



PRESS RELEASE

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UNAMSIL HUMAN RIGHTS SECTION HOLDS ASSESSMENT SEMINAR IN MASIKA

Freetown, Sierra Leone – Over 80 people including members of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) and the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), yesterday attended a one-day assessment seminar organized by the United for the Protection of Human Rights (UPHR), based in Masiaka, northern Sierra Leone, in collaboration with the Human Rights Section of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).

The seminar aimed at assessing the competence of local human rights activists with the view to knowing their preparedness in handling human rights issues in the face of UNAMSIL's drawdown.

In front of a panel of eight, four groups were given 20 minutes to present a paper followed by a question-and-answer session.

UNAMSIL's Human Rights Officer in Port Loko, Boubacar Dieng gave a rundown on how UPHR was formed, noting that the one-day assessment seminar was a follow-up on previous seminars and symposia.

Presenting a paper on "Monitoring of Human Rights and Reporting", a member of UPHR, David Momoh defined human rights as the fundamental principles people needed as human beings to get their dignity and respect. He said that under the laws of Sierra Leone, any person arrested for minor offenses should not be detained for over 72 hours without being charged to court.

Another member of the group, Lamin Sesay spoke about the rights of the child and called for a review in some of the laws of Sierra Leone to harmonize those sections he said contravened some articles of the Convention of the Right of the Child. He said children with deformities in the country were treated like outcasts, noting that the girl child in Sierra Leone was not given as much chance to go to school as her boy counterpart.

Francis Issac Cole stated that, "without food and work, there will be no human rights," and explained why the unemployed with an empty stomach could not think about human rights issues. He urged Government to make food available to the people.

Miss Ajaratu Kamara, who made a presentation on "Women's Rights; Discrimination/Gender-based Violence", said that in the northern part of Sierra Leone "women are not allowed to become Paramount Chiefs." She noted that girls should be given equal rights as boys, and explained how women were being discriminated against in Sierra Leone.

The Human Rights Section of UNAMSIL hopes to organize a refresher seminar on gender mainstreaming in Masiaka.

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