



Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL)

...fostering human rights through accountability

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ECOWAS COURT CONCLUDES MERIT IN EBOLA CASE AGAINST GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

Freetown, 14th February, 2023: More than five years after two Ebola survivors and the Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL) filed a suit against the Government of Sierra Leone, the ECOWAS Court of Justice yesterday held a hearing on the merits of the case. Despite the Sierra Leonean government's request for yet another adjournment, the Court noted that the hearing was long overdue and that it needed to make progress in the matter.

Counsel for plaintiffs, Oludayo Fagbemi (Senior Legal Officer at the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa), summarized the plaintiffs' case, stressing that Sierra Leone would have faced fewer Ebola deaths had the missing US\$14M (as reported by the Auditor-General) been used appropriately by the Government of Sierra Leone. He argued that the Government mismanaged the available Ebola response resources, resulting in more infections and the loss of more lives. Counsel also noted that now, eight years after the Ebola crisis, the Sierra Leonean government has yet to prosecute anyone for theft or mismanagement of the missing funds.

Responding on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone, Osman Kanu Esq. opposed the application of the plaintiffs, claimed that the Anti-Corruption Commission found nothing unusual with respect to misuse of Ebola funds, and that appeals into the Commission of Inquiry's (COI's) findings are still ongoing.

Shortly after it was elected in 2018, the Sierra Leone Government expressed willingness to settle this matter out of court. Unfortunately, despite several efforts over the last five years, the Government has failed to demonstrate the required commitment for a settlement agreement.

"It is regrettable that it took so long for this matter to be heard by the Court. I feel let down by the Government's clear lack of commitment to its own publicly stated promise to settle the matter out of court. Ebola survivors have waited for more than five years to see this day. Glad that we're finally making progress", said Ibrahim Tommy, Executive Director of the Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law, the public interest plaintiff in this action.



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“It’s a great feeling”, said one of the plaintiffs, adding that “Ebola victims suffered a lot. We came to court for justice. I am happy that the Court has finally heard from us. Whatever happens, this gives me great hope that future emergencies will be better managed”.

The Court will issue a decision by May 10, 2023. However, the presiding Judge indicated that the Court would be willing to recognize and adopt a settlement agreement before a judgment is delivered, if the parties present one to the Court.

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