REPORT ON CSO FACT FINDING MISSION ON THE VIOLENT INCIDENTS IN MAKENI ON 17TH AND 18THJULY 2020



10[™] August 10

A REPORT FROM
SIERRA LEONEAN CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANIZATIONS

PARTNER ORAGANISATIONS

We, the undermentioned Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Sierra Leone, hereby publish this report following the statement based on the outcome of our Fact-Finding visit to Makeni on Thursday, 23rd July 2020:

- 1. Campaign for Good Governance (CGG)
- 2. Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL)
- 3. Human Rights Defenders Network-SL (HRDN-SL)
- 4. West Africa Network for Peace Building (WANEP)
- 5. Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR)
- 6. Centre for Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA)
- 7. ActionAid Sierra Leone
- 8. Institute for Governance Reform (IGR)
- 9. Women's Forum for Human Rights and Democracy (WOFHRAD)
- 10. Campaign for Human Rights and Development International CHRDI
- 11. Community Action for Human security (CAHSec).
- 12. Network Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (NMDHR)
- 13. Amnesty International Sierra Leone (AISL)

All rights reserved:

Any use of information, in full or in part, should be accompanied by an acknowledgement of the organizations mentioned above.

INTRODUCTION

Sierra Leoneans, home and abroad, would recall the horrific images and media reports on the violence that occurred in Makeni, on Friday 17th to Saturday 18th July 2020, which resulted in loss of lives, injuries to many citizens and damage to public property. This followed a decision by the Ministry of Energy (MoE) to relocate a 1.65kw thermal generator from Makeni to Lungi. In order to ascertain the truth about what happened without relying on hearsay and social media reports, and the need to proffer recommendations to avert future reoccurrence, a team of civil society organisations travelled to Makeni on Thursday 23rd July 2020 to speak to local stakeholders in Makeni. The delegation comprised CSOs from Freetown and counterparts in Makeni.

Whilst in Makeni, the team met and spoke with the Mayor of Makeni City Council, Chairperson of the Bombali District Council, the Assistant Inspector General (AIG) of Police North, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) Brigade Commander, North, the District Security Coordinator, and P.C. Bai Shebora Kasangna II of Bombali Shebora Chiefdom. Additionally, the team met and spoke with the Minister of Energy, the Deputy Minister and the Permanent Secretary in Freetown to hear about what occurred prior to the relocation exercise.

The delegation also spoke to some civil society representatives who participated in the consultative meeting held between representatives of the MoE from Freetown to discuss the relocation of the thermal plant with local stakeholders of Makeni.

This report represents the full and honest account of the information we gathered during our discussions with the above-mentioned actors in Makeni City.

FINDINGS

A . CONSULTATIVE MEETING BETWEEN MOE AND MAKENI STAKEHOLDERS TO DISCUSS THE RELOCATION OF THE 1.65 KW THERMAL GENERATOR FROM MAKENI TO LUNGI

Our delegation was informed that there was a stakeholders' meeting on 30th May, 2020 between officials of the Ministry of Energy (MoE) and local stakeholders of Bombali District and the Makeni Municipality. The MoE was represented by the Permanent Secretary, the Director General Electricity Generation and Transmission Company (EGTC), and other personnel from the EGTC office in Makeni, whilst the Makeni stakeholders included the Mayor of Makeni City Council, the Chairman, Bombali District Council, the Regional Chairman of the All Peoples Congress, representatives of civil society and the media, among others. At that meeting, representatives of the MoE informed the participants that the government would like to move one of two standby generators in Makeni to Lungi as a stop-gap measure to address the electricity problem at the Lungi International Airport. The MoE officials further informed the local stakeholders that the generator would be returned after two months, adding that the reason they are borrowing the generator is that efforts to repair the generators at the Lungi International Airport had been derailed by the travel restrictions occasioned by the Corona virus. Officials of the MoE further assured the local stakeholders that the proposed relocation of the generator would not disrupt electricity supply to Makeni during this rainy season since the town's main source of energy is the Bumbuna hydro electricity dam.

In response to the request, the local stakeholders, represented by the Mayor of Makeni City Council, indicated that whilst they had no objection to the request, they would require some time to consult or engage the local community on the request made by the MoE. This engagement was needed to build consensus on the issue and allay any fears among residents of Makeni. The local stakeholders promised to get back to the MoE within a week to provide feedback/update on the outcome of the consultations. Shortly after the meeting, the Mayor of Makeni City, Madam Sunkarie Kamara (who was the chair for the local stakeholders Meeting)

unfortunately fell seriously ill and was hospitalized in Freetown. It was impossible for her to have led those consultations whilst she was sick and out of Makeni.

