

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Ref.: AL SLE 2/2026
(Please use this reference in your reply)

24 April 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 52/4, 60/8, 52/9 and 59/4.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **the arbitrary detention and judicial harassment of human rights defenders Prince Tommy Williams and Mohamed Turay as a result of their peaceful human rights work with Lifeline Nehemiah Projects.**

Lifeline Nehemiah Projects (LNP) is a civil society organisation founded in 1992 which supports children, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups in Sierra Leone by providing resources and tools to foster sustainable development and address disparities faced by minorities.

Prince Tommy Williams is a human rights defender and the Executive Director of LNP. He has served the organisation for over 25 years, notably leading the community response to the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone.

Mohamed Turay is a human rights defender and the Finance Director of LNP. He manages LNP's Agricultural Project and blood donation project, and advocates against gender-based violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and girls' education.

According to the information received:

Since 2020, LNP has held a freehold title to its compound in Kuntorloh, East Freetown, obtained from the Ministry of Lands. Despite duly registering the title with the Ministry of Lands, there have been disputes over legal ownership which resulted in LNP filing a legal action before the High Court of Sierra Leone.

On 4 February 2025, the High Court of Sierra Leone granted an interim injunction in favor of LNP and their freehold title over the compound, against three defendants due to repeated encroachments, and pending legal proceedings. The interim injunction restrains the defendants, whether by themselves, their

servants or their agents or privies workmen or whosoever called, from entering, occupying, remaining or interfering with the land.

On 5 September 2025, the Minister of Social Welfare visited the LNP compound and voiced the intention to construct a rehabilitation centre for people with disabilities on land owned by LNP, notably a field used as a recreational space by children and young people from surrounding schools and community-based organizations. Thirty-one schools use the field for sport events. The visit was allegedly made without prior notification to LNP. The Minister voiced that the proposed project would be part of the initiative “Enabling Economic Independence for the Specially Abled Person”, launched on 11 July 2025. The initiative is funded and promoted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sierra Leone and the Government of India.

On 8 September 2025, Mr. Williams went to the Office of the Minister of Social Welfare following agreement to discuss the proposed construction. On arrival, Mr. Williams was advised that the Minister did not wish to engage in discussion.

On 27 September 2025, a consignment of stones was delivered to the LNP site by workers allegedly contracted by the Ministry of Social Welfare, accompanied by a police guard.

On 2 October 2025, a consignment of sand was delivered to the LNP site by the workers. An LNP leader and beneficiary were arrested and beaten by police officers after voicing their concern about the delivery. Mr. Williams contacted Kissy Police to voice serious concern about their arrest but was himself threatened with arrest and harm to his physical integrity. The following day, the detained were released from police custody without being charged.

On 4 October 2025, police fired tear gas into a pre-arranged parent and teachers meeting at the LNP school building. They continued to fire tear gas through the Kuntorloh community, including in residential areas. A two-day old baby was reported dead following the incident. Additionally, police raided Mr. Williams' home, firing tear gas inside, arresting a family member and striking them multiple times.

On the same day, police officers arrested three LNP beneficiaries. Two beneficiaries were beaten with metal chains, one of whom required medical attention. The police also forced entry into the LNP IT suite and took several items including tablets, money and phones belonging to LNP and their beneficiaries.

Mr. Williams' family member was held in police custody until the evening of 5 October 2025. Three LNP beneficiaries were held in police custody until 7 October 2025, released on bail and charged with riotous conduct. The charges were later dismissed at court after the police failed to attend and present evidence against them.

On 1 December 2025, a ‘resolution’ meeting was organized by the UNDP to facilitate dialogue between the LNP, the UNDP country representative, and the

Ministry of Social Welfare following complaints submitted by LNP to the UNDP's New York Office, the UNDP Social and Environmental Compliance Unit, the Inspector General of Police, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Independent Police Complaints Board, the Office of the President and the Office of the Chief Minister. LNP concerns were reportedly excluded and ignored during the meeting, with specific issues taken by participants to LNP's complaints to the UNDP's New York office. Additionally, representatives from a neighboring community were invited and attended the meeting rather than the affected Kuntorloh community.

