

# STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST UNARMED CIVILIAN PROTESTERS



**CIVIL SOCIETY**  
**REPORT ON THE**  
**GROSS HUMAN**  
**RIGHTS VIOLATIONS**  
**BY SECURITY**  
**FORCES IN MAKENI**



**THE MAKENI STORY**

*#TheMakeniStory*

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## A. Executive Summary

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The Consortium for Good Governance, Human Rights and Democracy, (hereinafter referred to as CGHRD) is a rights-based entity of like-minded organisations with key focus and commitment to expanding the culture of democratic good governance, human rights, the rule of law and socio-economic justice to ensure a transparent and accountable society in Sierra Leone.

Twelve civil society/human rights activists who constitute the Coalition for Good Governance, Human Rights and Democracy, visited Makeni on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July, to investigate what happened during the weekend of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020 which left at least six people dead and 11 people injured, some very seriously. Some of our findings reveal include the following:

1. Preliminary discussion on the relocation of the 1.65 Megawatts generator from Makeni to Lungi was held between the Ministry of Energy and local authorities and stakeholders in Makeni.
2. That before the relocation of the said generator, the Ministry of Energy would provide an agreement as a show of commitment and sincerity. But that the Ministry of Energy did not provide the agreement as promised and failed to get back to the stakeholders of Makeni. And that the arrangement for the relocation of the machine was inconclusive.
3. That the action of the people of Makeni was spontaneous and not premeditated.
4. That the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) proved to be ineffective in handling the protest and as such, solicited the intervention of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF).
5. That the Sierra Leone Peoples Party's Office which is about one hundred meters off the Makeni power station was pelted with stones.
6. The intervention of the military occasioned series of human rights violations on the people of Makeni.
7. Security personnel denied severely injured victims the right to access medical facilities in good time.
8. That the corpses were conveyed to Freetown for autopsy unknowingly to their families.
9. Family members of deceased expressed frustration and called killings of their loved ones "unjustifiable" and were "peaceful and unarmed". Ann

Marie Kamara, elder sister of 20-years old Thaimu Kamara, one of those killed, was allegedly: “...ambushed and gunned down by security personnel right in front of his house about two miles away from the scene of the protest.”

10. Another Augustine Conteh, a 28-year-old teacher, was shot and killed by security personnel on the orders of a police officer called Vandi, while he was at a shop next to his house to buy recharge card to call his wife, who had gone to work.
11. We believe that the Makeni Killings are equal to gross violations of human rights, the use of force disproportionate and needless and therefore undermines the hard-won peace and democracy of the country.
12. Protests have been criminalised by successive governments. Protest is a fundamental right in a democracy and must not be penalised.
13. We call for full impartial investigations into the Makeni Killings which came just weeks after another mass killing of prisoners on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2020 in Freetown.



The lack of effective communication between the Makeni City Council and the Ministry of Energy, the unreasonable/proportionate use of force by Security personnel, suspicion and distrust in the political circles. They are of the view that the action of security forces was premeditated and calculated to relocate the generator by force, irrespective of the deteriorating situation and damages it may cause on lives and property.

- *Bombali District Human Rights Committee*

## B. Background

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The tragic incident of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020 in Makeni led to the loss of six (6) precious lives of citizens and eleven (11) severely wounded on account of gunshots. Makeni, the regional headquarter town of Bombali District, Northern Province of Sierra Leone, lies approximately 137 kilometres (85miles) off Freetown. It is the traditional stronghold of the main opposition All Peoples Congress Party (APC). Before 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020, Makeni electricity supply was mainly derived from Bumbuna Hydro and had two standby generators, a small 500 Kilowatts generator and a big 1.65 Megawatts generator. On 30<sup>th</sup> May 2020, a meeting was held between, a team, representing, the Minister of Energy and a cross-section of stakeholders in Makeni City, including, Her Worship, Mayor Sunkarie Kamara. In that meeting, a cordial preliminary discussion was held in which the team of the Ministry requested the relocation of the 1.65 Megawatts generator from Makeni to Lungi as a temporary or quick-fix measure to mitigate the electricity challenge in Lungi (for two months). At the end of the meeting, the stakeholders requested the team to show a commitment that the 1.65 Megawatts generator will be returned within two months. The team on behalf of the Minister promised to enter into an agreement with the stakeholders on behalf of the people of Makeni that the 1.65 Megawatts generator will be relocated to Makeni after two months. The stakeholders, after that, requested that they will inform other stakeholders on the issue while they wait for the agreement to take effect.

