



ECOWAS Court Issues Important Judgment on Police Accountability in Sierra Leone

Freetown, 28 February 2024: AdvocAid and the Institute for Human Rights Development in Africa (IHRDA) welcome today's judgment by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Community Court of Justice in the "*Mohamed Morlu v. Republic of Sierra Leone*" case, which found Sierra Leone responsible for violating several of Mr. Morlu's rights under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention Against Torture, and ordered Sierra Leone to pay the applicant monetary compensation. The judgment represents a significant victory in the fight for police accountability in Sierra Leone and sets an important precedent for Sierra Leone on what amounts to torture by state law enforcement agents in the context of protests.

The case was filed by Mr. Morlu with the support of AdvocAid and IHRDA in August 2022, alleging that the Republic of Sierra Leone had violated his rights to security of the person and to be free from torture when police shot him in the abdomen during a peaceful student protest in Bo in March 2017, and further violated his right to a remedy when the State failed to effectively investigate and prosecute those responsible for the shooting.

The Plaintiff, Mr. Morlu, shared his thoughts on the judgment, saying, "*After 7 years of living with the effects of this painful incident with no one being held responsible, I am relieved and grateful for the ECOWAS Court's decision. This victory gives hope to other victims of police brutality that justice is attainable.*"

After the Court delivered the judgment, Eleanor Thompson, legal counsel for Mr. Morlu, said, "*This case was not just about redressing the harms caused to Mr. Morlu. It sought to remind the State of its obligations under the numerous human rights treaties that it has ratified while addressing systemic issues of law enforcement agents' use of lethal force against citizens peacefully exercising their rights.*"

AdvocAid Executive Director, Ms. Alison French, expressed her appreciation for the ECOWAS Court's decision, stating, "*This judgment reaffirms the principle that no one is above the law, including law enforcement agencies. It sends a clear message that police violence and misconduct will not be tolerated, and the State must ensure that its law enforcement agents respect and protect the human rights of all civilians.*"

On her part, IHRDA Executive Director, Emilia Siwingwa, commended the judgment, saying, "*It sets a progressive standard for policing and human rights not only for Sierra Leone, but also for the entire sub-region.*" She also noted that "*the success in securing this judgment underscores the critical role of civil society in holding governments accountable and safeguarding human rights.*"

AdvocAid and IHRDA remain committed to advocating for the rights of all individuals, particularly those who are marginalised or vulnerable to human rights abuses. Through strategic litigation and advocacy efforts, the organisations continue to champion justice, equality, and accountability in Sierra Leone and beyond.

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About AdvocAid

AdvocAid is a feminist organization led by women for women. We are the only human rights organization in Sierra Leone providing holistic access to justice and support post-incarceration, to women and girls who come into contact with the law. We operate across eight towns in Sierra Leone from established offices in Freetown, Makeni, Kenema. Our team of dedicated paralegals social workers and lawyers work with women in contact with the law, to ensure they are supported and represented throughout the justice system - from police stations to court to correctional centres - with legal empowerment and psycho-social / welfare support, as well as support once released from incarceration. We use all of the insights and lessons from these important short-term interventions, to inform our policy work, advocating for law reform that is focused on changing the system that disproportionately traps women and girls in poverty and brings them into contact with the justice system.

About IHRDA

IHRDA is a Pan-African non-governmental organisation established in 1998 in The Gambia. IHRDA works to promote human rights and development in Africa and to improve the effectiveness of the African human rights system. IHRDA envisages an African continent where all have access to justice via national, African and international human rights mechanisms. IHRDA's work can be summarised in three words: defend, educate, and inform. IHRDA engages in legal advocacy via pro-bono strategic litigation and has massive experience litigating before regional human rights mechanisms. It diversifies the scope of its efforts to ensure the effective implementation of decisions and recommendations. IHRDA also plays a lead role in skills development for State and non-State actors on the use of international legal instruments and mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights and development in Africa.