

Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone

Periodic Report on the Universal Period Review (4th Cycle)

Sierra Leone

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Submitted by: Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL)

(An 'A' Status Accredited National Human Rights Institution)

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Introduction

1. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) was established by Act (No. 9) of 2004 in accordance with the Paris Principles for the establishment of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs). It commenced operations in 2006. Section 7 (1) of the Commission's Act provides for "*the protection and promotion of human rights in Sierra Leone*". In 2022, HRCSL submitted its Statement of Compliance (SoC) for reaccreditation to its 'A' Status to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), having deferred same from 2021. After a review of the Commission's SoC and an oral interview, it was eventually reaccredited its 'A' Status in October 2022.
2. The Commission's periodic report gives it the privilege to comment on the implementation of a list of selected recommendations which the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) supported during the 3rd Cycle Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of May 2021. Such comments are informed by its independent monitoring and stakeholder engagements on the status on implementation of supported recommendations.
3. While HRCSL notes some strides made by GoSL in the implementation of the recommendations, progress in some other areas have so far been slow. The Commission's engagement with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other right-holders revealed gaps between supported recommendations and their actual implementation on the ground, thus leading to challenges to the full enjoyment of human rights.
4. On 12th May 2021, Sierra Leone underwent its 3rd Cycle UPR and accepted 216 out of 274 recommendations proffered by 102 countries. GoSL further noted 58 recommendations and made three voluntary pledges, one of which has been fully implemented namely, the abolition of the death penalty.
5. Since the UPR of Sierra Leone in 2021, HRCSL engaged stakeholders in the regions and the western area in November 2021 and April 2022 to popularize the 216 recommendations accepted and 3 voluntary pledges made by GoSL.
6. In 2022, HRCSL held consultations with stakeholders in the south, east, north and north-western regions in November 2022 as well as in the western area in December 2022 with a view to gathering information on the levels of implementation of the UPR recommendations.

Implementation of Human Rights Obligations/3rd Cycle UPR Recommendations

7. HRCSL acknowledges the steps taken by GoSL to fulfil the three voluntary pledges it made during the 3rd Cycle Universal Periodic Review of Sierra Leone namely abolition of the death penalty, resumption of the constitutional review process and a review of the Sexual Offences Act of 2019 and bring it in line with international standards on child rights.
8. HRCSL welcomes GoSL's abolition of the death penalty (**Recommendation 143.10**) by enacting the Abolition of Death Penalty Act 2021 and the harmonization of the age of marriage in the enactment of the Prohibition of Early Marriage Act 2024. The implementation of the third pledge, the resumption of the constitutional review process. However, HRCSL is concerned that GoSL is yet to ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty (**Recommendations 143.8 & 143.10**).
9. Also, while the Commission welcomes the enactment of the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act 2022, Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Act 2022, the introduction of Policies and Initiatives for the protection of migrant workers and members of their families, HRCSL remains concerned that GoSL has not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (**Recommendations 143.14 & 143.15**). Similarly so for the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (**Recommendations 143.5 – 143.7**). These were recommendations accepted by GoSL at the 2021 UPR.
10. HRCSL further commends GoSL for the ratification of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (**Recommendation 143.20**) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (**Recommendation 143.18**) in 2009 and 2010 respectively.
11. In November 2021, government launched the National Reporting Mechanism to International Treaty Bodies indicating government's commitment to submit periodic reports to Treaty Bodies and other Special Mechanisms. HRCSL however notes that this commitment by GoSL is yet to be fully realized.

Recommendations:

- ***HRCSL urges GoSL to ratify the Optional Protocols and the Treaty in paragraph 14 above as recommended in the 2021 UPR process***
- ***GoSL should take practical measures to submit outstanding reports in fulfilment of its international reporting obligations.***

National Human Rights Institution (NHRI)

12. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) now has four Commissioners, one short of its full complement of five Commissioners as provided for in Section 3(1) of its Act. Since the UPR of Sierra Leone in 2021, the Commission has been recruiting staff progressively to boost its overall staff strength. In 2022, the Commission recruited 31 staff, (19 males and 12 females); in 2023 it recruited 20 staff (13 males and 7 females) and in 2024, 3 staff (2 males and 1 female) making a total of 117 staff members (77 males and 40 females).
13. HRCSL commends GoSL for the progressive increase in government financial support to the operations of the Commission. The Commission further commends GoSL for paying its outstanding debts to its international, regional and sub-regional networks and organizations to the tune of US\$73,000 and for facilitating the setting up of a regional office in the North-Western province in Port Loko district and an additional office space in the Central Business District (CBD) of Freetown, aptly referred to as the Complaints House **(Recommendations 143.33, 143.36 & 143.38)**.
14. The office in the North-western region will increase the visibility of the Commission and make its services available in that region while that in the CBD of Freetown would be easily accessible to would-be complainants.
15. In spite of these accomplishments, HRCSL continues to face logistical and financial challenges which are impeding its capacity to fully carry out its mandate of protecting and promoting human rights across the country **(Recommendations 143.34 – 143.35, 143.37 & 143.39 – 143.41)**

Recommendation:

GoSL should fully comply with the Paris Principles which mandates it to support the Commission with adequate logistics and financial resources to perform its functions.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS

Equality and non-discrimination

16. HRCSL also welcomes the enactment of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (GEWE) 2022 which will, among other things, gradually seek to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in public and political life. The GEWE Act 2022 guarantees women's participation in politics with the 30% quota. As a result, following the 24th June 2023 multi-tier elections, out of 135 parliamentary seats, 41 were allocated to women accounting for 30.4% electoral seats as opposed to 14.5% in 2018. ((**Recommendations 143.236 – 143.237, 143.241 & 143.246**). However, only one woman was elected to the 14 extra seats reserved for Paramount Chief Members of Parliament. This could be attributed to barriers created as a result of traditional beliefs and practices across the country.
17. Also, following the same multi-tier elections on 24th June 2023, out of a total of 57 Ministerial appointments, 14 were women (8 Ministers, and 6 Deputy Ministers). Although these appointments demonstrate GoSL's commitment to improve women's participation in governance, they fall below what is required.
18. Other equality and non-discrimination laws enacted by GoSL are the Public Elections Act 2022 and the Political Parties Act 2022 which provide for female political participation while the Customary Land Rights Act 2022 gives women the privilege to acquire land in the rural areas without any form of discrimination (**Recommendations 143.186, 143.202, 143.233 – 143.234, 143.238 – 142.240 & 143.244 - 143.245**).
19. In furtherance of its flagship Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSE), GoSL introduced the National Radical Inclusion Policy which provides access to education for children including pregnant girls, parent learners, children with disabilities and those from low income families and underprivileged communities. This should, in principle help remove barriers to education for all marginalized children and ameliorated the challenges of stigma against them (**Recommendations 143.158 & 143.168**).
20. According to the 2021 National School Census Report, pupils' enrolment in schools increased by 37% 2018 and 2021. The report further states that girls' enrolment in schools has increased at all levels and is almost at par with boys' enrolment at the senior secondary school level.
21. However, during its monitoring of the FQSE programme over the reporting period, the Commission observed some challenges to its implementation. These challenges include the

lack necessary infrastructure such as ramps in many schools and universities, inadequate assistive devices such as hearing aids, recorders and braille to support students with disabilities.

Recommendations:

- GoSL should consider safe seats for women paramount chiefs who cannot be elected by their male counterparts as a result of traditional notions and practices.
- GoSL should consider allocating a quota of ministerial and deputy ministerial appointments for women with a view to increasing the number in governance.

Business and Human Rights

22. HRCSL commends GoSL for creating a friendly investment climate and addressing human rights related issues in the country by enacting a number of laws that regulate the activities of companies namely the Customary Land Rights 2022, the National Land Commission Act 2022, the Mines and Mineral Development Act 2022, the National Investment Board Act 2022 and the Environment Protection Agency Act 2022.
23. Part XVIII of the Mines and Minerals Development Act 2022 provides for community development. Section 140 compels companies to assist in the development of mining communities affected by its operations to promote sustainable development, enhance general welfare and the quality of life of the inhabitants (**Recommendations 143.54**) while Sections 141-144 provide other things, community development agreement, establishment of community development fund and the mining district development fund respectively.
24. However, during its monitoring of specific mining communities, HRCSL received complaints from host communities that the requirements provided for in the Sections above have not been fully complied with. While the companies admit paying the 1% for development in the host communities, the latter complain of the lack of good roads, inadequate health facilities, lack of clean and safe drinking water, poor educational facilities, poorly constructed houses etc. This poses a challenge to the enjoyment of human rights by host communities.