The inconclusiveness of the nature of engagement between the Ministry of Energy and the Makeni City Council caused the resistance put up by the youth and the unfortunate nightmare of gross human rights violation.

In light of the above, the CGHRD embarked on a fact-finding mission to ascertain the veracity of the impasse in Makeni. On Friday, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020, a cross-section of the CGHRD officials immediately departed Freetown for Makeni and on arrival started engagement with the following key stakeholders:

- The Mayor of Makeni City Council – Her Worship, Sunkarie Kamara
- Chairman, Bombali District Council – Mr John Shanghai Koroma
- Assistant Inspector General of Police, North East - Frank Alpha
- Brigadier Commander - Brigadier V. V. Samba
- Medical Superintendent, Northern Region Hospital – Dr Mohamed G. Sheku
- Senior Superintendent Mechanical Maintenance - Makeni, Electricity Generation and Transmission and Company (EGTC) - Mohamed Conteh

- The Governing Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP) Office – military officers.
- Officials of Makeni District Human Rights Committee
- The Indigenes/Locals of Makeni
- Family members of deceased Persons
- Injured victims

## **C. Methodology**

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The team used mainly one on one interviews with stakeholders and observation.

## **D. Scope of the Report**

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This report covers findings on the incident that occurred in Makeni on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

## **E. General observations**

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The CGHRD observed the following:

- There was a preliminary discussion on the relocation of the 1.65 Megawatts generator from Makeni to Lungi for two months.
- That before the relocation of the said generator, the Ministry of Energy should provide an agreement as a show of commitment and sincerity.
- That the Stakeholders in Makeni agreed to inform other stakeholders on the issue after the agreement would have been crafted.
- That the Ministry of Energy did not provide the agreement as promised and failed to get back to the stakeholders of Makeni.
- That the arrangement for the relocation of the machine was inconclusive.
- That the timing of the relocation of the machine was odd (at midnight), and gave rise to suspicion and distrust.
- Her Worship, the Mayor of Makeni City Council, Sunkarie Kamara was diagnosed with COVID-19, a day after the stakeholder's engagement on the relocation of the machine, thus, affecting the subsequent arrangement. However, the Ministry of Energy failed to engage other stakeholders to reach a final agreement.



- That the Minister of Energy went with security personnel provided by the Inspector General of police to execute the relocation of the machine without officially informing the stakeholders.
- That the Ministry of Energy conveyed the 1.65 Megawatts Standby generator and left the 500 Kilowatts Standby generator as a backup to the Bumbuna Hydro supply.
- That the action of the people of Makeni was spontaneous and not intentional.
- That the police proved to be ineffective in handling the protest and as such, solicited the intervention of the military.
- That the Sierra Leone Peoples Party's Office which is about one hundred meters off the Makeni power station was pelted with stones.
- That the intervention of the military occasioned series of human rights violations on the people of Makeni.
- That security personnel denied severely injured victims the right to access medical facilities in good time.
- That security personnel used unreasonable and disproportionate force.
- That the military and police refused to take responsibility for the lives lost and injured persons.
- That there is an apparent lack of professionalism resulting in the use of firearms in responding to the scuffle without taking into consideration the rules of engagement.
- That the Medical Superintendent, Northern Regional Hospital, Makeni (Dr Mohamed G. Sheku confirmed to CGHRD that he received five corpses and 11 (eleven) persons severely wounded as a result of gunshots on the very day of the protest.
- That one of the injured victims who was shot in the head died later while undergoing a surgical operation at the Connaught Hospital, Freetown.
- That majority of persons killed, injured and arrested by security personnel (police and soldiers) were mostly pupils, teachers, petty traders, commercial bike riders, trade men and onlookers.
- That the corpses were conveyed to Freetown for autopsy unknowingly to their families.

- That fifty-one (51) arrested persons (all Males) were conveyed and detained at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Headquarters.
- That among the 51 detained persons, 16 are West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination Candidates, 14 are below the age of 18 years, of which 8 are Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) Candidates.
- That one of the detainees, Jeremiah Kamara, who had recently undergone medical operation is in a critical health condition that requires urgent attention.
- That there is an endemic distrust between officials of Central and local government as evident in the inconclusive arrangement on the relocation of the machine and the resistance posed by the people of Makeni.
- That the apparent silence of the Commander-In-Chief and Fountain of Peace and Justice in the Republic of Sierra Leone, H. E. President Julius Maada Bio leaves much to be desired.

