



THE BAR MUST BE GOVERNED BY THE LAW IT EXISTS TO DEFEND

The Institute for Legal Research and Advocacy for Justice (ILRAJ) notes with deep concern the events of 31 July 2026 at the Freetown International Conference Centre in Aberdeen, where members of the Sierra Leone Bar Association who had travelled from across the country for the Association's Annual General Meeting and executive elections were prevented by officers of the Sierra Leone Police from entering the venue. Members reported that they were told the restriction came from “orders from above.” No court order restraining the meeting has been produced. The Annual General Meeting has been postponed indefinitely.

These events did not arise in a vacuum. They follow the orders of the High Court of 23 July 2026, made by the Hon. Justice Mark Ngegba in proceedings commenced under the Companies Act, 2009, requiring the Association's “executive” to publish a verified list of fully paid-up members eligible to vote and to produce audited financial records. They follow an earlier application to the National Investment Board arising from the Association's failure to convene its Annual General Meeting within time. They follow a public exchange between the Attorney General and Minister of Justice and the Association's “executive” over the legality of the indefinite postponement of the meeting first scheduled for June 2026. This follows the deeply contested Annual General Meeting held in Kenema in May 2024, the consequences of which the profession has never fully resolved.

ILRAJ takes no position on the merits of any candidacy, and no position on the disputes now pending before the courts. Our concern is with principle, and our position is straightforward. The rule of law is not selective. It binds the State in its dealings with the Bar, and it binds the Bar in its dealings with its own members.

On the conduct of the State

Section 26 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991 guarantees to every person the freedom to assemble freely and to associate with others, and expressly protects the freedom to form and belong to professional associations for the protection of their interests. Section 5(2)(b) declares that it is the duty of the Police and all security agents to protect and safeguard the people of Sierra Leone.

The lawful meeting of a professional body, convened under its own Articles of Association and attended by fee paying members, falls squarely within that protection. Any restriction on it must be prescribed by law, must serve one of the limited purposes the Constitution permits, and must be shown to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society. An unexplained instruction, however senior its source, satisfies none of those requirements.

ILRAJ therefore calls upon the Inspector General of Police to state publicly and precisely the legal authority relied upon for the action taken on 31 July 2026, and to review the decision making that led to it. We further affirm that the Attorney General, notwithstanding the



constitutional dignity of that office, exercises no statutory supervisory jurisdiction over the internal governance of the Bar Association. Where the Government believes the Association has acted unlawfully, the remedy lies in the courts, not in administrative directives and not in the deployment of the police.

On the responsibilities of the Bar Association

The Sierra Leone Bar Association cannot credibly demand of others a standard it does not meet itself. An association that asserts, correctly, that it answers to its Articles, to the Companies Act, 2009 and to the supervisory jurisdiction of the High Court must demonstrate that it answers to all three in practice and without delay.

On the responsibilities of members

Members and candidates who are dissatisfied with the conduct of the Association's affairs have proper and adequate remedies. They should use them. No grievance, however, sincerely held, justifies inviting the coercive apparatus of the State into the internal life of an independent profession. Once that door is opened, it does not close at the convenience of those who opened it.

ILRAJ notes that the Association has not conducted an election accepted by its own membership as free and fair since before May 2024. The meeting in Kenema on 17 and 18 May 2024 produced a result that two of the three presidential candidates publicly repudiated, one of them stating that no election had taken place at all. The objections then raised were specific, namely the late publication and accuracy of the register of paid-up members, alterations to the announced agenda, and the manner of the returning officer's appointment. Those objections were never independently examined. They are, in substance, the same matters the High Court found it necessary to address by its orders of 23 July 2026. An unresolved grievance does not fade. It compounds.

The term of the “executive” purportedly elected in May 2024 was to run for two years. That term has expired. The Association failed to convene its Annual General Meeting within the period required by section 185 of the Companies Act, 2009, a default that prompted an application to the National Investment Board under section 185(4). The meeting scheduled for June 2026 was then postponed indefinitely by the “executive” itself. The result is that persons whose mandate has lapsed have retained control of the register of members, the accounts, and the timing of the very election that would replace them. That is not a procedural irregularity. A body corporate whose directors decide when they may be removed is not being governed. It is being held.

ILRAJ takes the view that the “executive” which has governed the Association since May 2024 has never enjoyed the settled confidence of its membership, and that whatever mandate it held has now expired. Its only remaining function is to deliver a lawful election and to account for the funds entrusted to it. It has no other authority



ILRAJ respectfully urges that an interim body be appointed to run the affairs of the Association. The interim body must comply fully and verifiably with the orders of the High Court of 23 July 2026, to publish the verified register of eligible members, and to lay before the membership audited accounts for the period since May 2024. Publication of a membership register and of audited accounts is not a concession to be extracted by litigation. It is the ordinary obligation of any body corporate to those who fund and constitute it.

The Sierra Leone Police must confirm in writing that the reconvened meeting will be facilitated and protected, and that any future restriction will be founded on an order of a court of competent jurisdiction. The elections be conducted by an independent electoral committee appointed by agreement of the contesting candidates, with the presence of observers drawn from the profession and from civil society.

In addition, ILRAJ calls on the Association to adopt, in advance of the next electoral cycle, a written electoral code forming part of its constitutive instruments, addressing eligibility, publication timelines, ballot procedure, scrutiny and the resolution of disputes.

ILRAJ urges all parties to refrain from public conduct that deepens division within the profession while these matters remain before the courts.

A Bar that cannot conduct its own elections in accordance with law forfeits some of its authority to insist that others obey the law. A State that decides when and whether lawyers may meet has already begun to dismantle one of the few institutions capable of holding it to account. Neither failing excuses the other, and each makes the other more likely.

Sierra Leone needs a Bar Association that is independent, transparent, united and lawfully governed. That is not a matter of internal professional housekeeping. It is a matter of national constitutional health.

The Institute for Legal Research and Advocacy for Justice (ILRAJ) is an independent institute promoting legal research, accountability and the rule of law in Sierra Leone.

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About ILRAJ

The Institute for Legal Research and Advocacy for Justice (ILRAJ) is a non-governmental organization dedicated to upholding the rule of law, advancing human rights, and supporting justice initiatives in Sierra Leone. For more information, visit www.ilraj.org or contact ilraj@ilraj.org.