Recommendation

- GoSL should consider setting up monitoring bodies to ensure that the provisions of the Mines and Minerals Development Act 2022 are fully implemented for the human rights

benefit of host communities affected by the operations of mining companies.

Human rights and climate change.

25. GoSL has developed the Disaster Risk Financing (DRF) Strategy, which forms part of the country's overall risk mitigation and preparedness framework. It illustrates the State's commitment to multi-sectoral coordination among Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs).
26. The strategy is designed to ensure prompt availability of financial resources in the aftermath of disasters aimed at alleviating the fiscal burden of disasters on the most impoverished and vulnerable Sierra Leoneans such as women, children, persons with disabilities and local communities (**Recommendation 143.55**). To achieve this, GoSL established institutions and structures to improve its management of disaster risks namely the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, the National Disaster Management Agency and the Social Protection Strategy.
27. In spite of these measures, equal access to government initiatives and programmes by women, children, persons with disabilities, minority groups and local communities continue to be a challenge. The result from a rights holders' focus group discussion conducted by HRCSL in 21 communities selected across the country indicated that all of these communities have experienced disaster, related to climate change. Out of the 21 communities, only 8 (38%) received support, and that this support did not reach to all groups (women, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and men) in 4 communities out of the 8; and that all of them said the support was not sufficient and effective.
28. During HRCSL's monitoring of various communities across the country, the Commission found that there was little awareness about climate change and its effects on their lives in various communities.

Recommendation

- GoSL should do more to engage women, children, persons with disabilities, minority groups and local communities in disaster risk management frameworks to ensure that they are inclusive, participatory and impactful.

Right to Health

29. GoSL continues to make strides in the health sector to ensure that everyone one enjoys the right to health. It has developed the following documents in this respect: the Allied Health

Professions Act 2022, Revised National Health Policy, Revised National Health Sector Strategy 2021-2025, Health Financing Strategy 2021-2025, the National Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy and the establishment of the National Public Health Agency which is responsible for the prevention, detection and response to public health threats and emergencies (**Recommendation 143.146, 143.149, 143.150**).

30. The Commission notes a slight improvement in budgetary allocation to the allocation to 8% from 7% in 2018. This increase however falls short of the Abuja Declaration of 2001 which calls for at least 15 % allocation of a State's GDP to the health sector. In 2022, GoSL also increased the salaries of health workers by over 40%. This replaced the COVID-19 allowances which had been in place during the pandemic. Also, every medical doctor now receives 45 litres of fuel weekly on individual fuel cards. Furthermore, a health insurance scheme has now been provided for all health workers as well as hazard, location and on-call allowances for all public health-care workers (**Recommendations 143.143, 143.147, 143.154**).
31. In March 2022, GoSL launched Four (4) mobile medical clinics/buses to support free high-quality health service delivery to the most vulnerable and underserved communities in Sierra Leone. The mobile hospitals or hospitals on wheels, provided free high-quality primary health care outreach services to patients of all ages in Kenema, Kambia, Port Loko, Bo and Koinadugu districts as well as the Western Area. A major challenge encountered though, in the implementation of the mobile clinics, was the high demand for the services relative to the available human resources and medicines (**Recommendation 143.149**).
32. GoSL took some concrete steps to promote the enjoyment of the right to health through the supply of medical equipment, recruitment of additional medical personnel, the provision of additional incentives for doctors, the construction and rehabilitation of some government hospitals across the country, creation of Public Health Units (PHUs), vaccination of adults and children, improving the capacity of public health workers etc. HRCSL applauds these efforts by GoSL as they will improve the health infrastructure in the country and address health care needs of people in various communities (**Recommendation 143.141 & 143.144**).
33. In January 2025, Sierra Leone's National Public Health Agency (NPHA) reported the country's first-ever case of Monkey Pox (Mpox), posing a significant threat to the right to health. This has posed a major challenge to the country's health infrastructure and

preparedness as it struggles to contain the outbreak. GoSL has issued public health guidelines and set up treatment and isolation facilities in the Western Area and Port Loko District to contain the spread of the virus in addition to 63,000 doses of vaccine received through the World Health Organization (WHO) and other partners. The Western area, which is the epicenter of the virus has a 500 beds capacity while Port Loko District has 100 beds capacity (**Recommendation 143.146**).

