



**IS**

**SIERRA LEONE'S**

**POLICE TRULY**

**A FORCE FOR**

**GOOD?**

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**





# IMPUNITY FOR POLICE ABUSES IS DEEPLY ENTRENCHED IN SIERRA LEONE.

For years, authorities and law-enforcement agencies routinely outlawed peaceful protests, used disproportionate force against demonstrators and limited citizens' right to freedom of peaceful assembly. With the election of a new government in March 2018, Sierra Leone now has a chance to put in effect the promises of reforms and human rights improvements its citizens have fought for.

The record of abuses and impunity of the police force is such that no reform will be able to succeed without a strong commitment to accountability and redress of past abuses. To date, not a single case of police abuse documented by Amnesty International has been successfully prosecuted in Sierra Leone.

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## REFUSAL TO GRANT PERMISSION

### WOMEN'S GROUPS, FREETOWN

July 2016

Women's groups wanted to assemble outside a conference centre in Freetown. They wanted to demonstrate to request greater protection of gender rights by the Constitutional Review Commission. Police refused permission.

### THE RENAISSANCE MOVEMENT, FREETOWN

18 November 2016

The Renaissance Movement wanted to organize a peaceful walk to work. It was a measure to complain about austerity measures and increase in fuel prices. Police refused permission.

## USE OF CRIMINAL SANCTIONS

### SLPP HEADQUARTERS, FREETOWN

27 April 2016

Parade organized by the political party SLPP to celebrate Independence Day. Police said that the parade was unauthorized. They used tear gas to disperse the parade. 29 people were arrested and detained for over a week. Several people were beaten. A bystander, a man in his seventies, was wounded in the head by a police baton. 6 people were sentenced to 6 months imprisonment and another one was sentenced to 9 months imprisonment on charges of unlawful procession and riotous conduct under the Public Order Act 1965. The trial of the others is still on going.

### VICINITY US EMBASSY, FREETOWN

16 April 2015

Peaceful assembly outside the US Embassy. Amongst other things protesters were protesting about the mismanagement of Ebola funds by the government. The assembly was dispersed by the police who took down the name of the organisers. 3 days later, 19 April, 10 people were arrested.

They were detained for 3 days. They were release on police bail without being charged.

### KENEMA

27 April 2015

A crowd of about 100 were protesting at the SLPP offices in Kenema. Police fired teargas into the crowd and people were beaten with canes. 15 people were arrested. The Senior Regional Officer of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) spoke on the radio about the discriminatory application of the State of Emergency. He was also subsequently arrested and beaten at the police station when trying to intervene to stop the police beating other protesters. All of them were charged with 11 counts under the Public Emergency Regulations and Public Order Act 1965.

## EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

### BUMBUNA

April 2012

16 - 18 April Sierra Leonean employees of African Mineral Limited mine were demonstrating peacefully for better working conditions and remuneration. Police used live ammunition and tear gas. One woman, Musu Conteh, was killed. She was shot on the right side of her chest. At least 11 people, including a child, were injured many as result if gunshots and tear gas. At least 15 people had their properties looted or damaged. No one has been held to account for the violations committed despite recommendations by the HRC Commission of Inquiry.

### BO

23 March 2017

Largely peaceful students' protest for the re-opening of Njala University. OSD police officers fired live bullets and used tear gas. A 21 years old female student was shot and wounded bellow her breast. A 26 years old male student was shot in his stomach. The bullet is still in his body and he suffers from health complications. A 15 year old boy was killed. He was shot in the neck. Other protesters were beaten and arrested. No one has been held to account for the violations committed despite recommendations by the Independent Police Complaints Board (IPCB). No official compensation has been given to the victims.

### KABALA

16 August 2016

Two boys were killed (16 and 17 years old) and four men injured by gunshots when OSD police officers opened fire on youth protesters in Kabala. No one has been held to account for the violations committed despite recommendations by the IPCB. No official compensation has been given to the victims.

