

21<sup>st</sup> July 2020

Press statement: for immediate release

### **NMJD Disapproves of Riotous Youth Conduct and Condemns Killing of Civilians in Makeni and Calls for Immediate Impartial Investigations**

Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) strongly condemns the recent killings of protesting civilians in the northern headquarter town of Makeni allegedly by the Sierra Leone Police. We are deeply disappointed by the alleged use of live bullets by the Sierra Leone Police to disperse unarmed civilian protesters. This action was uncalled for and could have been avoided. We, therefore, call on the Government of Sierra Leone to set up an impartial independent investigation immediately to ascertain the circumstances surrounding the recent protest in Makeni that resulted in the death of at least five people and left nine others seriously injured.

It will be recalled that Sierra Leone has witnessed several incidents of alleged shooting to death of defenseless and unarmed civilians at the hands of the Sierra Leone Police in places like Mile 91, Bunbuna, Tombo, and most recently, at the Pademba Road Correctional Centre in Freetown. While we disapprove of the conduct of many youth considered to be riotous in character, we equally believe that peaceful protests are not only a fundamental right and an integral part of democracy, but they are also a means through which citizens communicate their feelings and positions to their leaders. Protests must, therefore, not be criminalized. Citizens should not be criminalized for exercising their constitutional right.

The killings in Makeni would have been prevented through adequate consultations and dialogue that should have gone beyond the political leaderships to include the general citizenry in the township, especially the youth. The fact that the generator, which was at the centre of this protest is "Government Property" was not enough for it to be removed and taken away without proper and adequate dialogue to ensuring that such understanding filters down to

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community members. We should note that Sierra Leone has a large population that is unemployed and which serves as a breeding ground for disgruntled youth who can spring up on every available opportunity to cause havoc.

We unequivocally condemn such youth and their actions. And in doing so, we equally condemn the use of excessive force by state agencies to quell riotous situations, especially where unarmed civilians are involved as it were in Makeni, Tombo, Mile 91, Bumbuna and Pademba Road Correctional Centre.

In concluding, NMJD reiterates its call on the Government of Sierra Leone to institute impartial investigations into the deaths of these our compatriots, publish the findings and take the necessary actions to promote justice and peaceful co-existence for all.

### **About NMJD**

NMJD is a national civil society human rights and development organization. It was established in 1988 in Kenema, eastern Sierra Leone, with the aim of working towards building a just and self-reliant Sierra Leone, where the marginalized and exploited will be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge and empowered enough to take control of their own lives. NMJD focuses on empowering the people in their quest to build a free, just and democratic society where there is respect for human rights and sustainable development for the benefit of all.

**For further information, please Contact:**

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