



PRESS RELEASE

DECLARATION OF A HUMAN RIGHTS EMERGENCY:

CHRD Exposes Systemic Judicial Collapse, Mass Arbitrary Detention, and State-Sanctioned Human Rights Violations in Sierra Leone's Correctional Facilities

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE — 19 October 2026 — The Campaign for Human Rights and Development International (CHRD) issues an unreserved and urgent Declaration of a Human Rights Emergency following an exhaustive forensic monitoring mission conducted on 14 October 2026 at the Freetown Male Correctional Centre (Pademba Road) and the New England Female Correctional Centre. The mission uncovered a catastrophic, state-orchestrated collapse of lawful custody, constitutional safeguards, and fundamental human dignity that directly contravenes peremptory international human rights law (*jus cogens*). Conditions within these maximum-security facilities have degenerated into active incubators of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment amounting to statutory torture, placing the Government of Sierra Leone in actionable breach of Section 17 of the 1991 Constitution, the ICCPR (Arts. 7, 9 & 14), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Arts. 4, 5, 6 & 7), the UN Convention Against Torture (CAT), the UN Nelson Mandela Rules, and the UN Bangkok Rules.

KEY FORENSIC FINDINGS & CUSTODIAL EMERGENCY INDICATORS:

- **Custodial Mortality Crisis:** Twenty (20) preventable deaths documented since March 2026 (13 died directly in the correctional service facilities, 7 in hospital) caused by severe anaemia, chronic malnutrition, and poor clinical facilities.
- **Surgical Negligence:** Twenty-eight (28) minor surgical interventions performed in unsterilized, inadequately equipped custodial infirmaries lacking basic surgical and anaesthetic safeguards at the facility at pademba road centre.
- **Epidemic Outbreak & Commingling:** Eighteen (18) active, contagious Tuberculosis (TB) male patients confined without clinical isolation alongside forty-eight (48) inmates living with HIV/AIDS (37 men, 11 women), creating lethal contagion risks.
- **Uncertified Psychiatric Detention:** Nineteen (19) individuals suffering from acute psychosocial and cognitive disabilities (16 men, 3 women) subjected to punitive incarceration without statutory psychiatric certification or care.
- **Severe Chronic Congestion:** Pademba Road Male Correctional Centre holds 2,016 male inmates under life-threatening conditions (over the original capacity), while New England Female Centre confines 184+ female detainees. Inmates endure cruel nutritional deprivation: just two starvation rations a day — bread and tea for breakfast, and plain rice with local sauce for lunch. For over 2,016 souls at the male correctional service in Freetown, the State allocates a paltry 23 bags of rice and 99 litres of palm oil daily. This is not feeding — it is state-sanctioned starvation, a flagrant violation of Rule 22 of the Mandela Rules and the right to adequate food.

1. Mass Arbitrary Deprivation of Liberty & Judicial Paralysis

Monitors documented 2,016 male inmates at Pademba Road and over 184 female detainees at New England confined under life-threatening conditions where pre-trial detainees constitute over two-thirds of the population, completely eviscerating the constitutional presumption of innocence and converting remand custody into de facto punitive incarceration.

1.1 Pervasive Unconvicted Custody: Over 1,000 unconvicted individuals are held in prolonged, indefinite detention without trial, constituting prolonged arbitrary detention in violation of Section 23 of the 1991 Constitution, Article 9 of the ICCPR, and Article 7 of the African Charter.

1.2 Chronic 'Court Shuttling' & Decade-Long Delays: CHRD uncovered a majority of the 108 inmates whose trials have been stalled since 2016 by endless adjournments, and a larger cohort of 172 remand detainees awaiting committal since 2020. Shuttling detainees to court for over 12 consecutive months without any substantive hearing is not mere delay — it is structural procedural paralysis, prolonged arbitrary detention, and a wholesale denial of the right to a fair trial within a reasonable time guaranteed under Section 23 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, Article 7 of the African Charter, and Article 14 of the ICCPR.



1.3 Unlawful TOCU 'Safe Custody' Transfers: The placement by the Transnational Organised Crime Unit (TOCU) of twenty-one (21) drug-related suspects in purported 'safe custody' without prompt judicial authorization, legal representation, or habeas corpus access constitutes prima facie arbitrary detention and a gross breach of due process.