### GUARD STREET, FREETOWN

11 November 2013

Unarmed crowd protesting again street traders occupying the walkway and immediate vicinity of a local school. Police fired live rounds to disperse the crowd and used tear gas. A secondary student at Ansarul Islamic Secondary School was shot dead. Amnesty International has not obtained any information about criminal or disciplinary action taken.

### TONKOLI

25 November 2010

According to the HRC and UK lawyers who gathered evidence on this incident, one woman was shot in the head and over 50 people were injured by police, following a protest in Tonkolili district. The property of dozens of people was looted or damaged during



police raids following the protest. Residents were protesting against the use of their land by African Minerals Ltd.

Amnesty International has not obtained any information about criminal or disciplinary action taken. Amnesty International is not aware of any compensation that was given to people shot or injured.

### **KONO**

**18 December 2012**

Two people were killed and one woman was seriously injured when police used firearms after workers at the Koidu Holdings diamond mine went on strike to protest over bonuses and work conditions.

It is not clear if any investigation was carried out.

Amnesty International has not obtained any information about criminal or disciplinary action taken. Amnesty International is not aware of any compensation that was given to people shot or injured.

### **KONO**

**13 December 2007**

Two men were shot dead by the police and at least nine people were injured by gunshots when demonstrators protested against working conditions in the diamond mine operated by Koidu Holdings.

## **FAILURE TO INVESTIGATE THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS OUTSIDE THE CONTEXT OF POLICING PROTESTS**

### **WELLINGTON, FREETOWN**

**June 2012**

Two unarmed men, Alieu Sonkoh and Ishmael KargTwo, were shot and killed by the police.

The results of the investigation into these deaths have not been made public.

### **KONO**

**November 2014**

Two young men were shot dead by security forces during a riot when health care workers attempted to take away a 90-year-old woman suspected of having Ebola.

Police used live rounds to disperse the crowd. It is unclear whether there was an investigation into the deaths and no information has been made public.

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# TESTIMONIALS

**“There is a justifiable culture of fear in this country, because people know that if you come out to protest, you’re going to be intimidated in one way or another and it’s unlikely anyone will stand up for you ... All this has an impact on human rights defenders. Some are intimidated and scared to demonstrate.”**

Lawyer Emmanuel Saffa-Abdulai

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**“One of the reasons for these repeated occurrences can be attributed to the impunity that has characterized human rights violations during police operations where no one has so far been prosecuted for using disproportionate force in response to public disorder situations.”**

Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone,  
Bumbuna Inquiry, 2012

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**“I felt that they had killed me that day.”**

Mother of Amadou, 16 year old boy who was shot dead during a Youth Protest in Kabala in August 2016

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**“My son was 17 years old. He loved football and music. He was attending Kabala Secondary School. This year he should have taken his WASSCE exam (senior secondary school exam). On the day he was killed I told him to go and buy me something. Later there was panic. Tear gas. People running everywhere. Someone told me they had shot him. I fainted.”**

Mother of a boy who was shot dead during a Youth Protest in Kabala in August 2016

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**“These people fired at this lady [the late Musu Conteh] and she dropped in front of my sister and I for us to see. The lady cried out, ‘I am dying for my right’, and she was shot at again. Altogether, she was shot at three times and we all panicked and ran because anybody who came to rescue the lady was shot at.”**

Eyewitness interviewed by the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone during the Bumbuna Inquiry

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**“The residents of Koidu feel like they cannot fight for their rights or someone will be killed. People are frustrated but now there is fear. People feel like they [the police] will just shoot you. The issue of impunity comes in. No one wants to lose their lives.”**

Civil society activist in Kono, 12 June 2017

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**“The police have been armed with very lethal weapons, and we believe they are not well trained to know when to use them.”**

Valnora Edwin, Campaign for Good Governance, 2012

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**END POLICE VIOLENCE.**

**DEMAND JUSTICE.**

Read more at : [www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr51/8590/2018/en/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr51/8590/2018/en/)

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