



UPR Pre-session on Sierra Leone

Statement of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL)

Geneva, 11th February 2026

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(Vice Chairperson)

1. The Institution (HRCSL)

This statement is delivered on behalf of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (hereinafter referred to as the Commission/HRCSL). HRCSL was established by an Act of Parliament named, the Human Rights of Sierra Leone Act, 2004, following a recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, 2003 at the end of the civil war in 2002.

It has the functional mandate to protect and promote the human rights of all in Sierra Leone while serving as a quasi-judicial body for addressing human rights violations. HRCSL has participated in the UPR since the inception of this mechanism, leading to the submission of the Commission's first UPR Alternate Report in 2011.

2. National consultations for the drafting of the National Report and the Alternate Report

The Secretariat of the National Reporting Mechanism at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MoFAIC) spearheaded inter-ministerial consultations in the

development of Sierra Leone's National Report in which different stakeholders were invited to form part of the consultations including Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL).

In a similar vein, HRCSL did nationwide consultations in the development of its alternative/shadow report. These consultations were done at the regional level, giving opportunity to representatives of far-to-reach communities to be able to have their say on the implementation of the UPR recommendations. Local leaders, district human rights committee members, CSOs and religious leaders were mostly the participants drawn from all six regions of the country for the consultations in 2024 and 2025.

3. Structure of the Statement

This Statement will look at the implementation of some of the recommendations for Sierra Leone during previous UPR cycles and then move on to address the human rights situation in the country since the last cycle with specific focus on women and children's rights. Both of the thematic areas will proffer recommendations for the attention of the State

4. The Statement

I. The rights of women and girls and the protection from the practice of Female Genital Mutilation

A. Follow-up to the last review

Women form more than half of the population of Sierra Leone, yet history records how they have been vulnerable and marginalized whether in the political sphere or in government and in times of war and climate-related disasters. Children are even more vulnerable in a poor country like ours.

During the last UPR cycle, many countries recommended that Sierra Leone takes steps to combat all forms of gender-based discrimination, accelerate the enactment of the Bill on gender equality and take steps to increase women's participation in parliament. It was also

recommended to harmonize laws to prevent and eliminate child marriage, criminalize FGM and ensure pregnant girls do not drop out of school.

B. New developments since the last review

There has been a huge improvement in the legal framework since the last cycle. Laws have been enacted to empower women and increase female representation in the House of Parliament. With the passing of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (GEWE) 2022, women have now been given a safe quota of 30% in all elective and appointive positions in government. In Parliament the percentage of women is 30.4% from 15% in 2018 and are about 28% in Cabinet. Women now have the same right as men to own property and be entitled to inheritance in the provinces under the Customary Land Rights Act of 2022.

While this legislative reform has brought prominence to women particularly educated women, HRCSL is deeply concerned over the snail's pace of the GEWE Act with specific reference to rural women whom this law also empowers to access finance to set up businesses or promote their existing business. This sect of women who are in the majority are the ones who are mostly the bread-winners of their families. Nonetheless, they are yet to fully benefit from the law.

Children have also been considered in the legislative reform with the passing of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024 and the Child Rights Act 2025. Both these laws are geared towards protecting the growth and welfare of the child. However, HRCSL is gravely concerned that the Child Rights Act fails to unequivocally criminalize FGM against children of the age of majority. The cultural practice of FGM against girls undermines their rights to health, education, dignity and life.

C. Recommendations

Despite the legislative reforms, implementation remains a challenge. Laws are nothing if not implemented. The Commission therefore urges government to:

- a. Through the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Sierra Leone to accelerate steps to ensuring rural women have access to finance to set up or boost their businesses as envisaged by the law
- b. To immediately amend the Child Rights Act 2025 particularly section 19 and clearly prohibit the practice of FGM against underage girls.

II. Adequate support to HRCSL

A. Follow-up to the last review

The Paris Principles puts a huge obligation on governments to provide adequate support to NHRIs. HRCSL is an independent government-established institution which holds government accountable on its human rights obligations. It is a huge task to cover the length and breadth of the country to serve the people. During the last review about 12 countries called on GoSL for adequate financial and logistical support to do its work effectively.

B. New developments since the last review

Since the last review and following those recommendations, the government has progressively increased its budgetary support to the Commission. Government remains the biggest funder of the Commission. The Commission has recruited 54 staff since 2022 so that we now have a total staff strength of 117 (77 males and 40 females).

However, this progression is still not where the Commission would like to be. In fact, there is an inordinate delay in the disbursement of funds, making it difficult to promptly respond to human interest-based stories. Additionally, the Commission has still not benefited from the government with vehicles since its establishment in 2004, except for one, which was allocated to the Commission in 2022. Logistical challenge remains a critical factor hindering its work.

C. Recommendations

It is no secret that government has competing interests and yet it has also increased its budgetary allocation to the Commission but much more can be done to enhance effective service delivery. We therefore recommend:

- a. That the government allocate/buy vehicles for commissioners and the Executive Secretary (6) and all regional offices (5) to enhance field work.

- b. To address the issue of the perennial delays in the disbursement of funds, the government/cabinet should approve the Commission's proposal for a one-of payment of its approved budget at the beginning of the first month of every year, as it appears in its proposed Amendment of its enabling law.

END!!!

I thank you all for your kind attention.