

Human Rights Defenders Network Sierra Leone (HRDN-SL)

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PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FREETOWN 6TH AUGUST 2022: CONCERN OVER ABUSE OF CIVIC SPACE

The rule of law affirms that the people have a right to know what their government does and how state institutions relate with each other. Peaceful assembly and association in society has a definitive watchdog quality, which itself requires that human rights defenders (professional and non-professional human rights workers, volunteers, journalist, lawyers etc.) enjoy free space for association, assembly and access to information, especially public information, to advocate and report accurately and fairly. Chapter III of the 1991 constitution guarantee the enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms. Also Articles 10, 11 and 19 of the African charter on Human and Peoples Rights guarantee the enjoyment and freedom to association, assemble and equality in the rule of law.

The rule of law demands an acceptance of diversity of opinion, association and assembly, and when realised in society, it ensures equality before the law and guarantees to all, equal protection of the law.

The United Nations *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, the Declaration defines a human rights defender as anyone working for the promotion and protection of human rights. This broad definition encompasses professional as well as non-professional human rights workers, volunteers, journalists, lawyers and anyone else carrying out, even on an occasional basis, a human rights activity.

The Declaration articulates existing human rights in a way that makes it easier to apply them to the situation of human rights defenders. It specifies how the rights contained in the major

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human rights instruments; including the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly, apply to defenders. It also outlines the specific duties of States and the responsibility of everyone with regard to defending human rights.

The Human Rights Defenders Network-SL believes that every citizen has the rights to freely associate, assemble and express his or her opinion. The network has been following with grave concerns rumors of demonstration going round social media with no clear institution taking the responsibility of organizing such assembly. The network is with the opinion that every organized peaceful assembly and association has leadership that will ensure that their peaceful association and assembly will not affect the rights of other citizen and or undermine the security of other citizens.

We believe that the proposed peaceful assembly and association (demonstration) does not only undermine the enjoyment of civic space by human rights defenders but also creates panic and insecurity of peaceful citizens.

The network therefore calls for the following actions:

THE SIERRA LEONE POLICE:

1. Create an enabling environment to engage would be leaders of the proposed assembly and association
2. Guarantee the protection of organizers of any form of peaceful assembly and association.
3. Ensure the safety and protection of other citizens not involved in whatever peaceful assembly and association.

THE LEADERS OF THE PROPOSED PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION:

1. To fulfill their responsibility for a peaceful assembly and association
2. Ensure that they respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of other citizens

The Human Rights Defenders Network Sierra Leone (HRDN-SL) is a coalition of civil society organizations and individuals working to promote and protect human rights with specific focus on defending human rights defenders.

END

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