



## Freedom of Expression cannot be Suppressed, Urges Sierra Leone's Civil Society

20 April 2023

**20 April 2023:** AdvocAid, L.A.W.Y.E.R.S., I.L.R.A.J., A Girl At A time, Amnesty International and Girlz Empowered are concerned about the recent arrest of **Zainab Sheriff** who was arrested and detained for a video she posted online expressing her frustration with the current government.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right recognized and protected in Chapter 3 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991. It is also enshrined in various international and regional human rights treaties Sierra Leone has signed and ratified. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Right (ACHPR). It is a vital tool for individuals to express their opinions, beliefs, and ideas, and to participate in public debates and discussions on issues that matter to them.

Although Zainab has now been released on bail (20 April), her arrest for expressing her opinion is a clear violation of her right to freedom of expression. We call for all charges against her to be dropped.

This act of intimidation by the police against a woman expressing her opinion goes against the new Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022, which aims to increase women's political participation and promote gender equality in Sierra Leone. Such actions can have a chilling effect on women's participation in public discourse and must be condemned.

We urge the government to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to criticize and hold those in power accountable. A robust and free media and an active and engaged civil society are essential for democracy to thrive.

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