34. HRCSL is concerned about the delay in setting up treatment and isolation centres across the country and the inadequate public education which could be the causes of the spike in the number of cases. The Commission is equally concerned about the poor water and sanitation facilities in some hospitals, inadequate and irregular supply of free health care and other essential drugs and intermittent power cuts in some hospitals made was by the lack of standby generators, among others, which impact the enjoyment of the right to health.

Recommendation:

- 1. Increase human resources to man these mobile clinics as demand for their services increase.***
- 2. Expand the facility to other districts/regions and thus ensure the enjoyment of the right to health for the great majority of the population.***
- 3. GoSL should ensure the regular and adequate supply of free health care drugs and supplies.***

Right to Education

35. HRCSL commends GoSL for implementing all 12 recommendations, in respect of the right to education accepted during the 12th May universal periodic review of Sierra Leone, albeit some partially and not without challenges.
36. In a bid to enhance the enjoyment of the right to education, GoSL has enacted into law the Universities Act 2021, the Sierra Leone Students' Loan Scheme Act 2021, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024 as well as the new National Policies on Radical Inclusion in Schools, School Health, School Feeding, Integrated Early Childhood Education, School Catchment Areas, and Guidelines on the Approval and use of School Subsidies.
37. GoSL also introduced the Best Teacher Award, reviewed the grant-in-aid policy to include persons with disabilities in private institutions, and developed the Postsecondary inclusive education policy and the free online result checker The National Policy on Radical inclusion, in particular, provides for the physical adaptation of all school buildings to contain ramps and hygiene facilities to accommodate persons with disabilities and allowing

pregnant girls to stay in school during pregnancy, return after giving birth and supporting them to stay in school, among others **(Recommendation 143.159, 143.163 & 143.169)**

38. In order to ensure that primary school education is free and accessible for all pupils, the government continued with its Free Quality School Education (FQSE) programme launched in 2018. This programme allows access to education of all children to six years of primary school and six years of junior and senior secondary school. Basic education comprises Primary and Junior Secondary School Education which is compulsory for all children. Since its introduction, GoSL has been paying tuition fees and subsidies to schools as well as national and international examination fees for pupils in government and government-assisted schools. GoSL has also maintained the 21% budget allocation annually to the education sector **(Recommendations 143.156-143.157, 143.159, 143.162, 143.164 & 143.166).**
39. According to the 2021 Annual School Census published by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) the aforementioned government effort has resulted to an increase in enrolment in schools at all levels increased by 37% from 1,982,475 to 3,131,440 pupils from 2018-2021. In 2020, the number of pupils increased from 16% from 2,695,590 to 3,131,440 in 2021. Of this figure, 1,541,549 (49%) were boys and 1,589,891 were girls suggesting that more girls than boys enrolled during the 2020/21 academic year **(Recommendations 143.159, 143.165, 143.167, 143.169 & 143.171).**
40. GoSL has constructed schools and rehabilitated others nationwide since 2021 and recruited additional teachers to allow access to education for the great majority of pupils. In order to expand access to technical and vocational education and training, GoSL established and operationalized ten Government Technical Institutes in nine districts and upgraded some colleges to university status (the Milton Margai Technical University and the Eastern Technical University). It established the new Kono University of Science and Technology in Kono District, eastern Sierra Leone. These efforts align with the broader objective of enhancing educational quality and accessibility throughout Sierra Leone. **(Recommendation 143.167).**
41. HRCSL is however concerned that in spite of the introduction of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) seven years on, there is still the inadequate supply of core text books in some schools across the country. As a result, pupils are encouraged to share such books, which has the likelihood of affecting the quality of education. There is also inadequate

infrastructure such as ramps and WASH (Water, Sanitation & Hygiene) facilities to accommodate the disabled in many schools and universities, inadequate assistive devices such as hearing aids, recorders and braille to support students with disabilities. These inadequacies negate the aspirations of the National Policy of Radical Inclusion Policy in schools.

