



AdvocAid PRESS RELEASE

23 July 2021

AdvocAid celebrates Sierra Leone abolishing the death penalty

AdvocAid congratulates the Government and Parliament of Sierra Leone on abolishing the death penalty. Since its founding 15 years ago, AdvocAid has campaigned to end this cruel practice.

Since 2006, AdvocAid has actively campaigned for the abolition of the death penalty and provided free legal representation for women and men on death row to challenge their convictions and death sentences. AdvocAid has secured the release of six women and three men on death row through appeals or presidential pardon applications.

23 July 2021 will remain a memorable date for Sierra Leone as Parliament made history announcing that Sierra Leone will abolish the death penalty for all crimes. Sierra Leone becomes the latest country to abolish the death penalty making it the 23rd in Africa joining West African neighbours Guinea, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo.

AdvocAid's Legal Manager, Julia Gbloh said: *"The death penalty is the act of legalizing murder and its abolishment highlights a new dawn in our nation."*

Although there have been no executions since 1998, there has been a resurgence in death sentences being delivered by Courts causing mental anguish to people on death row and their families. The death penalty was mandatory in Sierra Leone meaning a judge could not take into account any mitigating circumstances, such as gender-based violence.

In March 2021, AdvocAid, together with The Death Penalty Project (DPP) and the University of Oxford, submitted a memorandum on capital punishment to President Julius Maada Bio. This project was supported with funding from the UK FCDO. The memorandum set out the case for cementing the country's *de facto* abolitionist position and detailed how the government could swiftly eradicate the death penalty.

AdvocAid's Executive Director, Rhiannon Davis commented on the decision by Parliament: *"AdvocAid welcomes the decision to abolish the death penalty. For 15 years, AdvocAid has tirelessly fought to end this cruel practice, through litigation, advocacy, and supporting women with lived experience of death row to share their stories. Replacing the death penalty with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment is landmark step. This approach gives the judiciary scope to consider in their sentencing the factors that lead*

Aminata's story (name changed)

AdvocAid successfully appealed the sentence of Aminata, a survivor of gender-based violence. Aminata was convicted of the murder of her abusive boyfriend when she was 17 years old. Her legal journey from death sentence to freedom took 9 years. In 2011, her death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment during pardons to mark the country's 50th independence anniversary. Aminata's case was heard by the Court of Appeal in 2014, and closed for judgement in February 2015. Nearly four years later, her appeal was granted and her sentence was quashed in January 2019.

women to come into contact with the law, which often include histories of poverty and gender-based violence. "

There were 99 people on death row, as at June 2021. AdvocAid and other human rights organisations had advocated that legislation to replace the death penalty should also provide for a judicial re-sentencing process for prisoners who have been sentenced to death. This would reduce the need for commutations or other special procedures. We welcome that the Government has committed to reviewing this.

We once again congratulate the Government of Sierra Leone, civil society partners, donors and international partners. We also thank all the men and women on death row who we worked with over the years and who courageously shared their stories.

Alistair White, the British High Commissioner said:

"Congratulations to the Government of Sierra Leone, who have made this courageous step forward in abolishing the death penalty and my heartfelt compliments to his Excellency President Bio for his personal commitment. It has been a monumental effort to get here today, working tirelessly across a number of years in partnerships across Government, the Bar Association, the International Community, Human Rights Defenders, the Human Rights Commission and Civil Society including our partners AdvocAid, the Death Penalty Project and UK-SL Pro Bono network. The UK have been proud to stand in partnership to ensure promotion and protection of human rights for Sierra Leone and will continue to support Sierra Leone in access to justice following Presidential assent making abolition into law."

For more information on AdvocAid or interview please contact: Rhiannon Davis
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Notes

Aminata's* story

Aminata is a pseudonym to protect the individual's identity

<https://advocaidsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Aminatas-Story.pdf>

This Memorandum provides information regarding punishments to be enacted to replace the death penalty. It was prepared by AdvocAid, Professor Carolyn Hoyle, Director of the Death Penalty Research Unit at the University of Oxford, and The Death Penalty Project (UK)
<https://advocaidsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Memo-May-2021.pdf>

The Memorandum provides up-to-date information on the global trends and on the administration of the death penalty in Sierra Leone that reinforces the justification for abolition. It was prepared by AdvocAid, Professor Carolyn Hoyle, Director of the Death Penalty Research Unit at the University of Oxford, and The Death Penalty Project (UK).
<https://advocaidsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/21.03.01-Memorandum-on-the-Death-Penalty-FINAL-1.pdf>