On 3 December 2025, the Minister of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Social Welfare were added as defendants to the case before the High Court of Sierra Leone, concerning the ownership dispute over the LNP compound, and to the interim injunction restraining construction.

On 15 December 2025, Mr. Williams was arrested and detained in connection with the aforementioned events on 4 October 2025. Mr. Williams was reportedly not present at LNP compound on 4 October 2025, rather at a different location to guarantee his safety.

On 17 December 2025, Mr. Williams was informed that he had been arrested based on a warrant, of which he had not received prior notification.

On 18 December 2025, Mr. Williams was released on bail, charged with 'riotous conduct', 'disorderly behaviour', 'incitement of violence' and 'throwing stones.' His phone was confiscated whilst in police custody, which allegedly has not been returned.

On 14 February 2026, police officers arrived at the LNP compound without prior notification, demolished the workshop of a local carpenter and attempted to demolish another building owned by LNP. Mr. Turay was alerted by the carpenter and on arrival at the LNP compound, was arrested by police without justification. Mr. Turay was arbitrarily detained at Kissy Police Station for seven days, exceeding the legal limit of 72 hours without being charged under the Criminal Procedure Act 2024.

On 20 February 2026, Mr. Turay was released on bail and charged with 'incitement' and 'obstruction of police duty.'

On 24 February 2026, the Law Officers Department, acting on behalf of the Ministry for Social Welfare, filed an application for an interim injunction restraining LNP and anyone associated with the organization from publishing information about the legal ownership case currently before the High Court of Sierra Leone.

On 14 April 2026, Mr. Williams and Mr. Turay attended a scheduled hearing before Ross Road Court in East Freetown. It was subsequently adjourned to 13 May 2026 due to the absence of the complainant. Hearings before Ross Road Court in the criminal cases against Mr. Williams and Mr. Turay have been

repeatedly adjourned owing to the continued failure of the complainant to appear and present evidence against the accused.

Despite the filing and registration of LNP's formal complaint to the UNDP Social and Environmental Compliance Unit on 16 December 2025, as well as a subsequent internal investigation, construction on the LNP compound continues and LNP members continue to face harassment and threats.

Without wishing to prejudge the accuracy of the information received, we are deeply alarmed by the targeting and criminalization of human rights defenders, Prince Tommy Williams and Mohamed Turay which appear to be directly linked to their peaceful human rights work as part of Lifeline Nehemiah Projects and the exercise of their right to freedom of expression. Our concern is gravely aggravated by the serious attacks, threats and harassment faced by LNP members, beneficiaries and the wider Kuntorloh community. The alleged information pertaining to the continuation of construction on the LNP compound despite a High Court interim injunction and a UNDP SECU investigation of a formal complaint is a cause for serious concern.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide detailed information as to the factual and legal basis for the criminal cases filed against Prince Tommy Williams and Mohamed Turay. Please explain in detail how these measures are compatible with international law (see annex).
3. Please provide detailed information on the protection measures taken by your Excellency's Government to ensure the safety of Prince Tommy Williams, Mohamed Turay and members of Lifeline Nehemiah Projects, in the face of continued threats. If such measures have not been implemented, please explain how this is compatible with international law (see annex).
4. Please provide information on the measures, taken by your Excellency's Government to ensure that human rights defenders in Sierra Leone are able to carry out their peaceful and legitimate work and exercise their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and freedom of expression in a safe and enabling environment without fear of threats or acts of intimidation and harassment of any kind.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the

60 days mark. Should Your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please be informed that a letter on this subject matter has also been sent to those that are involved in the "Enabling Economic Independence for the Specially Abled Person" initiative, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and their Social and Environmental Compliance unit (SECU).

Further, we would like to inform your Excellency's Government that after having transmitted the information contained in the present communication to the Government, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention may also transmit the case through its regular procedure in order to render an opinion on whether the deprivation of liberty was arbitrary or not. The present communication in no way prejudices any opinion the Working Group may render. The Government is required to respond separately to the letter of allegation and the regular procedure.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Mary Lawlor
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Ganna Yudkivska
Vice-Chair on communications of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

Irene Khan
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Gina Romero
Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the following human rights norms and standards.

