

13th April, 2021

“Punish Assault on Civilians by State Actors”

In less than forty-eight hours, the Renaissance Movement has observed with dismay, two disturbing episodes of state actors using excessive and unnecessary force and assaulting peaceful civilians in and around Freetown.

The Movement is appalled at videos and images of the heartless and unlawful beating of a female student of the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) and the use of excessive force by the Sierra Leone police against protesting students at that University on 12th April 2021.

We are further outraged by the harassing and assaulting of Dr. Catherine Jackson Cole allegedly by senior officials of the Ministry of Health and Sanitation on April 13, 2021.

The IPAM incident continues a disturbing trend by the Sierra Leone police in employing excessive and unnecessary force in responding to protests by citizens. This trend betrays the investment made in building a professional police “force for good” and undermines much-needed public trust in an institution that should serve and protect the citizens of our great nation.

We therefore call on the leadership of the police force to **take decisive action against those officers caught on video assaulting the unarmed female student**, to serve as a deterrent for the men and women in the police force from the use of unwarranted force against citizens. These incidences should be thoroughly investigated, and perpetrators should bear the full penalty of the law. We call on the police to immediately drop all charges against the female students and all other students who are caught up in this unfortunate situation.

The Movement also calls on His Excellency the President, Julius Maada Bio, the Minister of Health and other relevant authorities to immediately **suspend the Deputy Minister of Health, the Chief Medical Officer and Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health for their alleged role in assaulting Dr. Catherine Jackson Cole pending further review and action**. An independent and public inquiry must be commenced immediately to properly and speedily investigate this assault on one of our prized female doctors and legal and administrative actions taken after the conclusion of the process. This is the very least that is needed in the face of this grave abuse of state power.

The Renaissance Movement extends our sincere sympathies to all those assaulted in both incidents. We stand in solidarity with students who are peacefully protesting against abuses at the University of Sierra

1

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Leone and with doctors who are exposing the rot in our health system while doing their best to save lives. These citizens must be listened to and not attacked by state actors meant to serve them.

We further encourage protesting citizens to exercise their rights peacefully and lawfully.

God bless the people of Sierra Leone and God bless the land that we love.

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