

[Sierra Leone: Develop and implement law for protection of human rights defenders](#)

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(Geneva) - States should use the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to urge Sierra Leone to repeal legislation restricting the activities of human rights defenders (HRDs) and develop and implement a law for their protection.

ISHR and the [Sierra Leone Human Rights Defenders Network](#) today launched a [briefing paper on the situation of HRDs in Sierra Leone](#), which details official restrictions on the rights of freedom of expression and of association. The briefing paper also documents risks and threats faced by particular HRDs, including those working on issues associated with labour rights and corporate accountability.

The paper aims to assist States elaborate recommendations for Sierra Leone's next UPR, which is scheduled to take place in January 2016, and serves itself as a submission.

Following its last UPR in 2011, Sierra Leone accepted recommendations in relation to freedom of expression and assembly. In response Sierra Leone enacted an important 'Right to Access Information Bill' in October 2013, however inadequate action has been taken to ensure the effective implementation of this Bill.

'Regrettably, grave concerns persist in relation to the safety and security of human rights defenders in Sierra Leone. Especially vulnerable are defenders working on issues related to corporate accountability, women human rights defenders and journalists critical of the government,' said Clement Voulé of ISHR.

'Less than a year ago, Sierra Leone showed international leadership as one of the key States negotiating Human Rights Council Resolution 27/31, which elaborated on the protection of civil society space. Unfortunately, however, there remains a significant gap between these international standards and their implementation at the national level in Sierra Leone. Human rights defenders, journalists and civil society organisations continue to face threats and obstacles that are incompatible with Sierra Leone's commitments under Res 27/31 and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders,' Mr Voulé said.

'The elaboration of a specific national law on the recognition and protection of human rights defenders, developed and implemented in close consultation with civil society, should be a priority for the authorities of Sierra Leone,' said Alphonsus B.M. Gbanie, Executive Secretary of the Sierra Leone Human Rights Defenders Network.

'Authorities should also ensure the full and effective implementation of the Right to Access Information Bill,

with access to information being vital to promote transparency, combat corruption, and expose and seek justice for human rights violations,' Mr Gbanie said.

Limitations on HRDs' rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly commonly take the form of defamation and sedition charges, and well as rigid procedural requirements for the authorisation and conduct of public demonstrations. Further, the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law has stated that the Sierra Leone Association of Non-governmental Organisations is being used as tool being used by the government to limit civil society space.

ISHR urges States to consult with civil society and to make recommendations for the protection of HRDs. In particular ISHR urges States to make recommendations that the government of Sierra Leone:

- Consult with civil society to create a national law on the protection of HRDs in line with the United Nations Declaration on HRDs, as promised at the 28th session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2015.
- Ensure full and effective implementation of the Right to Access Information Bill.
- Repeal restrictive laws on freedom of expression and assembly.
- Stop criminalising HRDs and repeal legislation restricting their work.
- Ensure prompt and transparent investigations and accountability in relation to all attacks and violations against HRDs.

For further information about the Briefing Paper or the Human Rights Council resolution, please contact ISHR's Tess McEvoy, on t.mcevoy@ishr.ch.

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