Recommendation:

- 1. GoSL should ensure the adequate supply of core text books and WASH facilities to schools facing these challenges.***
- 2. GoSL should ensure the reconstruction of schools with ramps and train sign language teachers for the deaf so that no one is left behind which is the mantra of the radical inclusion policy.***

Right to Life

HRCSL observed that the right to life was generally protected. HRCSL commends GoSL for abolishing the death penalty and signing into law the Abolition of the Death Penalty Act 2021 in fulfilment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and HRCSL recommendations.

The Commission also applauds GoSL for taking containment and mitigation measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and deaths including the increase in the uptake of COVID-19 vaccines. A total forty-five (45) fatalities were recorded by the National COVID-19 Emergency Response Centre (NaCOVERC) in 2021. GoSL's actions to curb the spread of the COVID-19 was timely and HRCSL applauds government for continuing to take measures to curb the spread of the virus.

However, HRCSL recorded an instance where lives were lost due to police high handedness or inaction by state authorities. On 15th April, four SLP personnel of the Operation Support Department (OSD) were involved in an incident over a land dispute at Hastings village in which one of the personnel allegedly shot one person, who later died the same day, as a result of gunshot wounds. The matter was investigated by the Complaints Discipline and Internal Investigations Department (CDIID) and action was taken which led to the dismissal of three while the fourth was referred to the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) and later charged to court for murder. HRCSL commends the SLP administration for such action which will serve as a deterrent measure to help curb indiscipline within the Force.

The enjoyment of the right to life was also affected when a fuel tanker loaded with petrol exploded at Old Wharf Wellington, on 5th November 2021 where one hundred and thirty-eight (138) people lost their lives and fifty-nine (59) others injured. HRCSL commends GoSL for prompt actions taken to provide medical assistance to the burnt victims.

HRCSL is concerned about the deaths of 31 protesters, including 6 Sierra Leone Police officers, during the 10th August 2022 protests, which turned violent, in some parts of the Western Area, the Northern and North-Western regions. The Commission is also concerned about the death of a person in Constituency 010 Kailahun district as a result of political tensions during a

Parliamentary bye-election and the shooting to death of a gold miner by a security personnel in Tonkolili district.

Freedom of Expression, Assembly and Association

In 2020 GoSL repealed Part V of the Public Order Act 1965 that abolished the 55-year-old seditious libel provisions that criminalized free speech and silenced journalism in Sierra Leone. Since the repeal, there had been no arrest of citizens as a result of sedition or libel. Radios, televisions and print media houses have continued to operate freely in the country. HRCSL has received no complaints in respect of restrictions on their operations or refusal by the Independent Media Commission (IMC) to register a radio, television or newspaper house.

HRCSL commends President Julius Maada Bio for signing the Global Pledge on Media Freedom on 22nd November 2022 as a commitment to improve media freedom in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone became the 5th country in Africa to have committed to the principles and values of Media Freedom Coalition. Global Pledge on Media Freedom is a form signed by members of Media Freedom Coalition as a sign of a commitment to defend media freedom in their different states.

HRCSL acknowledges the passage of the Cyber Security and Crime Act, 2021 which provides for the prevention of the abusive use of the computer system; the timely and effective collection of electronic evidence for the purpose of investigation and prosecution of cybercrime; the protection of Critical National Infrastructure and the facilitation of international cooperation in dealing with cybercrimes.

The Judiciary

HRCSL acknowledges strides taken by the Judiciary in the administration of justice and the decongestion of correctional centres across the country. The Judiciary has now deployed Magistrates in all districts and Resident Judges in 9 districts from a previous 6 districts. These deployments across the country went alongside the deployment of additional State Counsel. The appointment of these Resident High Court Judges will enhance access to justice, particularly for child victims, and speedy trials in these districts.

The Judiciary has also developed the Sentencing Guidelines for Sexual Offences, the National Strategy Response to sexual and gender based violence. These strides by the State are meant to ensure that perpetrators of violence against children are held accountable and prosecuted expeditiously.

From 31st January – 4th February 2021, the Judiciary held a Judicial Week in an attempt to decongest correctional centres and 26 Judges were deployed across the country. The Judges looked into a combined total of 870 cases (423 from the regions and 447 from the Western Area). Also in December 2021 and June 2022, the Judiciary held Judicial week across the country where 374 (259 from the regions and 115 in the Western Area) inmates were released as part of an effort to decongest the correctional centres.