## **F. Highlight of our findings**

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### **1. The Mayor of Makeni City Council**

In a meeting with Her Worship, Mayor Sunkarie Kamara and some officials of the Makeni City Council, she confirmed to CGHRD that on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2020, the Ministry requested the relocation of one of the two standby generators stationed in Makeni. The idea was received with mixed feelings by community stakeholders in attendance. Therefore, the Council requested for a week to engage her constituents on the issue. Shortly after the aforementioned meeting, the Mayor was diagnosed with COVID-19 on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020 and was subsequently transferred to Freetown for medication. While on her sickbed battling for her life, the Minister, Mr Kanja Sesay called and registered his intention to effect the relocation of the said generator and noted that he would relocate the generator at all cost.

With this, the EGTC informed Mayor Sunkarie Kamara that they were going to relocate the Generator to Lungi. To the surprise of the Mayor, heavily armed security personnel were deployed to relocate generator without conclusive arrangement.

The Mayor, however, expressed regret on the deterioration of the situation that accounts for the destruction of precious lives and property





## **2. Chairman Bombali District Council**

The Chairman Bombali District Council, Mr John Shanghai Koroma also had a meeting with members of CGHRD, and he opined that the action of the police and the military was beyond imagination; as the joint forces exhibited fury against everyone, they came across and at the same time arrested and detained people impulsively. Also, he stated that corpses and people arrested were all taken to Freetown without consulting any stakeholder in Makeni.

## **3. Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG), North East**

The CGHRD held a closed-door meeting with AIG North-East Region, Frank Alpha in which he disclosed that on the said date the youth had conducted themselves lawlessly, and using offensive weapons against the police such as machetes, stones, sticks and the likes. When asked as to whether the protesters had live arms, he responded live arms were not among the exhibits found. He further confirmed that he had to call the military for assistance as the SLP was overwhelmed by the youth.

#### 4. Brigade Commander, Tekor Barracks, Makeni

The CGHRD met with the Brigade Commander, Brigadier General V. V. Samba at Tekor Barracks and two other senior military officers. The commander confirmed military involvement in the incident of the 18th July 2020 at Makeni. According to him, he had to intervene to support the Sierra Leone Police who had already been overwhelmed by hundreds of protesters. He further intimated the CGHRD that the force used to quell the protest was proportionate to the threat posed by the protesters.



#### 5. Medical Superintendent, Northern Region

The CGHRD also visited the Makeni Regional Hospital and held a closed-door meeting with the medical superintendent Dr Mohamed G. Sheku. He confirmed to the CGHRD that on the said date, he received five corpses and nine severely injured persons on account of gunshots. He told the CGHRD that some of the critically wounded victims whose conditions required urgent surgery were transferred to Freetown for proper medication. The Makeni Regional Hospital currently has only three wounded victims under their care for medication. On allegations of victims been denied medication at the hospital, Dr Sheku dispelled it to be false.



## **6. Senior Superintendent, Mechanical Maintenance - Makeni, Electricity**

Speaking on behalf of the EGTC, Mr Mohamed Conteh, Senior Superintendent Mechanical Maintenance - Makeni, Electricity, informed CGHRD that he was indeed part of the stakeholders meeting of 30<sup>th</sup> May 2020. In which deliberation on the relocation of the Standby generator was done. He, however, confirmed that on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020, an attempt was made by security personnel to effect the relocation of the generator from Makeni to Lungi. In the course of removing the generator, concerned Community people started gathering around the site of EGTC, where the machine was located. The tension gradually mounted, and the situation degenerated to a mass protest.





## 7. The Governing Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP) Office

The SLPP office is located about one hundred meters of the EGTC Office in Makeni, where the generator was situated. At the time the CGHRD visited the party's office there was no official of the party present. However, the account of the security personnel deployed at the party office suggests that due to the altercation between community people and security personnel at the EGTC Office, the SLPP office became a primary target for the protesters, who pelted the building with stones causing windows to be smashed and doors were broken.



## 8. Officials of Bombali District Human Rights Committee

To have an independent account of the unfortunate incident in Makeni, the CGHRD met with officials of the Makeni District Human Rights Committee. They expressed dismay and blamed it on the lack of effective communication between the Makeni City Council and the Ministry of Energy, the unreasonable/proportionate use of force by Security personnel, suspicion and distrust in the political circles. They are of the view that the action of S=security forces was premeditated and calculated to relocate the generator by force, irrespective of the deteriorating situation and damages it may cause on lives and property.



