

Freetown- Friday 23rd Oct. 2020

**CIVIL SOCIETY CALL FOR REINSTATEMENT OF HONORABLE MEMBERS OF
PARLIAMENT TO THEIR CONSTITUTIONAL ROLES**

We the undersigned organisations are gravely concerned about recent happenings in the Parliament of Sierra Leone, especially those relating to the suspension of four Members including Hon. Hindolo Moiwo Ngevao, an anti-corruption whistleblower, from participating in parliamentary committee proceedings even without having found them culpable of any wrongdoing. This decision to suspend them is not only atrocious for our collective effort to strengthen democratic governance, but it also sends a very unfortunate message about our parliament's attitude towards persons who raise their voices for accountability and institutional integrity.

A press statement dated 20th October, 2020 issued by the Department of Public Relations of the Parliament of Sierra Leone stated as follows:

"Four Hon. Members of Parliament have been committed to the Parliamentary Committee on Privileges and Ethics for investigation, pending approval by the House for complaints relating to intimidation and verbal abuse, indecent and derogatory text messages, unverified corruption allegation against Parliament on BBC Focus on Africa and alleged arm-twisting by the leadership of Parliament resulting in resignation..." Ironically, the same statement pointed out that "...the following Members of Parliament so referred are presumed innocent until proven otherwise by the said Committee's investigation and recommendations.

While it may be within the powers of parliament to inquire into the general conduct of the Members of Parliament, we fail to see the legal basis for hurriedly suspending elected officials from performing their functions especially for whistleblowing on corruption. It is simply unjust and profoundly repugnant to all the guarantees of due process and presumption of innocence enshrined in our Constitution.

Corruption is pervasive and remains a major impediment to our collective effort to address poverty and deliver basic social and economic services, despite the best efforts of the Government of Sierra Leone and its partners. It is, therefore, quite worrying that the leadership of Parliament has reacted angrily to public opinion on corruption and went further to punish MPs either for expressing their views about corruption in parliament or complaining about attempts by the leadership of Parliament to scupper their efforts to address the scourge. We are shocked to learn that even before the Committee on Ethics and Privileges complete investigation of the misdemeanors the MPs and the public are unanimously complaining about Parliament has turn round to punish the whistleblowers by suspending them from their committees.

Civil society is particularly concerned that arm-twisting and unjustly punishing MPs for whistle-blowing on corruption will in turn discourage ordinary citizens who want to report corruption. This is worrying, as a recent (2020) studies by Afrobarometer shows that 61% of citizens fear the risk of retaliation for reporting corruption.

Under the circumstances, we hereby urge the Speaker of Parliament and the leadership of all the political parties represented in parliament to immediately take steps to re-instate all parliamentary entitlements and privileges to the affected parliamentarians. We further urge the leadership of Parliament to demonstrate more commitment in the fight against corruption by protecting persons who speak up against the scourge – rather than punishing or suppressing their voices.

We stand ready to support Parliament in deepening the culture of accountability and integrity in Sierra Leone.

Signed:

1. ActionAid Sierra Leone
2. Amnesty International – Sierra Leone
3. Budget Advocacy Network (BAN)
4. Campaign for Good Governance (CGG)
5. Campaign for Human Rights and Development International (CHRDI)
6. Center for Accountability and the Rule of Law (CARL)
7. Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR)
8. Citizens Advocacy Network (CAN)
9. Foundation for Rural and Urban Transformation (FoRUT)
10. Human Rights Defenders Network
11. Institute for Governance Reform (IGR)
12. The 50/50, Group Sierra Leone
13. National Advocacy Coalition on Extractives (NACE)
14. Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)
15. Peace Africa Alliance Consulting Education and Training Centre (PACET)
16. Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ)
17. Society for Democratic Initiatives (SDI)
18. West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Sierra Leone