In spite of these efforts by the Judiciary, HRCSL observed that there are still delays in the preferment of indictments and a lack of quorum of jurors, which continue to cause prolonged trials.

Recommendations:

- 1. The Judiciary should assign Resident High Court Judges to the remaining 7 judicial districts to speed up trials and improve access to justice.***
- 2. The Judiciary should ensure that indictments are issued within the required timeframe to ensure expeditious trials.***

The Sierra Leone Police

HRCSL acknowledges that Human Rights education is part of the curriculum taught in all Sierra Leone Police (SLP) training schools for recruits and police officers. HRCSL further acknowledges steps taken by GoSL to continue professionalizing the police force. Between June and August 2021, 10 senior police officers participated in 8 weeks intensive training course in Strategic Leadership and Command in Abuja, Nigeria. This was done to enhance effective and efficient policing within the SLP.

Also, the SLP continues to contribute significantly to international peace and security with their presence in Darfur and South Sudan in compliance with its international obligation in Regional Peace Building within Africa. A total of 96 police personnel (66 male and 30 female) participated in peace missions in 2021.

Despite capacity building strides of the SLP, the HRCSL remains concerned about the unprofessional manner in which some officers conduct themselves. In 2021, police personnel deployed at the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) assaulted one female student during a protest at the college campus. Five others were also arrested. HRCSL, in a press release condemned the action of the police, and called for the immediate and unconditional release of the students, who were subsequently released. Another incident involved 4 Operational Security Division (OSD) personnel of the SLP who were involved in a land dispute at Hastings which led to the loss of life of one male adult.

HRCSL noted during its monitoring that with the exception of the Central Police Station in Freetown, police stations across the country lacked juvenile cells. As a result, juveniles in conflict with the law were placed in open detention or locked up with adults while their matters were being investigated. HRCSL is concerned about the placement of juveniles with adults in detention facilities as it contravenes Article 13 (4) of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing Rules) which provides that “juveniles under detention shall be kept separate from adults and shall be detained in separate institutions”.

Recommendation:

HRCSL calls on GoSL to further strengthen the capacity of the SLP with a view to improving their efficiency, accountability and professionalism.

Conditions of Detentions

GoSL has taken some concrete steps in implementing all three recommendations that it accepted in respect of the correctional services at the May 2021 Universal Periodic Review of Sierra Leone. The steps include increased budgetary allocation to the Sierra Leone Correctional Services (SLCS), decongestion of correctional through judicial week or circuit courts within the centres and improving the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities in most correctional centres.

During its monitoring of various correctional centres across the country, HRCSL observed that overcrowding continues to be a perennial problem in most male correctional centres. However, GoSL has been taking steps to ensure that this challenge is mitigated to ensure the enjoyment of other human rights.

In 2024, GoSL increased the budget allocation for the Sierra Leone Correctional Service (SLCS) from SLE 87 million in 2023 to SLE 113 million in 2024, reflecting a commitment to enhancing correctional infrastructure and services. HRCSL acknowledges this increased financial support as a positive step towards improving conditions within the correctional system **(Recommendation 143.85)**.

In January 2022, GoSL supplied 22 vehicles, including 3 ambulances and 11 trucks, to the SLCS. These vehicles would improve the transportation challenge of taking inmates to and from courts and hence lead to expeditious trials.

Also in January 2022, the Judiciary of Sierra Leone embarked on a nationwide Judicial Week geared towards decongesting Correctional Centers across the country. Twenty-six (26) Judges were deployed across the country to review matters that had been before the courts for unreasonably long periods. A total of 870 cases (423 cases from the provinces and 447 cases from Western Area) were reviewed by the Judiciary. Of this number (870), only 234 inmates nationwide were released and 374 inmates (259 from the provinces and 115 from the Western Area) were granted bail to secure their release. In November, another judicial week which lasted for three days was conducted with support from the UNDP in Kenema and Magburaka respectively. A total of 160 cases in the two districts were reviewed and 33 detainees were released **(Recommendation 143.84)**.

