

## The Sierra Leone Civic Space Manifesto

### What is the Sierra Leone Civic Space Manifesto?

The civic space manifesto is a document designed and supported by over 40 Sierra Leonean civil society organizations to call on political parties ahead of the March 2018 elections to commit to four human rights principles to better safeguard civic space in Sierra Leone.

It is our hope that all political parties in Sierra Leone will commit to the principles outlined in this manifesto, incorporate them into their party manifesto and policies and commit to furthering these commitments if elected to political positions.

### Why is the Sierra Leone Civic Space Manifesto Needed?

Sierra Leone has emerged from years of conflict into a vibrant society where citizens are demanding the right to be heard. While too many countries across the world are restricting the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, Sierra Leone has an opportunity to entrench and protect its people's human rights. These human rights are already enshrined in the country's constitution, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to which Sierra Leone is a state party, and the next government can commit to protecting and enhancing them.

Civic space is the bedrock of any society that values human rights. When civic space is open, citizens and civil society organizations are able to organise, participate and communicate without hindrance. In doing so, they are able to claim their rights and influence the political and social structures around them to better protect and promote human rights. In particular, [human rights defenders](#) are often threatened due to their work defending human rights.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See further, Amnesty International, Shut Down for Speaking Out: Human Rights Defenders at Risk in West and Central Africa, 16 May 2017, Index number: ACT 30/6170/2017, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/6170/2017/en/>

## The Sierra Leone Civic Space Manifesto Commitments

1. **Uphold the Right to Freedom of Expression:** All people in Sierra Leone have the right to hold opinions and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media.

In order to achieve this right, candidates should commit to:

- a. Repealing sections of the Public Order Act 1965 (sections 26 -37) which criminalise libel and implement laws on freedom of expression in line with international human right standards;
- b. Ensuring people are free to communicate without the fear of being watched and ensuring that laws and practices include safeguards against mass surveillance, in line with international standards.

2. **Uphold the Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly:** All people in Sierra Leone should have the right to gather publicly or privately to peacefully meet, protest or campaign. This right should be protected, promoted and facilitated by the authorities.

In order to achieve this right, candidates should commit to:

- a. Reforming the Public Order Act 1965 (sections 17 – 22 and 24) so the law is brought in line with international standards on freedom of peaceful assembly;
- b. Supporting the training of security forces to enable them to police assemblies without use of excessive force, and adopt and implement the [African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Guidelines on Policing Assemblies in Africa](#).

3. **Uphold the Right to Freedom of Association:** All people in Sierra Leone have the right to associate freely with others, including by forming organizations, societies or clubs.

In order to achieve this right, candidates should commit to:

- a. Repealing and amending existing legislation, and refrain from adopting legislation, which may place obstacles in the way of freedom of association.

4. **Protect Human Rights Defenders:** Human rights defenders should be protected and have safe conditions to carry out their work.

In order to achieve this objective, candidates should commit to:

- a. Passing and implementing the Human Rights Defenders Bill that was submitted to the Attorney General's office by the Human Rights Defenders Network in February 2017;
- b. Ensuring women human rights defenders receive the specific protection they need
- c. against gender threats and violence they may face due to their work, recognizing the

particular challenges and risks they face, including specific forms of violence.

## LIST OF ORGANISATIONS

Below is a list of organisations that have so far endorsed the Sierra Leone Civic Space Manifesto. Please contact Amnesty International Sierra Leone (Emmanuel Sattie - [sattie24@gmail.com](mailto:sattie24@gmail.com)) if your organisation would like to support.

1. 50/50 Group Sierra Leone
2. Access to Justice Law Centre
3. Action for Community Development and Good Governance
4. Action for Good Governance and Development Sierra Leone (ACODE- SL)
5. Action for Women and Children at Risk
6. AdvocAid
7. Amnesty International Sierra Leone Section
8. Campaign for Human Rights Development International (CHRDI)
9. Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law
10. Centre for Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA)
11. Center for Democracy and Human Rights Makeni
12. Children in Development Association
13. Civil Society Movement
14. Coalition for Justice and Accountability
15. Dignity Association
16. Dignity Now
17. Defence for Children Sierra Leone
18. Gender Rights Advocacy for National Development Sierra Leone
19. Girl 2 Girl Empowerment Movement (G2G)
20. Good Shepherd Development Ministry
21. Human Rights Defenders Network
22. Humanist Watch
23. Initiative in Capacity Building International
24. Institute for Governance Reform
25. L.A.W.Y.E.R.S (Legal Access Through Women Yearning For Equality Rights and Social Justice)
26. Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) Sierra Leone Chapter
27. Movement for the Restoration for Democracy
28. Namati
29. National Transparency, Accountability and Human Rights Center
30. Network Movement for Democracy and Human Rights
31. Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)
32. New Harvest Development Organisation
33. Organisation for Development and Human Rights
34. Partnership for Justice
35. Peoples' Rights Integrity and Dignity Empowerment Sierra Leone
36. Prison Watch
37. Service Providers Network
38. Sierra Leone Association of Journalists
39. Sierra Leone Citizens Rights Association
40. Society for Democratic Initiatives
41. Skyy Women's World Network
42. Timap for Justice