conducted countrywide training on the Guidelines on the Conditions of Arrest, Police Custody and Pre-Trial Detention in Africa for 591 community residents, including Police officers, Correctional Service Officers, Human Rights Defenders, Civil Society activists, persons with disabilities, Chiefs under a UN Project, "Improving the Rule of Law and Human Rights in Sierra Leone."

113. The IPCB has been a welcome creation to police accountability. It guarantees the rights of people who come in contact with the SLP. Since its creation, the IPCB has handled a variety of complaints as reflected in table annexed.

H. Challenges and constraints

The impact of natural disasters and COVID-19 pandemic on human rights

114. Between 2016, when the 2nd cycle report was submitted, and 2021, when this 3rd cycle report is being submitted, Sierra Leone has experienced two serious crises i.e., Mudslides and COVID-19, impacting the Government's ability to realise its entire human rights obligations, that is, most of the rights in the category of economic and social rights.

115. In 2017, Sierra Leone experienced a national flood and mudslide emergency which left approximately 500 people dead, 500 unaccounted for, and thousands including 4000 children made homeless. This came at the back of the country's attempts to recover from the consequences of the decade long civil war, and the almost three years of Ebola virus epidemic.

116. The projection is that the economic consequences of COVID-19 will lead to a drop-in GDP from 4.2% to 1.7% under the worst-case scenario before increasing to 2% by 2021. The effects on poor households and vulnerable groups such as women, girls and persons with disability, in terms of income and basic livelihoods are severe.

Unemployment and the right to work

117. Multi-dimensional poverty is 86% for the rural areas whilst urban poverty stands at 37%. Using the Human Development Index (HDI), in 2019 the Global Development Report ranked Sierra Leone 181 of 189. A net effect of this is that unemployment among the youth is over 60%. The right to work is therefore a challenge and the GoSL is embarking on programmes and policies to progressively improve the right to work.

Traditional practices and rights of women

118. Some violations have always been inherent within the structures of the society for decades, predicated upon dubious traditional practices and beliefs. FGM, as a harmful practice on the girl child, is difficult to eliminate or legislate out of existence because of the traditional and cultural belief systems.

119. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) which is a perennial source of human rights violations is itself a complex mix of traditional beliefs and poverty that are experienced more by women, particularly by women in the rural areas and within the urban-rural enclaves.

Access to justice

120. Access to justice in terms of a fair trial is of paramount concern in the country, especially in the provinces. The first major issue for people in some of the remote chiefdoms is about physical access to courts. The local courts' system is the main judicial forum in the provinces; it is estimated that about 80% of the population use the local courts, yet cases brought before the local courts are characterised by arbitrariness in several forms.

121. Across the country, the concern is expressed about pre-trial detention, viewed as a serious challenge to the criminal justice system because of its protracted nature. Much of the practice of the pre-trial detention is because of the provisions in the Criminal Procedure Act, 1965 (CPA) designed with the intent to prevent a backlog of frivolous or unsubstantiated cases in the higher courts but over the decades it has become a major cause of delays in the courts because of indefinite adjournments and the remand system bringing about congested prisons. However, the CPA is under review.

I. National priorities

122. In February 2019, the Government launched the MTNDP as the fourth-generation Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The key objective of the Plan is to achieve and improve education, hence a Free Quality School Education, as a basis for the development of human capital to facilitate the transformation of women's empowerment, health improvement, creation of employment and other sectors.

123. Corruption is a major impediment to sustainable development and economic growth. If not stamped out, the effect of corruption can impair the enjoyment of human rights. Accordingly, the GoSL set up the three independent Commissions of Inquiry to combat corruption, bring accountability in governance and foster economic growth for the people of Sierra Leone.

124. The Constitutional Review process is to enable the country to adopt a new constitution that responds to emerging human rights issues.

125. The Establishment of the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion is to strengthen national unity, political tolerance and social cohesion as aligned to Cluster 4 of the MTNDP.

J. Technical assistance

126. The GoSL requests assistance in the following areas:

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- (a) Strengthening the National Reporting Strategy and the means of tracking data and making use of statistics for measuring human rights realisation obligations assumed under treaties.
- (b) Capacity building for reporting on the various instruments to the appropriate treaty bodies.
- (c) The National Capacity training for the National Reporting and Tracking Database (NRTD).
- (d) Developing a National Human Rights Action Plan.

Notes

¹ See A/HRC/39/48/Add.1 in Annex 2.

²

https://www.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/Documents/Issues/Disability/Older Persons/SIERRA_LEONE.docx&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1.

³ For example, Section 27(4) (d) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone Act, No. 6 of 1991 entrenches gender discriminatory law and harmful traditional practices.

⁴ For example, the Domestic Violence Act of 2007, the Devolution of Estates Act of 2007 and the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act of 2007.

⁵ Through the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA), as it was formerly known.

⁶ The body representing traditional women who carry out the practice of FMG.

⁷ The last five (5) ILO instruments were ratified by the Sierra Leone Parliament on 16th July 2019.

⁸ UNDP Sustainable Development Goals: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Government of Sierra Leone, June 2019, p 30.
