

Justice Within Reach of Every Citizen

Justice & the rule of law

A young man is arrested over a dispute with a neighbour. He can't afford a lawyer, so he waits. Weeks become months, months become years, and he is still waiting for a trial that never seems to come — not because he was found guilty of anything, but because no one moved his case forward.

WHY THIS MATTERS

That story is not unusual here. Most of the people crowded into Sierra Leone's overflowing prisons haven't been convicted of anything — they're on remand, waiting, and the waiting has become the punishment. For everyone else, the formal justice system is built for people who can afford a lawyer and reach a city court, which leaves most citizens with nowhere real to turn when they're cheated, wronged, or in a dispute over land. And a justice system is judged, in the end, by how it treats those with the least power to protect themselves.

WHAT WE'RE PROMISING

Justice within reach of every citizen, not only those who can afford a lawyer or a trip to the city.

FLAGSHIP — A Paralegal in Every Chiefdom

Sierra Leone already pioneered something the world has taken notice of: a legal-aid system built not only on lawyers but on trained community paralegals, who advise people on their rights, visit police cells and prisons, and resolve disputes at a fraction of a lawyer's cost. We can't put a lawyer in every village — there simply aren't enough, and they cost too much — but we can put justice within reach of every village. We will expand that paralegal network until affordable legal help reaches every chiefdom, not just a handful of towns, backed by the national legal-aid body, university law clinics, and private lawyers willing to give their time.

HOW WE'LL MAKE IT REAL

- We'll end the scandal of people held for years without trial through camp courts — a magistrate, a prosecutor and a paralegal sitting inside the correctional centre itself to clear remand cases on the spot, a model already piloted here and proven across the region. Alongside it, we'll actually enforce the law limiting how long someone can be held before trial, and reform bail so people aren't jailed simply for being poor.
- Courts will become swifter, cheaper, and closer to where people actually live — through disciplined case tracking that clears the oldest backlogs first, mobile and circuit courts that travel to rural communities on a published schedule, and wider use of mediation so a land or family dispute doesn't have to end in a years-long court fight.
- We'll strengthen the customary courts most rural Sierra Leoneans actually use for their disputes, standardising their fines so they can't be used to fleece people, and give particular attention to the groups the system fails most often: women, whose cases of violence and abuse need stronger handling in both the formal and customary systems; children in conflict with the law, who need rehabilitation and alternatives to detention rather than criminal treatment; and persons with disabilities, who need a justice system they can actually use.
- We'll reform prisons toward rehabilitation, not just punishment — vocational and skills training, literacy classes and psychosocial support so people leave able to earn an honest living rather than hardened and idle — and build on the country's recent, welcome abolition of the death penalty as part of a wider turn away from our harshest punishments.
- And we'll work to rebuild trust in the judiciary itself — merit-based, transparent appointment of

judges, better pay so a judiciary kept poor isn't a judiciary left vulnerable to corruption, and real accountability for the few who betray the office.

“A court strong enough to check this government will be strong enough to check the next. That is precisely the point.”