



Human Rights Defenders Network Sierra Leone (HRDN-SL)

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CITIZENS TO ACCOUNT FOR THEIR OPINIONS ABOUT PARLIAMENT: CONCERN OVER INTIMIDATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN SIERRA LEONE

The Human Rights Defenders Network is disturbed by the threats and intimidation issued by the Speaker and leadership of the Sierra Leone Parliament against two human rights defenders: Mr. Andrew Lavali Director of the Institute for Governance Reform (IGR) and Mr. Ibrahim Tommy of Center for Accountability and the Rule of Law (CARL) for publication of research report on citizens voices and opinions on corruption and trust in public institutions. We strongly believe that calling citizens to account for their opinion is a new threat to human rights that will further shrink the democratic space.

In our recent history of monitoring of human rights and accountability issues, we note with concern a chain of well documented incidences of direct accusation of corruption in the house of parliament by well-placed individuals including sitting MPs themselves. For instance:

- a. In December 2014, A sitting Mayor of Kenema Mr. Joseph S Keifala accused the Public Accounts Committee of demanding a bribe Le20m before his budget can be approved. The then Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) failed to protect Mayor JS Keifala and the allocation for delivery of essential services in his locality was blocked by parliament for six months. The people of Kenema were denied of essential services throughout the period.
- b. In 2017, Sierra Leone parliament ordered the detention of a CSO leader Mr. Abdul Fatoma for calling on parliament to account for Le120 Billion as constituency development fund. He spent days in police cell.
- c. On 23rd Nov 2019, Hon Ibrahim Tawa Conteh of Constituency 130 and Clerk of Parliament, Hon Param Tarawally traded accusations over allegations of mismanagement and misappropriation of public funds during separate radio interviews in Freetown.

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- d. On 11th September 2020 Hon Hindolo Moiwo Gevao admitted on BBC that some of his colleagues MPs are engaged in corruption. Hon Gevao was removed as head of the Legislative Committee of Parliament a few days after his interview.

We in the HRDNSL believe that this chain of evidences have grave consequences on the state accountability and only contributes to weakening environment for service delivery and government effectiveness. We believe that the two reports by our two colleagues present an opportunity for reflection on what citizens see as the challenges facing parliament. The evidences contained in the reports should not provide a platform for attacking human rights defenders or a call on citizens to account for their opinions on parliament.

We equally believe that the two reports by CARL, Afrobarometer and IGR are results of a sad accumulation of the gross inactions and neglect citizens continue to have about elected leaders who they have entrusted with the powers to govern their lives.

We illustrate three ways the neglect by parliament affects citizens:

- a. The Cost of Corruption report by CARL states that volume of corruption between 2016 and 2018 was over Le10 Trillion. This was higher than the total volume of domestic revenue for the three years which was Le8.4 Trillion.
- b. We note that these grave incidences of corruption are promoted by the weakness of parliament. The majority leader of Parliament in 2016 dismissed a real-time audit that showed that \$14m have been misappropriated from Ebola funds as a mere opinion of the auditors. Such statements and many others have made parliament weak to hold MDAs to account. Consequently as we write this release, not up to 40% of the recommendations of the report of the auditor general for closing leakages have been followed by MDAs. Consequently, the weak state of accountability in Sierra Leone is a production of deliberate inaction by our parliament.
- c. According to the recently published Afrobarometer 2020 indicates that 61% of citizens are afraid of reporting corruption related issues due to reprisals.

We HRDNSL call on parliament to stop the attack and intimidation of human right defenders and rather use the findings of the report to improve parliamentary effectiveness. The network is seriously concerned about the outcome of a press conference held within the well of parliament on 30th September 2020 wherein the Speaker of parliament issued threats and intimidation especially on the heads of institutions of CARL and IGR as well as possible funders of these institutions

The outcome of the aforementioned press conference held within the well of parliament undermines governments' commitment to international laws and obligations with particular

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reference to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights Article 19, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 19, African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights Article 9, Chapter III of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone and the UN Declaration on the protection of human rights defenders.

The Human Rights Defenders Network Sierra Leone (HRDN-SL) is a coalition of civil society organizations and individuals working in the field of human rights with specific focus on defending human rights defenders.

SIGNED

Executive Secretary

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