In the exercise of his duty of Prerogative of Mercy and in an effort to decongest the correctional centres, H.E. President Julius Maada Bio granted Presidential Pardon to 160 inmates pursuant to Section 40 (4) (e) and Section 63 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991. According to the head of the FMCC, out of the 160 inmates who were pardoned, 117 had their sentences commuted while the remaining 43 were released. Similarly, on 1st January 2024, 352 inmates, including 11 females were granted Presidential Pardon by H.E. President Julius Maada Bio. This gives the released inmates the opportunity to reintegrate into society earlier than expected and to live productive lives.

In a further effort to reform, develop and decongest the prison system across the country, GoSL embarked on some infrastructural developments at some correctional centres. On 19th February 2024, nine (9) new cells were built at the Pre-trial Simulation Centre in Waterloo, with each cell designed to accommodate fifty (50) inmates. Additionally, a separate facility for female inmates was also under construction on the premises. On 8th March, work was in progress on the construction of additional cell blocks at the Moyamba Correctional Centre. On 15th April, an administrative building that includes cells for high-profile inmates was also under construction at the SLCS Headquarters in Freetown. **(Recommendation 143.84)**

With support from the UNDP, water facilities have been established across all correctional centers in Sierra Leone. Some centers are equipped with both boreholes and pipe-borne water systems, while others rely solely on boreholes. These enhancements are part of broader efforts to improve water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) conditions within correctional facilities, aiming to promote the health and dignity of inmates and staff. For instance, the Freetown Male and Female Correctional Centres have benefited from water storage tanks and the provision of two water bowsers, facilitating the efficient distribution of water within the facilities.

While all the correctional centres monitored by HRCSL had toilet and bathing facilities, they pose significant health concerns for inmates in some because of their appalling conditions. Inmates in some of these facilities are compelled to use buckets for urination and defecation, while in others, the available toilet facilities are located outside the sleeping blocks and are in poor condition. **(Recommendation 143.85)**

Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV)

Following the declaration on 7th February 2019 of a State of Emergency by H.E. President Julius Maada Bio to combat rape and sexual violence, GoSL has taken various steps to ensure that the rights of women and girls are protected from sexual and gender based violence.

GoSL enacted the Anti-Human Trafficking Act 2022 to provide for the prosecution of the offence of human trafficking, to provide for the prosecution of the offence of migrant smuggling including women and girls. On 21st June 2024, Parliament passed the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024. The law criminalizes marriage of anyone below the age of 18 years. It is meant to protect young girls from harmful practices that have long violated their rights and impeded their development. The enactment of this law addresses six key recommendations in the UPR recommendations of May 2021 (**Recommendations 143.187, 143.213, 143.222, 143.225, 143.232, 143.248, 143.252, 143.253, 143.255, 143.256, 143.266**)

GoSL established One Stop Centres in eight districts to provide comprehensive and free services to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence including medical examination, treatment, psychosocial counselling, legal services and temporary shelter facility if needed. Between January 2021 and December 2022, HRCSL noted that the One Stop Centres received a total of 1195 abuse cases disaggregated as follows: sexual penetration 1007, rape 34, domestic violence 110, other forms of gender-based violence 27 and other forms of violence against children 17 (**Recommendation 143.172**).

HRCSL applauds Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MoGCA) and partners for piloting Community Safe Homes in Kailahun, Koinadugu, Pujehun, and Moyamba districts to provide temporary care and shelter for child and adult survivors of SGBV. This is seen to provide alternative care for women and girls based on the principles of Foster Care.

Also, the Judiciary established the Sexual Offences Model Court to fast track SGBV cases. Since its establishment in July 2020 conviction rates have increased. In 2021, a total of 322 files were sent to the court for trial: 26 cases were convicted, 45 cases discharged. Accordingly, 71 cases were completed.

However, HRCSL noted during its monitoring exercises that most State Counsels face challenges in bringing witnesses to court which delays the proceedings as a result of several adjournments.

Also, some accused persons do not have legal representation while others are at large and therefore not received indictment notices subsequently leading to lots of adjournments and increase in the number of pending cases before the court.

Recommendation:

GoSL should device a witness protection strategy to ensure that witnesses are brought when they are needed in order to expedite SGBV cases.

