

Statement at 48th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Item 6: UPR Outcome Sierra Leone

Speaker: GBANIE, Alphonsus Bilson Manver

Madame President,

This is a joint statement¹.

We welcome Sierra Leone's acceptance of several UPR recommendations aimed at preventing impunity and harassment against defenders, and refraining from criminalising the legitimate activities and rights of defenders.

We also commend the efforts and openness of the government towards better legislative protection of defenders in the country since 2016. However, we remain concerned by the continued criminalisation and repression by law enforcement agencies of defenders opposing the agribusiness group SOCFIN's land deal in the Malen Chiefdom. Indeed, while we commend the government's decision to discontinue prosecution of 19 MALOA members on 9 December 2020, on 21 January 2019, two land rights defenders, Mohamed Ansumana and Mustapha, were shot dead during clashes between members of local communities and security forces deployed to protect the palm oil plantations of the SOCFIN Group.

A draft bill on the protection of human rights defenders was jointly presented to the Attorney General and Minister of Justice in March 2017 by the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone and Human Rights Defenders Network-SL. To date the draft bill is yet to be discussed at Cabinet level to pave the way for its enactment by parliament.

Therefore, we would like to call on Sierra Leone to:

- Ensure adequate protection of defenders working on land such as the members of the Malen communities and their advocates against threats, reprisals and harassment by members of the State security forces or individuals with ties to the SOCFIN Group;
- Review the restrictive Development Cooperation Framework (DCF) and refrain from adopting policies aimed at restricting CSOs or interfering with their financial autonomy and independence of action;
- And finally, to adopt and implement a national law on the protection of HRDs in conformity with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the Model National Law on the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders.

¹ ISHR and the Human Rights Defenders Network - Sierra Leone

I thank you.