



11th January 2023

CSO PRESS RELEASE ON THE DETENTION OF Mr. EDMOND ABU (Jr.)

The attention of the Amnesty International (SL), Human Rights Defenders Network-SL and Institute for Governance Reform (IGR) has been drawn to news of the arrest and detention of Edmond Abu Jr., Executive Director of Native Consortium and Research Centre on contempt charges as reported by various media outlets including the British Broadcasting Corporation. This news is particularly concerning to us as human right defenders in the light of the impressive strides recorded by the Bio administration in providing space and opportunity to citizens to air their views as evidenced by the repeal of the seditious libel law, among other developments in the last few years.

While we are cognizant of the need to protect the sanctity and integrity of the courts and their inherent powers therein, we are also mindful of the concomitant effects of the discretionary exercise of judicial powers especially on shrinking space for human rights defenders and other citizens. We believe that human right defenders and citizens should be provided the space and opportunity to freely express their views and engage in acts of legitimate dissent as provided for by the laws of Sierra Leone including the Constitution of Sierra Leone Act no. 6 of 1991. The role of civil society institutions and activists in public education, dissemination and mobilization in a growing democracy like ours can hardly be overstated.

It must be underscored that Edmond Abu Jr. is a seasoned activist with a long background of public interest advocacy targeting goods and services like fuel and telecoms and has empowered the public with vital information on these essential commodities. While we urge activists and human right defenders to practice their craft within the bounds of the law, we also implore state agencies especially the judiciary to exercise restraint and dialogue in dealing with citizens and their expression of rights as established by law. Sending an activist to prison for 21 days without a proven case of contempt could be perceived as intimidation of human right defenders and lead to silencing of watchdog institutions.

In this regard, we join the call of other civil society actors in requesting his immediate release, within the bounds of the law. We also wish to call on the judiciary to adopt a more proactive approach in educating citizens especially activists and journalists on what constitutes CONTEMPT, with a view to building stronger partnerships and relationships between and among different sectors in society. This is even more imperative in view of the growth of social media and the dawning 2023 elections later this year.

LONG LIVE SIERRA LEONE!! LONG LIVE DEMOCRACY!!!