Persons with Disabilities

HRCSL noted progress relating to the enjoyment of human rights by PWDs. To ensure compliance with Section 14 (1) of the PwD Act 2011 which provides for accessible and free tertiary education for PwDs at all educational institutions accredited by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) had engagements with Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone and the Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology for the admission of persons with disabilities into these institutions without hindrance. Prior to the above engagements by the NCPD, HRCSL also engaged the former Minister of Education, Professor Gbamanja in 2021, on the enjoyment of the right to education of PwDs at all levels. A government White Paper was released thereafter giving effect to same. Persons with disabilities can now gain admission into these universities without paying tuition fees and other charges.

The Radical Inclusion Policy is now being implemented by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and it is inclusive of persons with disabilities. There is an improvement in the teaching and learning materials for the visually impaired children at the National School for the blind. However, unlike the School for the Blind, the National School for the Deaf is lacking in teaching and learning materials; their textbooks are not translated into sign language to aid effective learning.

Recommendation

MBSSE should provide teaching and learning materials for the deaf to aid effective learning and ensure that no one is left behind; being the main aim of the Radical Inclusion Policy.

Human trafficking and contemporary forms of slavery

GoSL supported a total of 14 recommendations at the 2021 universal periodic review of Sierra Leone and has taken significant steps towards implementing some of them with a view to combating human trafficking, including making policies, enacting laws, creating a Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs, and training law enforcement officials.

GoSL enacted laws such as the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act 2022, Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Act 2023 and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024 which sets the age of marriage at 18 without exception, thus harmonizing all laws in Sierra Leone while the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act 2022 makes

provision for Minimum prison terms of 25 years for major offenses, including sex trafficking, the Protection of survivors by establishing a Trafficking Victims Trust Fund that will provide interim care facilities or rehabilitation shelters for trafficking victims, medical and related services, witness protection as part of legal aid, family tracing and reunification and reintegration. The Act is a demonstration of a zero-tolerance approach for convicted traffickers **(Recommendations 143.117 – 143.126)**

GoSL also launched the Sierra Leone Decent Work Country Programme (SL-DWCP 2023-2027), the Sierra Leone Parliamentary Trafficking in Persons Working Group (PTIPWG), the National Referral Mechanism for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking and the National Labour Migration Policy. It further ratified the ECOWAS Convention A/P.1/7/92 on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. The ratification seeks to achieve integration in all fields of activity of Member States by adopting a common rule in the field of mutual assistance in Criminal Matters such as in the fight against trans-border crimes, including human trafficking **(Recommendation 143.208).**

In 2023, Sierra Leone hosted the ECOWAS Conference in Ending Human Trafficking with countries across the ECOWAS Region. The conference's outcome gave birth to the FREETOWN ROADMAP on enhancing the fight against Trafficking in persons in the ECOWAS Region.

GoSL also conducted several trainings for law enforcement authorities, prosecutors and judges in handling and investigating trafficking matters as well as in victim identification and National Referral Mechanism **(Recommendation 143.123).**

In 2024, the Government of Sierra Leone took step to review Child Rights Act 2007 title “Child Rights Bill 2024. The Bill of 2024 proposed involving in child trafficking an offence and anyone caught is liable, on conviction, to a fine not exceeding NLe.50,000 or to a term of imprisonment not less than 15 years or both.

In a bid to continue its fight against human trafficking, GoSL launched the National Action Plan against Human Trafficking, especially in women and children (2024-2028). The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs emphasized the critical need to address trafficking in persons, with a special focus on vulnerable women and children.

As part of the ongoing efforts in the elimination of child labour in the country, the Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Security developed a National Action Plan (NAP) 2021-2025 to address the worst forms of child labour. The NAP essentially focuses on the worst forms of child

labour defined in the ILO Convention 182.

Despite all these efforts at combating human trafficking, some challenges still remain

1. Inadequate training opportunities for members of the public to enhance their ability to identify human trafficking when they see one.
2. Construction of shelters in the border areas for victims of trafficking as they are normally housed within police stations when identified.
3. Recruitment of additional inspectors in the border regions to quickly identify, prevent and investigate human trafficking.
4. Delays in addressing child labour.

Recommendation:

- GoSL should provide training for CSOs and other stakeholders in the identification of human trafficking situations.
- GoSL and its partners should construct shelters in the border regions to house victims of trafficking while they are being processed.
- GoSL recruit additional inspectors in the border regions to help combat human trafficking.
- GoSL should institute punitive measures for perpetrators of child labour, including parents
