
Prison Watch Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone

Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review

**11th session of the UPR Working Group of the Human
Rights Council**

May 2011

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B. Normative and institutional framework of the State

The prison rules and ordinance of 1960 and 1961 constitute the national legislation which guides the treatment, processes and procedure of people in prison. Most of the provisions of these rules are outdated and do not meet the current needs of prisoners.

The UN minimum standard rules for detention set the basic minimum standard to be followed in treatments of people in prison; unfortunately the Sierra Leone is not a party to this convention.

The right to fair and prompt trial is a challenge and has resulted in many prisoners behind bars.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recent Child Rights Act is in conflict with the prison ordinance on the age of children, which peg the maximum age of a child as seventeen, whereas in the CRC and the Child Rights Act it is eighteen. The national legislation also sets the minimum age of criminal responsibility at fourteen years old. However, children under fourteen are routinely convicted and send to approved schools.

C. Promotion and protection of human rights on the ground

Poor prison conditions

On the 31 of December 2009, Prison Watch documented and reported the standoff at Pademba road between the prisoners and the prisons officers. This was as a result of an unclear searching procedure. The prison officer did not follow the correct procedures of searching. Though searching is a regular routine in prison, but this particular searching was for mobile phone and dangerous weapon, but the prison officers start confiscating money and food stuff which are not part of the search items. This lack of clarity on what to search for causes this fracas on the said date in Pademba road prison, serious injuries were sustained by both parties. Eight prison officers were injured and 14 prisoners carried marks of torture.

In 2009, Prison Watch documented 35 cases of health related death at Pademba road prison. Some of the prisoners died from Cardiac arrest, Pneumonia, respiratory failure. Most medical emergencies are transferred to government hospital because the prison hospital lacks the capacity to deal with medical emergencies. The difficult transfer procedure and delays are also responsible for most death in prison.

In 2010 Prison Watch has documented that child offenders below the age of 18 are imprisoned in all the prisons in Sierra Leone.

Prison Watch noted that in October 2010, a boy of 11 years old was convicted and detained at an approve school in Freetown.

D. Recommendations for action by the State under review

1. Government should undertake a complete review of the Sierra Leone detention code.
2. Government should ensure that all prisoners enjoy free and qualitative health care services
3. Government should consider establishing a prison hospital for prisoners and prisons officers
4. The government needs to respect and harmonise laws in respect of the age of the child, either in terms of age of criminal responsibility or allowable age for detention
5. Government should increase the number of judges and capacity of the judiciary to be able to ensure prompt and fair trial