1.4 Criminalization of Poverty & Indigence: Over twenty-five (25) individuals remain arbitrarily incarcerated solely for inability to pay minor fines, in direct violation of the prohibition against imprisonment for debt and the criminalisation of poverty. Monitors documented four (4) persons unlawfully detained for over six months without judgment for a paltry Le 4,000, and a woman who will complete her custodial sentence in a few days, yet will remain imprisoned solely for an unpaid fine of Le 15,000. Such detention penalises poverty, constitutes arbitrary and disproportionate deprivation of liberty, discriminates against the indigent, and violates Rule 5 of the UN Nelson Mandela Rules, Article 11 of the ICCPR, and the right to equality before the law and human dignity under Sections 15, 23 and 28 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone and Article 2 & 3 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

1.5 Judicial Defiance & Ultra Vires Re-arrest: In a flagrant subversion of the rule of law and judicial hierarchy, authorities re-arrested a young man released during the special prison court session of the Judiciary of Sierra Leone. The continued twelve-month detention of an individual formally acquitted and discharged by a Justice of the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone is ultra vires, contemptuous of judicial authority, constitutes double jeopardy and arbitrary detention, and is an egregious violation of the right to liberty, fair trial, and effective remedy. Such lawless re-arrest undermines the finality of judicial decisions, erodes public confidence in the administration of justice, and amounts to a grave abuse of power.

Forensic Custodial Audit: Freetown Male Correctional Centre (Pademba Road)

Custodial Classification	Inmate Count (% Total)	Constitutional, Statutory & International Treaty Violations
Trials Pending (Indicted & Unindicted)	1,052	Evisceration of Presumption of Innocence; violation of Sec. 23 Constitution (1991), Art. 9(3) ICCPR, and Art. 7 ACHPR (Right to Expeditious Fair Trial).
Held Wholly Without Formal Indictment	481	State-sanctioned arbitrary detention; nullification of Habeas Corpus, Sec. 17 Constitution (1991), and Art. 9(1) ICCPR.
Long-Term Stalled Cases (Adjourned Since 2016)	108 Inmates	A decade of extra-judicial procedural paralysis; constructive indefinite detention.
Remand Detainees (Awaiting Committal Since 2020)	172 Inmates	Excessive pre-trial custody violating statutory committal timelines under Criminal Procedure Act.
Criminalization of Indigence (Unpaid Minor Fines)	25 Inmates	Coercive deprivation of liberty penalizing socio-economic poverty; violation of Mandela Rules.
Convicted Population (Lawfully Sentenced)	669	Lawful penal execution. Crucially, convicted inmates constitute merely one-third of total population.
Specialized Custodial Cohorts • Life Sentences: 45 High Risk: 45 • Foreign Nationals: 39 Psychiatric: 16 males	145 Inmates	The 16 psychiatric detainees are held without mandatory statutory clinical mandates.
TOTAL POPULATION AUDITED	2,016 Inmates	Severe Overcrowding Exceeding Facility Original Capacity of 324

2. Gender-Specific Violations, Unrecorded Custody & Child Incarceration

2.1 Unrecorded Custody & Enforced Disappearance Liability: Official registries at New England Female Facility record 184 inmates against verified physical counts exceeding 200 detainees. This administrative discrepancy creates unrecorded custody, establishing prima facie State liability for arbitrary deprivation of liberty and enforced disappearances under international law.

2.2 Incarceration of Infants & Denial of Maternal Care: Monitors documented seven (7) nursing infants and toddlers confined in toxic cells, including three (3) born in custodial confinement without basic obstetric, perinatal, or pediatric healthcare. Subjecting nursing infants to punitive custodial environments constitutes cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.



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2.3 Breaches of UN Bangkok Rules, UN CRC & ACRWC: Incarcerating infants and nursing mothers directly violates the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, Arts. 3 & 37), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, Art. 30), and the UN Bangkok Rules (Rules 48 & 64). The State is under a binding obligation to prioritize the 'Best Interests of the Child' through immediate non-custodial diversion.

