

STATEMENT

UPR Pre-Session on Sierra Leone

Geneva, Wed 11 February 2026

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On behalf of: *Mother Earth for Climate Justice (ME4CJ) and Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)*

1. Introduction and Presentation of the Organisations

This statement is delivered on behalf of **Mother Earth for Climate Justice (ME4CJ)** and the **Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)**.

ME4CJ is a **rights-based organisation** committed to advancing **environmental justice, civic freedoms, and climate accountability** through strategic litigation, advocacy, and community engagement.

NMJD is a **national civil society and human rights organisation**, working to build a **just, inclusive, and self-reliant society**, particularly by empowering marginalised and exploited communities.

Both organisations are **independent, advocacy organisations** and are part of a broader civil society platform that has engaged with the UPR process at the national level since 2022.

2. National Consultations on the State Report

We acknowledge that consultations were reportedly held with civil society organisations during the drafting of the national report. However, **our network and several allied organizations were not fortunate to be invited.**

3. Scope of the Statement

This statement addresses three priority issues:

1. **Civic Space Protection and Criminal Justice Reform**, with emphasis on freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression;
2. **Natural Resource Governance**; and
3. **Climate Change and Environmental Protection.**

I. Civic Space Protection and Criminal Justice Reform

During Sierra Leone's Third UPR Cycle, the Government received 17 recommendations relating to civic space and accepted 14, including commitments to guarantee fundamental freedoms and end arbitrary arrests and detention of civil society actors and human rights defenders.

Despite these commitments, implementation remains weak.

Restrictive laws and practices continue to undermine civic freedoms, notably the **Public Order Act of 1965**, particularly Part III on processions, and the **Cybersecurity and Crime Act of 2021**, especially section 44 on cyberstalking and cyberbullying.

Since the enactment and continued enforcement of these laws, journalists, bloggers, and activists have faced a sustained pattern of arrests, detentions, and intimidation. Between **2020 and 2025**, civil society organisations documented **over 60 arrests, detentions, or police summons** of journalists, online commentators, and activists for offences linked to public order and cybercrime legislation. Many of these cases did not result in convictions but involved **prolonged detention, denial of timely bail, seizure of electronic devices, and repeated police reporting requirements**, amounting to punishment without trial.

The impact extends beyond individual cases. Journalists and activists increasingly practice **self-censorship**, particularly when reporting on corruption, governance failures, and natural resource management. Media practitioners have reported refraining from publishing investigative stories or critical online commentary for fear of arrest or prosecution under section 44 of the Cybersecurity and Crime Act. This chilling effect undermines the **right to freedom of expression, access to information, and democratic accountability**.

These practices violate Section 25 of the 1991 Constitution, Article 19 of the ICCPR, and Articles 9 and 11 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

We therefore recommend that Sierra Leone:

- a) Amend the Public Order Act of 1965, including repealing Part III on processions;
- b) Repeal or substantially amend section 44 of the Cybersecurity and Crime Act of 2021;
- c) Institute mandatory annual human rights training for security forces, prosecutors, and judicial officers from 2026 onward, including **mandatory bail with reasonable, non-punitive conditions**, particularly for journalists and human rights defenders.

II. Natural Resource Governance and Climate Action

During the Third UPR Cycle, Sierra Leone accepted Recommendation 143.54, calling for measures to compel mining companies to contribute to sustainable economic and social development in host communities.

While the Mines and Minerals Act of 2022 represents progress on paper, its implementation has failed to address persistent community concerns regarding **environmental harm, displacement, and accountability**.

In mining-affected communities such as **Koidu, Marampa, and Sahn Malen**, the human rights impacts are severe and ongoing. In **Koidu**, repeated blasting by mining operations has caused widespread structural damage to homes. Community leaders estimate that **several hundred households** have experienced cracked walls or partial destruction of their houses, affecting **over 3,000 residents** over the past decade.

In **Marampa**, large-scale iron ore mining has led to the **loss of farmlands and displacement of entire communities**, affecting **thousands of households** whose livelihoods depend on subsistence farming. Many displaced families report inadequate compensation, lack of alternative land, and absence of effective grievance mechanisms, resulting in prolonged economic insecurity.

When affected communities have attempted to peacefully protest or seek redress, they have often been met with **militarised responses, arrests, and intimidation**, most notably during protests in **Marampa in November 2025**. These responses reveal a troubling pattern of **state support for corporate impunity**.

Planned **offshore oil exploration** in southern Sierra Leone further raises concerns about environmental degradation and climate vulnerability. Despite this, only **one climate-related recommendation** was made during Sierra Leone's last UPR review, despite increasing exposure to flooding, mudslides, coastal erosion, and loss of lives.

Environmental protection must be recognised as a **core human rights obligation**.

Plastic Pollution and Human Rights

Plastic pollution in Sierra Leone has direct and serious implications for the **right to health, the right to water and sanitation, and the right to adequate housing**. The country generates **over 200,000 tonnes of solid waste annually**, with plastics accounting for **more than 15 per cent**.

In urban and peri-urban communities, plastic waste routinely blocks drainage systems, contributing to flooding that **destroys homes, contaminates drinking water sources, and increases the risk of waterborne diseases** such as cholera and typhoid. Informal settlements are disproportionately affected, as residents often live near clogged waterways and lack access to adequate waste disposal services.

Flood-related displacement and property damage undermine the **right to adequate housing**, while contamination of rivers and groundwater violates the **right to safe and sufficient water**. In addition, the open burning of plastic waste exposes communities to toxic fumes, posing long-term risks to respiratory health, particularly for children and women.

Conclusion

The lack of urgent climate action in Sierra Leone now constitutes an **existential human rights threat**, already destroying homes, livelihoods, and lives. Weak natural resource governance, unchecked plastic pollution, and corporate impunity—combined with shrinking civic space and the criminalisation of dissent—allow environmental harm to continue without accountability. Climate justice, civic freedoms, and protection of fundamental rights are therefore **inseparable obligations** under international human rights law. We urge Member States to make strong, specific, and measurable recommendations to prevent irreversible harm to present and future generations