We refer your Excellency's Government to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Sierra Leone acceded to on 23 August 1996, and to articles 2(3), 9, 19, 21 and 22 which guarantees the right to an effective remedy, right to security of person, the right to the freedom of expression and the right to freedom of assembly and association.

In its general comment No. 31, the Human Rights Committee clarified that article 2(3) entails an obligation to conduct prompt, thorough, effective, independent and impartial investigations into alleged violations to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice ([CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13](#), paras. 15, 18).

The right to security of person as established by article 9 refers to protection against physical or psychological injury, or attacks on physical and moral integrity, and obliges State parties to take appropriate measures to protect individuals from foreseeable threats to their life or physical integrity from any State or non-State actor. As the Human Rights Committee has underlined, States parties should respond appropriately to patterns of violence against certain categories of victims, such as intimidation of human rights defenders, and should take appropriate measures to protect the victims of such violence ([CCPR/GC/35](#), para. 9). Where individuals are exposed to repeated threats or acts of intimidation linked to the exercise of their rights, the obligation to ensure security of person requires timely and effective action by competent authorities.

Article 19 requires the States parties to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds. As interpreted by the Human Rights Committee in general comment No. 34 ([CCPR/C/GC/34](#)), such information and ideas include, *inter alia*, political discourse, commentary on public affairs, discussion of human rights, and journalism (paragraph 11).

The Committee further asserts that there is a duty of States to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression (para. 23). Recognizing how journalists and persons who engage in the gathering and analysis of information on the human rights situation and who publish human rights-related reports, including judges and lawyers, are frequently subjected to threats, intimidation and attacks because of their activities, the Committee stresses that “all such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, and the perpetrators prosecuted, and the victims, or, in the case of killings, their representatives, be in receipt of appropriate forms of redress” (para. 23).

Any restriction on the right to freedom of expression must be compatible with the requirements set out in article 19(3) ICCPR. Under these requirements, restrictions must (i) be provided by law; (ii) pursue one of the legitimate aims for restriction, which are the respect of the rights or reputations of others and the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals; and (iii) be necessary and proportionate for those objectives. The State has the burden of proof to demonstrate that any such restrictions are compatible with the Covenant, and restrictions must always be “the least intrusive instrument among those which might achieve their protective function” ([CCPR/C/GC/34](#), para. 34).

Article 19(3) may never be invoked to justify the muzzling of any advocacy of democratic tenets and human rights (para. 23). Nor, under any circumstance, can an attack on a person, because of the exercise of their freedom of opinion or expression, including such forms of attack as arbitrary arrest and torture, be compatible with article 19 (para. 23).

Article 21 states that “[t]he right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others”. The Human Rights Committee further stated that “[a]rticle 21 of the Covenant protects peaceful assemblies wherever they take place: outdoors, indoors and online; in public and private spaces; or a combination thereof. Such assemblies may take many forms, including demonstrations, protests, meetings, processions, rallies, sit-ins, candlelit vigils and flash mobs. They are protected under article 21 whether they are stationary, such as pickets, or mobile, such as processions or marches” ([CCPR/C/GC/37](#), para. 6).

Furthermore, article 22 of the ICCPR protects the right to freedom of association with others. It stipulates that “everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others” and that “no restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those which are prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others”.

As stated in a report by the former Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, States not only have a negative obligation to abstain from unduly interfering with the rights of peaceful assembly and of association but also have a positive obligation to facilitate and protect these rights in accordance with international human rights standards (A/HRC/29/25/Add.1). This means ensuring that the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are enjoyed by everyone, without discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (article 2(1) of the ICCPR).

We also wish to refer to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In

particular, we would like to refer to articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration which state that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We would like in particular to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government the following provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders:

- Article 5(a), which provides for the right to meet or assemble peacefully.
- Article 6(a), which provides for the right to know, seek, obtain, receive and hold information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- Article 8, which guarantees the right of everyone to participate in government and public affairs, including the right to submit criticism and proposals to public authorities and to raise concerns about actions that hinder the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- Article 9, which holds that in the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the promotion and protection of human rights as referred to in the Declaration, everyone has the right to benefit from an effective remedy and to be protected in the event of the violation of those rights.
- Article 12, which states that the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone exercising their rights under the Declaration against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action.