



# CHRISTIAN LAWYERS CENTRE LEGAL LINK



Motto: "Defending the Rights of Vulnerable Groups in Society"

5<sup>th</sup> July, 2021.

**His Excellency,  
The President of the Republic of Sierra Leone,  
Retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio,  
Office of the President,  
State House,  
State Avenue,  
Freetown.**

**Your Excellency,**

**Appeal for the lifting up of the Suspension on Congregational worship in churches, mosques and other religious places in Sierra Leone.**

**Christian Lawyers Centre** also known as **LEGAL LINK** has seen and heard your broadcast to the nation of Sierra Leone dated 1st July 2021 introducing a plethora of measures to effectively address the third wave of the Coronavirus (Delta variant) in the country.

**As an organization that defends the rights of religious communities and vulnerable groups in Sierra Leone, we sincerely commend the leadership you have shown thus far and also acknowledge the good work that NaCOVERC has done and is still doing regarding the fight against the Coronavirus in the country. Without any iota of doubt, your timely interventions and guidance have fundamentally helped in saving lives and livelihoods during this challenging period in world's history.**

**But be that as it may however, in this our open letter sent to you, LEGAL LINK has raised five cogent and convincing reasons as to why your Excellency should consider the lifting up of the suspension on Congregational worship and prayers within religious institutions in the country.**

**Firstly Your Excellency, though your intentions are quite understandable and are premised on saving lives, we at LEGAL LINK are however concerned particularly with the measure suspending congregational worship in churches, mosques and other religious places for a month in the country. This is so because such a measure might have the proclivity of not only producing hardship for the religious community but also depriving our nation of a sustained spiritual response in the fight against the noisome pestilence called COVID-19 in our shores.**

**Without any gainsaying Your Excellency, COVID-19 is a pestilence that needs to be dealt with not only through scientific and physical means but much more by a united spiritual response. This is the case because, like the Bible records in Psalms 91 from verse 3 to 7, our ultimate protection from such noisome pestilence can only be ensured by God Himself.**

A suspension therefore of Congregational worship and activities will gravely undermine the realization of the above spiritual objective; which you and I know is highly recommended at this time especially where powerful nations and medical experts across the world have been humbled by the virus and are seemed to be running out of ink and ideas regarding medical solutions to dealing with the coronavirus pandemic.

**Secondly your Excellency, we make bold to say that religious institutions have been the most compliant of all when it comes to adherence to the COVID-19 guidelines issued by NaCOVERC to prevent and/ or curtail the spread of the virus in the country. Without any doubt, there is outright disregard for many of NaCOVERC's COVID-19 measures in other places and institutions including government offices when compared to places of worship.**

**As a matter of fact, in our last documentary survey conducted by LEGAL LINK to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the religious community in Freetown, Sierra Leone, we found out that there is over 90% compliance rate within religious institutions with regards the core COVID-19 measures introduced by NaCOVERC for the safe return to Congregational worship in Sierra Leone.**

Since we are the only institution with such a comprehensive report and credible data, we shall attach a copy of that report in this letter for your perusal and informed decision.

**Thirdly your Excellency, it would certainly not be just, fair and equitable in the given circumstances to suspend Congregational worship and prayers within religious institutions while allowing schools, market centres, clubs and restaurants to freely operate in the country without much hindrance.**

**It is uncontroverted and undisputable that unlike religious institutions and places of worship where order and control can be easily achieved, market centres, clubs and learning institutions have proven to be the most difficult of places to regulate and enforce COVID-19 measures as a result of the huge crowd and social interactions that usually occur in such places as well as the length of time spent therein.**

To now allow for such uncontrolled places to continue operations while restricting controlled places such as religious institutions from holding congregational prayers is not only paradoxical and unfair but will certainly sap off the energies, potentials and collective efforts of the religious community in the fight against COVID-19 in the country.

**More importantly your Excellency, and with the greatest of respect, this decision to suspend congregational worship and prayers is not driven by data, science or empirical evidence. There is no data, scientific evidence or empirical studies undertaken either by NaCOVERC or any other related body to show that religious institutions and places of worship have recorded huge number of infections, deaths or hospitalizations or have become the epicenter for transmissions or have been outrightly cavalier in the coronavirus fight in the country.**

**On the contrary your Excellency, in the findings of our documentary survey report assessing the impact of Covid 19 on the religious community in Sierra Leone, it was revealed that no religious institution in the country has ever recorded a single coronavirus outbreak or crisis situation since the return to Congregational worship in July 2020. This report finding is quite instructive indeed!**

With such positive and compelling available data indicating the response from the religious community regarding the COVID-19 measures, it stands to reason that some careful efforts had truly being made by religious institutions in terms of adherence to the COVID-19 guidelines. It would therefore be scientifically incorrect for your Excellency to now suspend the activities of these religious institutions at a time when they had shown enormous compliance to the COVID fight.

**Finally your Excellency, was the absence of an open, inclusive, systematic, engaging and comprehensive consultative process with heads of the diverse religious bodies in Sierra Leone before such measure was rolled out.**

It is no gainsaying to state that many of the religious denominational heads in the country have expressed concerns and misgivings over the frequent non-notification, non- engagement and non- consultative approach by the government before stringent COVID-19 measures are often rolled out against religious institutions.

**This is certainly an issue that is worth noting by His Excellency due to the fact that religious clergymen and Ecclesiasts are God's representatives here on earth and must always be treated with awe, reverence and a deep sense of cosmic responsibility and moral rectitude. An emergency summit with all religious organizational heads before the suspension would have perhaps saved the current backlash being experienced.**

Bear in mind also your Excellency that Sierra Leone is not only a religious nation but religion happens to be a core and sacred fundamental human right guaranteed under section 24 of the 1991 Constitution. The sanctity of its enjoyment therefore must always be preserved and guaranteed in the state as it forms the soul and way of life of the people.

**In conclusion your Excellency, from the above points raised, it stands to reason that a reversal of the suspension of congregational worship, prayers and gatherings by you would not only be expedient at this time but also be capable of further injecting into the nation a spiritual focus- which is fundamentally crucial in dealing with the coronavirus scourge going forward.**

By way of mitigation however, we recommend that NaCOVERC carries out robust and effective monitoring of its earlier COVID -19 measures introduced for the safe operations of religious institutions in the country in a bid to ensure adequate compliance of same. **Where religious institutions default, LEGAL LINK calls on the enforcement of punitive sanctions by NaCOVERC against them.**

**It is vital to end by echoing loudly to all and sundry that the religious community of Sierra Leone serves as the largest constituency in the nation's body politic and also provides the most formidable platform that may be crucial for the advancement of socio- economic, religious and political objectives within the state. Hurting such a constituency therefore will not only be counterproductive in the short term but will definitely have far and wide reaching implications in the long run.**

We therefore kindly appeal to the good heart and conscience of His Excellency for a reversal of the suspension within the shortest possible time.

**Thanks once again for your outstanding leadership in the COVID-19 fight and especially for encouraging people to take the vaccine rather than making it mandatory in your public address to the nation. This shows your outright respect for the right to health of your citizens and their right to make informed decisions regarding same. May God richly bless you!**

Please accept the assurances of our highest regards.

**Yours Faithfully,**

**Rashid Dumbuya Esq,  
Executive Director,  
LEGAL LINK.**

**For and on behalf of the LEGAL TEAM**

Cc:

**The Inter- Religious Council of Sierra Leone**

**All Heads of religious denominational bodies**

**NaCOVERC**

**File**