In the absence of Mayor Sunkarie, we gathered that none of the stakeholders made efforts to undertake the consultations with the people of Makeni. We were informed, though, that the proposal/request to relocate the generator was discussed on a radio show dubbed "Media Junction" by civil society and media actors who attended the May 30 consultative meeting with the MoE. It was discussed mainly as a way of informing—rather than - eliciting the views or consent of the public. Several weeks after the consultation, we were informed that the Minister of Energy Kanja Sesay reached out to Mayor Sunkarie seeking updates on their consultations. Unfortunately, as the Mayor was seriously ill, she was unable to provide any updates to the minister. With knowledge of the Mayor's illness, the Minister or representatives of the Ministry did not reach out to any other stakeholder in Makeni for feedback on the agreed consultation however the Minister discussed on phone with the APC National Secretary- General Amb. Alhaji Osman Foday Yansanneh on the need to move the generator.

B . RELOCATION OF THE 1.65KW THERMAL GENERATOR

Our delegation was informed that on the 16th July, 2020, the Minister of Energy contacted the Mayor of Makeni City informing her of the ministry's compelling desire to relocate the generator to Lungi on Saturday, 18th July 2020. The Mayor was told that the plan to immediately relocate the machine to Lungi was necessitated by the government's decision to re-open the Lungi International Airport on 22nd July 2020. Our delegation was informed that the Mayor returned to Makeni on 15th July following her discharge from the hospital in Freetown. The Mayor, we were told, gave her unqualified approval for the MoE to transfer the thermal generator from Makeni to Lungi. The relocation exercise was planned for Saturday, 18th July, 2020, but the Mayor was surprised to learn that an advance team from the MoE came on Friday night 17th July 2020 (to do preparatory work for the relocation), and she was not called thereafter.

However, the CSO fact finding mission found out that, the crane for the relocation of the thermal generator actually arrived in Makeni on Saturday 18th July 2020, contrary to other views that it had arrived on the night of Friday 17th July 2020. We found no evidence to suggest that

consultations were held with the people of Makeni before or after the greenlight for the relocation of the thermal generator to Lungi was given.

C . ACTS OF VIOLENCE ON 17TH JULY 2020

We were informed that on the night of July 17, 2020, unidentified youths of Makeni came out in a large number to stage a demonstration in protest over the government's proposal/decision to relocate the thermal generator to Lungi. The protests started after 10:00pm on Friday 17th July. The Minister of Energy informed us that he had spoken to the police to provide security ahead of the relocation exercise, on Friday 17th July 2020. In response to the protests on Friday night, we were informed that security forces were invited to secure the premises of the local EGTC power station in Makeni where the generators are located ahead of the planned relocation to Lungi on Saturday 18th July. Eyewitnesses confirmed that there were several road blocks together with rampant burning of tyres on major streets and junctions of the city. We were further informed that there were people on motorcycles with megaphones urging residents to come out and resist the attempt to relocate their generator to Lungi.

Police intervention on Friday 17th July 2020

Our delegation was informed that the youths were very rowdy and at some point violent, and that before the riots were suppressed on the night of 17th July, they had already attacked the vehicle of the Chief Administrator of Makeni City Council, the Sierra Leone Commercial Bank, and the local office of the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). The police discharged tear gas canisters and deployed other riot control measures to suppress the riot on the night of 17th July 2020. We were informed that no fatalities or injuries were recorded on the night of Friday, 17th July. We were further told that though the leadership of the police and military tried to contact local leaders in Makeni in the hope that they would step in to restore calm, most of them were unreachable. Their phones were switched off. We gathered from our conversations with stakeholders that some of them were out of Makeni City and others were not aware about the planned relocation of the thermal generator. The security personnel only succeeded in contacting the Chief Administrator of the Makeni City Council, who assisted the police in pacifying the youths on the night of the 17th July.

Additional Security Personnel/Reinforcement

Following the incident of 17th July 2020, the leadership of the police and military said they sought and received assistance in the form of additional personnel from both the military and police units in and out of Makeni out of fear that the protesting youths would overpower them. We gathered that a good number of those who were brought in to provide reinforcements were not ordinarily resident in Makeni and may not have understood the terrain and local context.

D. RIOTS/ACTS OF VIOLENCE ON THE 18TH JULY 2020

The delegation was informed that the City of Makeni was quite peaceful on the morning of 18th July 2020. Later in the morning, however, youths mobilized and took to the streets to continue their protest. They were reportedly rowdy and visibly angry. One of the stakeholders informed us that he was so scared of the unquantified number of youth he saw on that day that he had to change course. In response to the protests and unlike the night of the 17th where the security forces used peaceful means to disperse the crowd, we were informed that security forces used lethal weapons against the protesters. While the police denied using live rounds, the military confirmed firing warning shots in the air. This riot, unfortunately, resulted in the loss of five lives (at the time of the fact finding), and injuries to at least ten people at that time.

