

To     The Commissioner  
          Anti-Corruption Commission  
          Gloucester Street  
          Freetown

CC:     Secretary to the President  
          Office of the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone  
          State House, Freetown

28<sup>th</sup> October, 2020.

Dear Commissioner Francis Ben Keifala,

**CSOs CALL ON THE ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION TO PROTECT  
PERSONS WHO SUPPORT THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION**

First, kindly permit us to share this private letter to you with the wider Sierra Leone public and international partners who are equally concerned about the issue of accountability and protection of whistleblowers in the country.

The undersigned group of 54 organizations sincerely applaud your efforts in fighting corruption and would like to draw your attention to the plight of two Members of Parliament - Hon. Hindolo Gevao and Hon. Ibrahim T. Conteh, who have remained suspended from all parliamentary committee proceedings, despite demonstrating a great deal of commitment to the fight against corruption by acting as whistleblowers in respect of alleged acts of corruption and abuse of power in Parliament.

We believe it is useful to draw your attention to the fact that President Bio came to power on the laudable promise to fight graft in Sierra Leone. The President made good on his promise by setting up three commissions of inquiry to investigate officials who served in the previous administration. Those actions resonated with a majority of the citizens who gave a nod of approval as expressed in almost all local and international corruption studies. In a recent (2020) Afrobarometer survey for instance, an astonishing 66% of Sierra Leoneans in 2018 said the Bio administration was doing well in fighting corruption, as compared to only 18% in 2015. Additionally, in 2019, Sierra Leone passed the Control of Corruption indicator on the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) scorecard for the first time in the nation's history and made significant inroads in the Global Corruption Barometer.

It is extremely sad to say that we risk reversing all of these gains because of the draconian actions of the Honorable Speaker and the parliamentary leadership in suppressing whistleblowing and dissent. For the avoidance of any misgivings or doubts, we shall endeavor to outline below the specific events that have prompted this letter:

In April 2020, a DFID-funded CSO Consortium on Public Financial Management released a Corruption Perceptions Survey report that named the Parliament of Sierra Leone as the fourth most corrupt institution in the country and parliamentarians as the second most corrupt set of individuals in public service. Following the publication, the Sierra Leone Parliament on 7<sup>th</sup> September released a public statement essentially berating members of the institutions that released the report and wholly dismissing

their observations and demand for ethical leadership. The act of dismissing the genuine concerns of citizens who interact with MPs on a regular basis and have a good knowledge of the activities of parliamentary institutions was an unfortunate move that could only serve to stop citizens from questioning leadership behaviors.

In September 2020, Hon. Hindolo Gevao, MP of Constituency 003, in an interview on the BBC's Focus on Africa programme, confirmed that the perception of corruption within Parliament had merit and should not be ignored. This was followed by a publication of the Afrobarometer on 15 September 2020, in which 81% of the respondents said "All" or "Most" Parliamentarians were corrupt. The release was again dismissed in a press conference in Parliament on 30<sup>th</sup> September, where Hon. Speaker Dr. Abass Bundu made strong statements aimed at intimidating both the authors of the reports.

Mr. Commissioner, it is with deep regret we note that the parliamentary leadership has decided to dismiss and suppress all legitimate calls for accountability, and instead, have moved swiftly to suspend Hon. Conteh and Hon. Ngevao, who have separately spoken out about alleged corruption and arm-twisting in Parliament. Civil society and human rights defenders are deeply concerned that the high-handed actions against the whistleblower-MPs would have a chilling effect that could negatively impact on the country's fight against corruption, especially as 61% of citizens already fear the risk of retaliation for reporting corruption (Afrobarometer 2020).

We also note with concern that both parties are complicit in this act of suppressing whistleblowing on corruption and stifling citizens' feedback to elected officials. This is clear as the motion to suspend the two MPs was moved by the Leader of the governing party in Parliament and seconded by the Leader of the main Opposition. This raises serious questions about parliament's ability to hold itself accountable, or to police itself.

Mr. Commissioner, we believe that both Hon. Gevao and Hon. Ibrahim Tawa Conteh were assisting the Commission in the fight against corruption by sharing information that could provide leads to the Commission. In this regard, they deserve the protection envisaged under Section 86 of the Anti-Corruption Act 2008 as amended, which states the following: "No action or proceeding, including disciplinary action, may be instituted or maintained against a person in respect of assistance given by the person to the Commission or an investigating officer".

We hope that the Commission will be guided by the provision above and intervene in this matter as we are worried that unless something is done urgently to remind the leadership of Parliament about the need to protect those who assist the Commission in its work, they will soon start going after ordinary citizens, including the leadership of local civil society organizations, especially those that hold institutions to account.

We hereby call on your good office to take immediate steps to ensure that all whistleblowers on corruption within and outside Parliament are protected in accordance with the laws of Sierra Leone.

We stand ready to support the fight against corruption and protection of human rights.

Sincerely,

- 1 ActionAid Sierra Leone
- 2 Advocacy Movement Network (AmNET)
- 3 African Women Leaders Network – Sierra Leone
- 4 Amnesty International – Sierra Leone
- 5 Budget Advocacy Network (BAN)
- 6 Campaign for Good Governance (CGG)
- 7 Campaign for Human Rights and Development International (CHRDl)
8. Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL)
9. Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR)
- 10 Centre for the Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA)
- 11 Chair CS BO
- 12 Chair CS Bonthe
- 13 Chair CS Kailahun (CCWA)
- 14 Chair CS Kenema (MORRD)
- 15 Chair CS Kono (KOCEPO)
- 16 Chair CS Moyamba
- 17 Chair CS Port Loko (CGG)
- 18 Chair CS Pujehun
- 19 Chair CSO Karene (Children’s Foundation)
- 20 Child Rights Coalition
- 21 Children’s Forum Network
- 22 Citizens Advocacy Network (CAN)
- 23 Civil Society Movement
- 24 Council of Churches in Sierra Leone
- 25 CSO Chair Tonkolili (Women’s Initiative for Democratic Development )
- 26 DADA-SL Kambia
- 27 Defense for Children International
- 28 DEMOCRACY SIERRA LEONE
- 29 Fambul Tok International
- 30 FORWARD SL
- 31 Foundation for Rural and Urban Transformation (FoRUT)
- 32 Health for all Coalition
- 33 Human Rights Defenders Network
- 34 Human Rights Defenders Network –SL (HRDN)
- 35 Institute for Governance Reform (IGR)
- 36 Market Women Association
- 37 Movement for Restoration of Democracy
- 38 National Advocacy Coalition on Extractives (NACE)
- 39 National Elections Watch (NEW)
- 40 Native Consortium Research Center
- 41 Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)
- 42 Network Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (NMDHR)
- 43 Network Movement for youth and Children’s Welfare (NMYCW)
- 44 Sierra Association of Journalists (SLAJ)
- 45 Sierra Leone Labour Congress

- 46 Sierra Leone Market Women Association SLMWA
- 47 Sierra Leone Union of Disability (SLUDI)
- 48 The 50/50 Group Sierra Leone
- 49 WASHNET
- 50 West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Sierra Leone.
- 51 Western Area Development Organisation
- 52 Women's Forum Sierra Leone
- 53 Young Mens Christian Association
- 54 Youth and Child Advocacy Network (YACAN)