



General Assembly

Distr.: General
19 October 2012

Original: English

Sixty-seventh session

Agenda item 110 (d)

Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of eighteen members of the Human Rights Council

Letter dated 14 August 2012 from the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the singular honour and pleasure to inform you of the candidacy of the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone for election to the Human Rights Council for the term 2013-2015 at the elections to be held in the General Assembly in November 2012.

Accordingly, in compliance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, I am submitting herewith the voluntary pledges and commitments of Sierra Leone in pursuit of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, both nationally and internationally (see annex).

Let me avail myself of this opportunity to affirm that, if elected, my country will continue to contribute actively and tirelessly to discussions pertaining to the promotion and protection of human rights at the national, regional and international levels.

(Signed) Shekou M. Touray
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



Annex

Voluntary pledges and commitments of Sierra Leone in support of its candidature for the Human Rights Council for the period 2013-2015

Sierra Leone gained independence in 1961, giving it the legal status, as an independent State, to enter into contractual relationships and make pledges for the promotion and protection of human rights. Since independence, human rights have been threatened at various times by coups and a civil war that lasted 11 years. Yet, ratifying key human rights instruments and making voluntary pledges that will enhance and/or establish a culture of promoting and protecting human rights have always been to the fore.

General policy on human rights

The Constitution of the State guarantees the basic human rights and freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To demonstrate its abhorrence for violations of fundamental human rights principles, Sierra Leone, in collaboration with the United Nations, established the hybrid Special Court for Sierra Leone for the prosecution of perpetrators of gross human rights violations, defined in article 1 of the Statute of the Court as persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations under international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law.

Sierra Leone believes in the rule of law and has therefore ensured that its people enjoy protection and are guaranteed fundamental human rights, as demonstrated by the enactment of Act No. 6 of the 1991 Constitution. Sierra Leone continues to respect all its obligations under the various international human rights instruments.¹

International contributions, pledges and commitments

As part of its commitment to human rights values and the rule of law, Sierra Leone has ratified core United Nations human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its first Optional Protocol, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities without reservations, declarations, derogations, restrictions or limitations.

Sierra Leone is also a signatory and/or a party to regional human rights instruments, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and its protocols, such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Protocol on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights

¹ Since ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, no Parliamentary action has been taken; first report was submitted in June 2012.

(signed but not yet ratified), the Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights (signed but not yet ratified) and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (also to be ratified).

The State is also a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and other international human rights treaties and conventions relating to international humanitarian law, conventions of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and conventions of the International Labour Organization. Sierra Leone is also signatory to a good number of international human rights instruments, which it is committed to ratifying as soon as possible.

It is also worth mentioning that Sierra Leone was a member of the former Commission on Human Rights, and that it successfully completed and submitted its first universal periodic review to the Human Rights Council in 2011, on which an outcome report was adopted by the Council. These are all major achievements in the field of human rights.

It is against this background that Sierra Leone undertakes to promote and protect human rights at all levels (national, international, regional and subregional) by:

- Maintaining its integrity and commitment in the fulfilment of all obligations relating to the promotion and protection of human rights.
- Supporting the United Nations in its trend towards mainstreaming human rights as a mechanism for development.
- Reciprocating constructive developments by its peers in the furtherance of promotion and protection of human rights.
- Ensuring cooperation by way of extending an open invitation to all special procedure mandate holders for visits, communications and follow-up recommendations.
- Continuing to fulfil its obligations under treaty bodies by submitting reports to treaty bodies and cooperating with them.
- Contributing to international initiatives for the promotion and protection of human rights through the provision of human and technical resources.
- Maintaining maximum collaboration and cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- Abiding by the principles of the United Nations (universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity) in its contributions to the deliberations in international human rights forums.
- Assuring the Human Rights Council of its full support by committing to engage constructively in all its deliberations, including those of its subsidiary bodies, mechanisms and special procedures.
- Affirming commitment to the universal periodic review process by ensuring that accepted recommendations are implemented.
- Committing to transparency and the meaningful engagement of non-governmental organizations in the Council.

National contribution, pledges and commitments

- Sierra Leone will continue to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights guaranteed in its Constitution. In that regard, work is currently in progress to produce and institutionalize a national human rights action plan. A national Human Rights Commission has been established and it has acquired an “A” status accreditation from the International Criminal Court based on the commitment to prosecute perpetrators of human rights violations in the courts of Sierra Leone or the national Human Rights Commission by virtue of its statutory powers.
- Recognizing that the numerical strength of female representation in governance is poor, the Government, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), is committed to enacting legislation to provide for a 30 per cent quota for female representation.
- In its bid to mainstream human rights into all its policies, plans and programmes, Sierra Leone is currently implementing the Free Health Care Initiative launched in April 2007 for vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under the age of 5, which is yielding the desired dividends.
- Notwithstanding the continued efforts to strengthen the justice sector with support from development partners, justice still remains widely inaccessible. Sierra Leone remains, however, committed to ensuring a better and more encompassing legal aid scheme, prompt and fair trials, review of juvenile delinquency and the codification of customary laws, with a view to making justice accessible to all.
- Sierra Leone continues to ensure adherence to all treaty obligations and guarantees the protection envisaged by the treaties through implementation and reporting.
- Cooperation and partnership with civil society organizations and the national Human Rights Commission has been strengthened in the area of protection and promotion of human rights.
- In addition to the Constitutional provision (Act No. 6, sect. 27), several enactments² have been made to protect against and prevent discrimination in all its forms and manifestations.

In spite of the many challenges, Sierra Leone reaffirms its commitment to respect both its international and its national obligations to protect and promote human rights and, accordingly, pledges to uphold the high standards already set by its laws and to introduce reforms in the law as and when necessary for the purpose of attaining the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights.

² For example, the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, 2007, the Devolution of Estate Act, 2007, the Domestic Violence Act, 2007, and the Child Rights Act, 2007.