



5th July, 2022.

PRESS RELEASE

**SDI CONDEMNS ARRESTS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
PROTESTERS IN SIERRA LEONE**

On 4th July 2022, two peaceful demonstrations were held across Sierra Leone. The first action saw commercial motorbike riders, keke drivers and commercial vehicle drivers, including poda-podas, buses and taxis, hold a nationwide strike sit-down action. The transportation sector demonstration was held to call attention to the difficult economic situation, increases in the price of fuel and dramatic inflationary rises in commodity and food prices.

Groups of market women, traders and business women, on 4 July 2022, also joined the demonstration by marching on the streets, carrying banners and plaques and calling for the government's attention to the severe economic hardship faced by women and the citizenry of Sierra Leone.

The peaceful demonstration on Monday 4 July 2022, saw the flagrant disregard of human rights by Police and security authorities. Violence and abusive language were used by the security apparatus against some women protesters. Forty-seven (47) women were arrested across Freetown and Masingba, according to the Police Media spokesperson.

On Sunday 3 July 2022, two truckloads of armed OSD personnel surrounded the home of Unity party Chair, Femi Claudius-Cole, on allegations of incitement. Claudius-Cole surrendered herself at CID Headquarters and was arrested and detained. Leader of the National Grand Coalition party, Denis Bright, who appeared with Claudius-Cole at CID, was also arrested and detained.

Sierra Leone is a democratic state and must welcome peaceful protests from its citizens. Chapter III of the 1991 Constitution guarantees and provides for "the recognition and protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual".

These fundamental Human Rights are, inter alia, the Protection From Arbitrary Arrest or Detention (Section 17); Protection From Inhuman Treatment (Section 20); Protection of Freedom of Expression and the Press (Section 25); Protection of Freedom of Assembly and Association (Section 26).

SDI recognizes the authority of the laws of Sierra Leone especially the 1991 Constitution. SDI also recognizes the authority of several international treaties and declarations, which also guarantee human rights.

The current economic situation in the country, and around the world, is difficult. Inflation runs into the high teens. The prices of food, produce, and basic necessities of life have risen significantly over the past five to six-months. The concerns of all citizens of Sierra Leone deserve to be listened to and heard. The rights of all citizens need to be respected and promoted.

The Society for Democratic Initiatives condemns the actions of the Sierra Leone Police on the following grounds:

1. The arrest peaceful protesters, who were not armed with offensive weapons.
2. The arrest of prominent, high-ranking opposition politicians.
3. The blatant abuse and misuse of their powers.

The Society for Democratic Initiatives - Sierra Leone (SDI-SL) is a non-governmental organisation established in June 2003, with the vision to ensure accountability in governance, advocating for the promotion and protection of people's rights with emphasis on women and children's rights.

For more information contact: Emmanuel Saffa Abdulai at +232 76647456 or George Mustapha at +23278155450