

September 2026

Statement at the 63rd session of the Human Rights Council
Item 6: UPR adoptions of Sierra Leone
Speaker: Alphonsus B.M Gbanie

Mr. President,

We acknowledge the constructive engagement of Sierra Leone under the Universal Periodic Review and its acceptance of recommendations protecting human rights defenders (HRD).

Sierra Leone has made progress since its last UPR, including abolishing the death penalty, adopting gender equality measures, repealing Part V of the Public order Act of 1965, and enacting the Cyber Security and Crime Act, 2021. However, challenges and threats against HRDs remain.

Freedom of expression remains under pressure, including through libel provisions in cybersecurity legislation. HRDs, journalists, women activists and political dissenters continue to face intimidation and arrest for exercising their rights. The detention of artist Hawa Hunt for speech-related offences has had a chilling effect on free expression. In April 2026, four UN Special Rapporteurs raised serious concern over the arbitrary detention and judicial harassment of HRDs Prince Tommy Williams and Mohamed Turay, targeted for their peaceful work with Lifeline Nehemiah Projects.

Sierra Leone continues to face criticism regarding its compliance with international human rights obligations. Despite the 2025 ECOWAS Court ruling finding Sierra Leone in breach of its obligations for failing to criminalise Female Genital Mutilation, the required legislation remains unenacted. Moreover, Sierra Leone's agreement to receive up to 300 migrants deported annually from the United States, especially HRDs who had sought asylum, raised serious concerns regarding non-refoulement under the Refugee Convention of 1951.

We urge the Government to:

- i. Adopt a national legislation on the recognition and the protection of HRD in line with international human rights standards.
- ii. Protect HRDs from intimidation and harassment, ensuring police and state institutions facilitate, not obstruct, legitimate human rights work.
- iii. Respect and protect civic space according to international standards and its own commitment.

Thank you