



BOMBALI DISTRICT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE (BDHRC)

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BOMBALI DISTRICT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE (BDHRC) DEMANDS THE RELEASE OF THE REMAINS OF VICTIMS KILLED IN MAKENI ON THE 18TH JULY 2020*Press Statement, 04.08.2020: For Immediate Release*

Bombali District Human Rights Committee (BDHRC) was established in 2003 and is the umbrella body representing forty-three (43) civil society organisations (NGOs, Human and Women's Rights Organisations, Social Movements etc) that are working in Bombali District.

The Committee has been monitoring with keen interest the actions and inactions of relevant authorities following the incidents that took place on July 17 & 18, 2020, in Makeni City which resulted to the killings of five civilian young protesters, many sustaining serious injuries and 51 others arrested and detained by the Sierra Leone Police. The Committee therefore wish to share its impressions with the general public as follows:

Nearly seventeen days after this unfortunate incident, an uneasy calm, a state of fear and an atmosphere of uncertainty has persisted in the city of Makeni.

The President has set up a Presidential Committee to investigate the incident: While the Committee hails and welcomes the efforts of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone in setting up a Presidential Committee to Investigate the July 17&18 incidents in Makeni as a first step in the right direction, we are however very concerned about the continued:

- intimidating acts of parading and displaying heavy weapons along the major streets of Makeni City by security forces. These actions are very intimidating to the residents of the city and a sad reminder of the unfortunate incidents of 17th and 18th July.
- indiscriminate and arbitrary arrests and, inhumane treatments meted out to residents of Makeni by security personnel. The latest incident being the arrest of two civilians (one along Station Road for allegedly printing T-Shirts with the inscription "Makeni Life Matters" and one along Kojo Street for yet unknown reasons) by heavily armed security personnel in a convoy of 5 pickup vans. While the Committee has no problems with security forces carrying out arrests of individuals that they may want to question, we are concerned about the inhumane manner in which such arrests are often conducted. For instance, the beating up of a 13-year old minor by a security personnel at Kojo Street, for simply enquiring from the police the reasons for arresting his uncle; the 24-year-old WASSC student at Station Road was arrested and taken away with only underwear pants. It is our considered view that the security forces should make deliberate efforts to de-escalate the situation but their present actions in the municipality are suggesting otherwise and may undermine the efforts of His Excellency the President

- delay in conducting the autopsy and subsequent release of the remains of **ALL** the civilians that were killed during the incident. We cautiously welcome the news that an autopsy will be carried out on two of the victims today 04.08.2020 (**16 days after the killings took place**) and their remains will be handed to their families for burial. But continued delay in handing over of the remains of the rest of the victims to their families will increase the anxieties of these families all of whom have already exhibited visible signs of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSDs)

From these impressions the committee

1. Encourages all residents of Makeni City to continue to show maximum restraint and continue to maintain the peace, stability and tranquility of the municipality.
2. Demands that security forces should with immediate effect cease the unprovoked and unwarranted show of force in the streets of the municipality. The parading and display of heavy weapons by convoys of security forces within the civilian populated streets of Makeni must stop
3. Considers such actions as provocative and tantamount to intimidating the civil populace even as they mourn the killings of their loved ones
4. Calls for the immediate release of the remains of **ALL** those killed in the unrest to their families for burial.
5. Demands the release or charge to court of all protesters that were arrested on the 17th and 18th July or any other individual that is currently being held in detention in connection with the said incident.
6. Continues to condemn the increase in the spate of killings of civilians in the country by security forces
7. Calls on Humanitarian Organisations to provide counselling support to the heavily traumatized families of those that were killed

Meanwhile, considering the uncertainties surrounding the carrying out of the autopsy, BDHRC together with both its Local and International partners is considering the option of consulting an international expert to carry out an independent autopsy.

Finally, we wish to announce that BDHRC is putting together a coalition of both National and International Civil Society Organisations to commence its own investigations into the killings of armless and defenceless civilians on the 18th July 2020 in Makeni.


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