

## DEFENCE FOR GIRLS AND HOPE GIRL SIERRA LEONE

PRESS STATEMENT – 21<sup>st</sup> September 2015

### **Girls and young women from communities that were worst affected by the September 16<sup>th</sup> flood raise concern over slow government response**

We are girls of the Defence for Girls group and young women of Hope Girl Sierra Leone. These groups were established by the Defence for Children International under the Girl Power Project. These groups were established since five years ago in very challenging communities in the Western Area of Sierra Leone and Moyamba district to address issues and barriers to the protection, survival and development of the Girl Child.

As you may be aware, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2015, there was a heavy rain in Freetown, which resulted to widespread flooding across Freetown. The flood led to the destruction of many lives particularly of women and children and properties across Freetown. The situation was even worse in the slum communities that are located close to the ocean where most of our members lived. Many women and children including our members have become homeless, they have lost everything including their school materials, food, clothing, cash and other things. Some children including our members got injured and are still in pain.

Many of the victims particularly those whose homes were completely destroyed have been given temporary shelter at the national stadium and the Attouga mini stadium in Freetown. Despite this development, many of the people who were affected have remained in their communities because they are afraid of overcrowding at the stadium, in order to prevent Ebola infection and any other potential outbreak like cholera. Access to food supply at the stadium is also by 'survival of the fittest'. Whilst some of our members are residing now at the stadium, most of us have remained in our communities.

As a local advocacy body, we would like to first extend our sympathy to all the affected persons and thank the government and partners for their response so far. We would however raise the following concerns as a group:

- The intervention of the government and most partners are only targeting displaced persons residing at the stadium, forgetting about majority of the victims who are still living in the most affected communities;
- We the children in these communities cannot attend school at the moment as we have lost everything including our school properties;
- Girls and young women in these communities have become even more vulnerable and men are now taking advantage of the situation to abuse them and many may end up becoming pregnant if their vulnerability is not addressed;
- The stadium is becoming overcrowded and we have seen up to 15 or more people including our members forced to live under one tent. They are at high risk of Ebola infection and other potential contagious diseases;

- We still have our injured colleagues who have not received any medical help;
- Gender stereotype roles remain to put women and girls more at risk and end up dying much more whenever there is a crisis. From our own observation, most of the deaths were women and girls because they were at home doing domestic work when the flood took place.

On this note, we would like to recommend to the government and partners to address the following:

- Put an emergency programme together to address the immediate needs of all the affected persons particularly in the worst affected communities; This kind of programme should be given a gender lens otherwise it will not work well;
- Provide an emergency relief and educational supplies to affected children and their families within the shortest possible time so that the children can return to school immediately; We had already stayed out of school for several months due to the Ebola outbreak and we would not like a repetition of that;
- Work on a plan to provide permanent solution to the problem of flood by addressing shelter inadequacy, improve on drainages and environmental affecting citizens particularly those living in the affected areas and other high-risk communities. We need a safer place to live and note that we have right to life, shelter, and good health
- Educate communities about environmental management and disaster response

Please note that we are not the problem neither the cause of the problem. We are rather the solution to the problem and thus recommend that you should consider our involvement in the response process as actors and not just as victims.