3. Custodial Health Catastrophe & State-Sanctioned Medical Negligence

The facility Medical Officer verified that squalid, unventilated cell blocks operate as an epidemiological tinderbox, generating preventable mortality and acute clinical crises:

3.1 Preventable Custodial Deaths: Since March 2026, twenty (20) preventable deaths (13 inside cells, 7 in hospital) resulted directly from severe anaemia, advanced malnutrition, untreated infections, and medical abandonment.

3.2 Uncontained Infectious Epidemic: Eighteen (18) active, smear-positive Tuberculosis (TB) patients are confined without clinical isolation alongside forty-eight (48) inmates living with HIV/AIDS (37 men, 11 women), exposing inmates and officers to lethal contagion.

3.3 Uncertified Psychiatric Detention: Nineteen (19) individuals with acute psychosocial trauma (16 men, 3 women) are held in punitive cells without statutory psychiatric certification or care, violating mental health laws and medical ethics.

3.4 Sepsis Hazard & Substandard Surgery: Twenty-eight (28) surgical interventions were conducted in non-sterile, inadequately equipped custodial infirmaries lacking basic surgical and anaesthetic safeguards.

3.5 Infrastructure Breakdown & Staff Neglect: Only one functional ambulance serves all correctional facilities in the Western Region. Nineteen (19) clinical inpatients languish with near-zero pharmaceuticals, while correctional officers are denied risk allowances, fair wages, and psychosocial support.

"What CHRDI has forensically documented across Freetown's correctional centres is not merely institutional negligence; it is an active, state-tolerated humanitarian and human rights crime. Deprivation of lawful liberty does not strip any human being of their inherent constitutional and human rights. Locking nursing infants in contaminated cells, warehousing citizens for a decade without trial, and abandoning contagious patients without medical care constitute actionable State liability under domestic and international law."

— Abdul M. Fatoma, Chief Executive, CHRDI

4. Legal Culpability & International State Responsibility

The Government of Sierra Leone stands in actionable breach of its binding domestic and international legal obligations. Under the International Law Commission's (ILC) Draft Articles on State Responsibility for Internationally Wrongful Acts, the systematic evisceration of habeas corpus, indefinite pre-trial detention, and state-sanctioned custodial neglect directly trigger the sovereign legal responsibility of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

5. Immediate Ultimatum & Non-Negotiable Directives to State Authorities

CHRDI issues an unreserved ultimatum to the Executive Branch, the Judiciary, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and the Sierra Leone Correctional Service (SLCS) to execute the following non-negotiable remedial actions:

1. Comprehensive Physical Registry Audit: Execute an immediate, independent, and transparent physical audit of all cell blocks and registers across Pademba Road and New England facilities to account for every detainee and eliminate unrecorded custody and enforced disappearance risks.

2. Emergency Goal Delivery & Judicial Discharge: Convene an extraordinary Judicial Taskforce and emergency Goal Delivery sessions to immediately review and discharge the 481 unindicted detainees and 108 victims of decade-long stalled trials. Grant



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immediate unconditional release or bail to all individuals detained for minor, non-violent offences, including the 21 TOCU safe-custody transferees.

3. Immediate Humanitarian Evacuation of Infants & Mothers: Immediately transfer all seven (7) nursing infants and their mothers out of custodial confinement into specialized social welfare and maternal healthcare facilities, applying non-custodial diversion under the UN Bangkok Rules and UN CRC.

4. Clinical Isolation & Immediate Psychiatric Hospital Transfers: Enforce strict clinical isolation and DOTS treatment protocols for the 18 active TB patients; ensure uninterrupted Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) for all 48 HIV patients; and immediately transfer all 19 uncertified psychiatric detainees to the Kissy Psychiatric Teaching Hospital.

5. Decriminalization of Indigence & Sentencing Overhaul: Issue an immediate executive pardon and discharge order for the 25 individuals imprisoned solely for unpaid minor fines and fast-track statutory non-custodial sentencing alternatives (community service, probation, diversion) to permanently dismantle prison congestion.

6. Officer Welfare & Logistical Provisioning: Deploy fully equipped emergency ambulances to correctional centres and immediately implement statutory risk allowances, enhanced remuneration, and mental health support for correctional personnel.

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