



COMMUNITY COURT OF JUSTICE, ECOWAS

COUR DE JUSTICE DE LA COMMUNAUTE, CEDEAO

TRIBUNAL DE JUSTIÇA DA COMUNIDADE, CEDEAO

PRESS RELEASE

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**Communication Division**

## **ECOWAS COURT FINDS SIERRA LEONE LIABLE FOR VIOLENT POLICE CRACKDOWN ON DEMONSTRATING STUDENTS**

The ECOWAS Court of Justice has, on 28 February 2024, ordered the Republic of Sierra Leone to pay \$25,000 as compensation to Mohamed Morlu, a Sierra Leone citizen, for violating his fundamental human rights. Mr. Morlu sued the Republic of Sierra Leone after he sustained a gunshot wound during a students' protest in March 2017, at which officers of the Sierra Leonean police force fired shots to disperse the demonstrators.

Delivering the judgment, Justice Edward Amoako Asante declared that the Respondent state violated Mr. Morlu's right to security of the person, freedom from torture, the right to an effective remedy contrary to the provisions of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention against Torture. The Court ordered that the government must pay for any upcoming surgery needed to remove the bullet from the gunshot, which is still stuck in the Applicant's abdomen. In addition, the Court ruled that the government must quickly investigate, find, and prosecute the officers who shot the Applicant during the student protest and take measures to properly train its law enforcement officers on crowd control.

Mr. Morlu was a student at Njala University in Bo City, Sierra Leone, in March 2017 when a four-month strike by lecturers at the University disrupted academic work. On 23 March 2017, students at the University went on a third protest march to present their grievances to the Ministry of Education. In an attempt to disperse the demonstrators, officers from the Operation Support Division (OSD) of the Sierra Leone Police Force fired shots into the crowd, injuring Morlu and other students. Mr. Morlu was hospitalized, underwent surgery, and later sought medical treatment in Ghana due to complications from the bullet.

In its defense to the suit at the ECOWAS Court, the Respondent State asserted that the protesting students blocked roads and obstructed traffic. The police tried to contain the situation but were met with resistance from the students, some of whom pelted the police with stones. In the ensuing escalation, the police fired some warning shots, one of which accidentally injured the Applicant. The Respondent, therefore, denied that it violated Mr. Morlu's human rights.

In the judgment, the Court rejected the Respondent's claim that Morlu was injured accidentally, finding that the firing of live ammunition into the crowd of protesting students by the police was unjustified. The Court also upheld the Applicant's case that he suffered torture and that the Respondent failed to provide effective redress by investigating, identifying, and prosecuting the perpetrators.

The panel of judges were Justice Edward Amoako Asante, Judge Rapporteur for the case, and Justices Gberi-Bè Ouattara and Sengu M. Koroma.

**For further information, visit the Community Court of Justice, ECOWAS website at [www.courtecowas.org](http://www.courtecowas.org) or contact the Information Officers using the contact details below:**

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