

NHRI CASE STUDY – THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) is an A-status National Human Rights Institution, modelled in accordance with the UN Paris Principles, with the mandate to promote and protect human rights. The monitoring and investigation of human rights violations is a core function of the Commission.

CASE STUDY

In 2013, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL), with support from the Irish Human Rights Commission and the Danish Institute for Human Rights, developed the Guidelines for Monitoring Business and Human Rights in Sierra Leone, a practical tool for monitoring the human rights impacts of business activities. The Guidelines draw on the HRCA.

In 2010, NHRIs worldwide affirmed their collective commitment through the Edinburgh Declaration to monitor and document business-related human rights abuses. This extends, in particular, to national and multinational corporations, whether operating in or registered under their domestic jurisdiction. In 2011, the Yaoundé Declaration expressed the commitment of African NHRIs in similar terms, while the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights explicitly recognised the mandate and role of NHRIs with regard to human rights in the business context.

In the wake of these developments, the HRCSL undertook a number of concrete activities to address business and human rights issues in the Sierra Leone context. Following the 2012 Bumbuna Public Inquiry into alleged human rights abuses associated with a protest at a mine site, the Commission in 2013 proceeded to develop the Guidelines for Monitoring Human Rights and Business in Sierra Leone. Building on the format and content of the Human Rights Compliance Assessment, the Guidelines comprise a range of questions and indicators addressing: employment practices, environment and communities, security, legal and government affairs, and contractors and supply chain. The questions and indicators are based on international human rights law, relevant business and human rights soft-law frameworks, as well as Sierra Leone laws and regulations.

The main objective of the Guidelines is to provide the Commission with a clear and consistent platform for monitoring the operations of business enterprises in Sierra Leone, and their respect for human rights standards, in line with the statutory mandate of the Commission. However, the Guidelines can also support other organisations in taking steps towards ensuring business respect for human rights. For instance, the Guidelines can provide a robust platform for advocacy efforts and can be applied in turn to empower civil society organisations, District Human Rights Commissions, Government Ministries, labour organisations, and other relevant stakeholders, of course including businesses themselves.

To inform the development of the Guidelines, consultations were held by the HRCSL with a range of key stakeholders, including civil society organisations, Government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies, and multinational enterprises, who were able to familiarise themselves with the contents of the Guidelines, make relevant inputs and take ownership of the document during consultation events.