

Statement at 32nd session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 6: UPR Outcomes – Sierra Leone

Thank you Mr. President,

The International Service for Human Rights, with the support of Human Rights Defenders Network Sierra Leone, commend the government of Sierra Leone for the steps taken to implement recommendations from the first UPR cycle.

In particular, we note the establishment of the Independent Police Complaints Board, together with the enactment of the Right to Access Information Act, 2013 and subsequent establishment of the Commission on the Right to Access Information in 2015.

Mr. President, Sierra Leone is the 12th country in Africa to enact a specific law on the right to access information. This is an example we urge other African States to follow, drawing on the Model Law on Access to Information in Africa adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.¹

These developments, amongst others, go some way to safeguard civil society space and improve the working environment for human rights defenders. In this regard, we commend Sierra Leone for demonstrating its commitment to protecting human rights defenders through its membership of the core group for the Civil Society Space resolution being consider at this session of the Council.

Building on this progress, ISHR, and defenders in Sierra Leone, urge the government to accept and implement recommendations by the Czech Republic, the UK and Ireland that call on the State to repeal restrictive laws on freedom of expression and assembly. We also urge Sierra Leone to implement recommendations by Japan, Canada and Costa Rica calling on the government to 'ensure prompt and transparent investigations and accountability in relation to all attacks and violations against human rights defenders'.

In addition to implementing these recommendations, Sierra Leone should commit to progress in the area of constitutional review and constitutional recognition and protection of rights. It is imperative that the new Constitution reflects the needs and aspirations of the people of Sierra Leone and international human rights law and standards.

Lastly, we urge the government to ensure that the draft NGO bill currently under consideration is amended in consultation with civil society to ensure that it enables rather than restricts the independence and work of NGOs and CSOs, in line with the spirit and commitments of the Civil Society Space Resolution being consider at this very session.

Thank you, Mr. President.

¹ *The Model Law on Access to Information in Africa* <http://www.achpr.org/news/2013/04/d84> Accessed: 15 June 2016