



BOMBALI DISTRICT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE (BDHRC)

95 AZZOLINI HIGHWAY, MAKENI CITY

Cell: +232 88318384/ +23278 381690

Email: bdhrcbombali@gmail.com

PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

21st July, 2020.

BDHRC CONDEMNS THE KILLING OF FIVE UNARMED CIVILIANS ON THE 18TH JULY 2020 IN MAKENI AND CALLS FOR AN INDEPENDENT, IMPARTIAL AND SPEEDY INVESTIGATION.

The Bombali District Human Rights Committee (BDHRC) has followed with utter dismay and disbelief the violent skirmishes between security forces and youths protesting against attempts by Officials of EGTC to relocate a 1.65 megawatt thermal plant from Makeni to Lungi. These skirmishes lasted from the late hours of Friday, July 17th right through to Saturday July 18th, 2020 with sustained and uninterrupted gunfire allegedly by the security forces throughout this period. Almost 30 hours of sustained and uninterrupted gunfire rocked the city of Makeni.

As a result of this violence, 5 young people have been killed with a minimum of 9 injured, some with life threatening injuries. Properties have as well been destroyed.

While we condemn all forms of violence by young people and have always spoken against such, we hereby categorically condemn in the strongest terms the killings of unarmed protesters allegedly by security forces and hence call on the government to immediately carry out a **CREDIBLE, INDEPENDENT, IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION** into the incident. We cautiously welcome the IGs press release that an investigation into the matter would be carried out by a wing of the Sierra Leone Police, but worried that all investigations into similar incidences of the past have not held any one accountable. We therefore hold very serious misgivings about how this one would be different.

We note with uttermost disappointment that the press releases from both the Ministries of Information and Communication, Energy and Power did not offer any regrets for the loss of human lives but were instead emphatically on the need to relocate the thermal plant apparently “at all cost”.

We acknowledge the efforts of the Ministry of Energy and Power in engaging the local authorities on the relocation of the said machine. But we equally note that there was no attempt on the part of the state authorities including the security forces to engage the young protesters into dialogue so as to de-escalate the situation. This was a unique opportunity that they ignored in favor of confronting them with armed security forces. We are therefore convinced that this incident could have been avoided.

While we call on and admonish residents of Makeni City to stay calm and continue to exercise restraints and decorum, BDHRC would like to state its position as follows:

1. Condemns all forms of violence that took place during the unrest that led to several loss of lives and properties.
2. Demand that the authorities concerned speedily institute an indepth, independent and impartial investigation into the incident which amounts to gross violations of human rights.
3. That we are deeply dissatisfied and disappointed over the action(s) of the security forces for the use of lethal weapons on armless civilians; considered their actions as unprofessional and uncalled for to open fire on armless civilians as a last resort.
4. We equally frown at local authorities in the municipality for failing to engage and communicate information to residents in a timely manner.
5. Condemn the actions of officials of the EGTC and Energy ministry to have carried out the said operation at night with armed state security.
6. Blames officials of the Energy Ministry for not waiting to get feedback, neither engage nor follow up on the issue prior to the commencement of the operation.

We are convinced that this incident could have been avoided if state authorities including the security forces had attempted to engage the young protesters into dialogue so as to de-escalate the situation.

That the state authorities ignored further engagements in favor of confronting the protesters with armed security forces.

7. Condemns in no uncertain terms the insensitivity of the central government through the Information and Communication and energy Ministries for putting out two press releases on the 18th July 2020 on the incident but failed woefully to acknowledge the killing of innocent and armless Sierra Leoneans protesting and expressing their democratic and civil rights as enshrined in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone and guaranteed in other international human rights instruments.
8. Bombali District Human Rights Committee strongly condemn the unlawful arrest and detention of youth in Freetown.
9. We sadly note the killing of innocent civilians by security forces is becoming a pattern in Sierra Leone in recent time from Kabala, Mile 91, Tonko Limba, Tombo, Sierra Leone Correctional Center at Pademba Road and now Makeni.

Following the incident that occurred, BDHRC is therefore calling on all key players including the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) and other local and international Human Rights partners, the media, Civil Society Activists to join in solidarity to ensure that the law supersedes personal interests and urge for the speedy, impartial and independent investigation to enhance justice for the civilians held, those who suffer deaths and injuries as soon as possible.

Finally the executive of BDHRC and the entire membership express heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of all those who have lost their lives in the unfortunate incident and sympathize with those that were injured.

Signed:

Alhaji Musa Conteh



Secretary General

Approved:

Peter Conteh



BDHRC- Chairperson