However, security stakeholders did not own up to the use of lethal force even though six persons died from alleged gunshot wounds as told by other stakeholders. They however confirmed that security reinforcements were received from outside Makeni. A key stakeholder informed us that on the morning of Saturday 18th July 2020, calls to some highly placed security stakeholders in Freetown and within Makeni to cease sporadic shootings proved futile. Local leaders, including civil society and media representatives mobilised to pacify the youths and asked them to go home but they out of fear of being caught up in the shootings, aborted their mobilisation efforts and returned to their respective homes. They, however, informed stakeholders that they would continue their efforts when the shooting subside. The shootings were reported around the market areas at a time when the people had started bringing out their wares for business. We were further told that some of the

victims had nothing to do with the protest but were allegedly shot either while at home or transacting other businesses. We confirmed that the riot was suppressed by the joint efforts of the police and the military after a curfew had been declared. We further learnt that the police do not have adequate riot control gears. Apart from tear gas canisters, we were told that the police had no water cannons, large quantity of anti-riot bullet proof shields, among others.

E . ARREST AND TRANSFER OF ALLEGED PROTESTERS TO FREETOWN

The police arrested at least 51 persons suspected to have been involved in the protests. They were subsequently transferred to Freetown, and detained at the Criminal Investigations Department (CID). No charges have so far been proffered against them. One local authority questioned why about 51 youths in the Municipality were arrested and taken to Freetown even though there are local justice systems within Bombali district and Makeni City.

F . RELOCATION OF THE THERMAL GENERATOR TO LUNGI – SUNDAY 19TH JULY 2020

Crucially, we were informed that the acts of violence, including the killings and destruction of property, occurred even before the crane/forklift that was supposed to convey the generator to Lungi arrived in Makeni. The crane/forklift actually arrived in Makeni on Saturday, 18th July, 2020 at 1800 hrs or thereabouts. In essence, the protests started based on information they had received from unofficial sources about the imminent relocation of the generator on the night of the 17th July 2020. It was popularly confirmed that there was a message on social media believed to have been produced by someone who goes by the name of "Adebayor" urging the residents of Makeni to step out and resist the proposed relocation of the generator to Bo in the South which contributed in the disturbances. The generator was finally transferred to Lungi on Sunday, 19th July, 2020. We also learnt that there were hardliners in the city who would have resisted the relocation of the generator because they were skeptical that it would not be returned.

G . PLANNED CIVIC BURIAL

Whilst in Makeni on the 23rd July 2020, our team gathered that the local leaders in Makeni (especially the city and district councils) are planning to organize a civic burial for those killed during the riots as a mark of respect and for residents of the city to mourn their dead. However, the security representatives informed us that they have received intelligence suggesting that over 5,000 T-Shirts have been printed within the city and large crowds intend to come out during the civic burial. The security expressed concern that such a large gathering will be in violation of the COVID-19 regulations and the security forces are worried that the event will spark further violence. We were told by the security sector that they have engaged the local authorities to tell them to cancel the event and that the security forces are not in a position to police the event nor provide an approval should local authorities insist on holding a civic burial. We later learnt that the authorities in Makeni had postponed the planned civic burial to allow for autopsy to be completed on the deceased and to consult with the security sector.

•

CONCLUSION

The Civil Society Fact-finding mission having spoken to the key stakeholders in Bombali District and MoE in Freetown in respect of the incidents of the 17th and 18th July 2020, hereby makes the following recommendations:

- That the government institutes an urgent and impartial investigation into the role of the security forces in quelling the youth disturbances, including the use of lethal force, with a view to establishing culpability and sanctions where necessary.
- 2. We call on the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) to institute a Public Inquiry into the matter.
- 3. That local leaders take responsibility for their actions and inactions and make a wholesome, unreserved apology to the people of Makeni and the country at large.
- 4. That where it is not already available, MoE develops a policy on the relocation of government assets, stipulating the steps to be followed which would include formal requests/memos, consultation/community meetings, public education etc.
- 5. That, as a matter of urgency, Government and its partners undertake an aggressive program of youth re-education, rehabilitation and reformation.
- 6. Youths whilst demanding for their rights should work within the ambit of the law.
- 7. That the Government of Sierra Leone considers an urgent review of the security sector protocol for dealing with protests, riots and demonstrations, including the use of nonlethal means like water cannons, batons etc.
- 8. We urge Sierra Leoneans, both at home and abroad, to use social media responsibly having regard to the vulnerability of our youths and the divisive nature of our politics.
- 9. We urge all leaders and citizens to preach and maintain peace and peaceful co-existence in all their engagements and activities.

CONTACTS

For further details on this report, please contact the following persons whose details are listed below.

Marcella Samba-Sesay

M: +23276984590 | E: cellasambasesay@gmail.com

Ibrahim Tommy

M: +23276365499 | E: <u>ibrahim.tommy@gmail.com</u>

Isata Mahoi

M: +23276586853 | E: isatamahoi.unimak@gmail.com

Alphonsus Gbanie

M: +23278213688 | E: Hrdefenderssl@gmail.com

Aminata Kelly Lamin

M: +23276651755 | E: Aminata.Lamin@actionaid.org

Emilia Kamara Jengo

M: +23276335749 | E: emilia.kamara3@gmail.com

Gibril Massie Bah

M: +23276689724 | E: Massie_Bah2011@hotmail.com

John Caulker

M: +23278500500 | johncaulker@hotmail.com