## 9. The Indigenes/Locals of Makeni

The CGHRD met with residents of Makeni concerning the 18th July impasse, which destroyed lives and property of the relocation of the said generator. In our investigation, the CGHRD learned that the people of Makeni were shocked at the spate of aggression unleashed on the residents. According to them, the people who were killed and injured were not active protesters but onlookers.

## 10. Family members of the deceased

In the course of the investigation, the CGHRD met with family members of deceased persons who expressed frustration over what they called unjust killings of their loved ones who were peaceful and unarmed. Ann Marie Kamara, elder sister of 20 years old Thaimu Kamara, one of the deceased, who was allegedly



ambushed and gunned down by security personnel right in front of his house about two miles away from the scene of the protest.

Augustine Conteh, a 28-year-old Teacher, died as a result of gunshots by security personnel at the order of a Police Officer, called Vandri, while he was at a shop by his house to buy recharge card to call his wife, who had gone to work.



### Names of Deceased Persons

NO	NAME	AGE	ADDRESS	OCCUPATION
1	Mohamed Sillah	24	Fofanah Street	Student
2	Alusine Sesay	22	Savage Squire	Student
3	Augustine Conteh	28	Teko Road	Teacher
4	Foday Kargbo		John Street	
5	Amadu Kamara	20	Kay street	Student
6	John Jalloh	Foreign national		

## G. Recommendations

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Given the findings mentioned above, the Coalition for Good Governance, Human Rights and Democracy (CGHRD) recommends the following:

1. Investigate the Makeni Killings. That an independent and credible judge-led inquiry into the unfortunate killings and human rights violations in Makeni be instituted.
2. That all security officers who pulled the trigger on unarmed protesters, including their Commanders must be immediately suspended pending the outcome of the Judge-led investigation.
3. That all Officers found wanting of killing and violating human rights be exposed and subjected to the full force of the laws of the land.
4. That the bereaved families be adequately compensated with at least Le 150,000,000.00 (One hundred and fifty Million Leones each) by the government through the Ministry of Energy as a show of regret for the glaring display of lack of leadership in the execution of their duties.
5. That the bodies of the deceased be handed over to their families to accord them a befitting funeral at the expense of the state.
6. That security personnel (Military and Police) are periodically engaged in professional training to keep them in tune with international best practices.
7. That His Excellency the President Julius Maada Bio imbibes the culture of showing compassion and empathy in such circumstances, as it lacked in this case and several other cases unlawful killings and human rights violations meted out on unarmed citizens by state security personnel.
8. That the high-security personnel presence in different communities in Makeni is relaxed with immediate effect.
9. That all detainees be speedily investigated and charged to Court or granted bail as provided by law.
10. That medical attention is paid to severely injured victims of gunshots and other related human rights violations who are currently hospitalised.
11. That the Diplomatic and Consular corps engages H. E. President Bio and his government on the rising spate of extrajudicial killings in the country under his direct watch.
12. That the International Criminal Court through their Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone deepen investigations into the killings of unarmed citizens.



13. President Bio and his government take calculated and conscious steps to foster a true spirit of national reconciliation and cohesion to bridge the divide in the country.
14. That Civil Society and media practitioners scale up efforts in investigating, reporting, educating and informing the general public on such sensitive national issues.
15. That a spelt out strategy be adopted by the Ministry of Energy to guide the relocation of thermal plants (machines) from one location to the other to avoid future recurrence of civil unrest as was manifested in Makeni and Kono earlier.
16. And that the people of Makeni remain calm and restrict themselves within the confines of the laws of the land.
17. Civil society organisation should coalesce around the critical issue of accountability and good governance, recalling how in the past, gross human rights abuse, irresponsible actions of state officials and lack of accountability by national authority led to war and wanton destruction of lives and property.

**END**

**NAMES OF CONSORTIUM MEMBERS:**

1. Democracy Sierra Leone (DSL)
2. Forum of Sierra Leonean Youth Network (FoSLYN)
3. Citizens Advocacy Network (CAN)
4. National Youth Coalition (NYC)
5. Forum of Democrats and Citizenship (FDC)
6. Conscience International (CI-SL)
7. Fair Play Sierra Leone
8. National Center for Human Rights and Democracy (NaCFoHRD)
9. League of Democracy Advocates (LoDA)
10. Initiative for Democracy and the Rule of Law
11. Youth Aid Sierra Leone
12. Community Action for Human Security

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