



PRESS RELEASE – 10 October 2016

THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD REITERATES THAT ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IS CENTRAL FOR SIERRA LEONE’S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

Freetown – Defence for Children International – Sierra Leone (DCI-SL) today welcomes the Concluding Observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by the State of Sierra Leone. The session, in which the State’s report was considered, took place from 14-15 September 2016 in Geneva, Switzerland.

“Today’s concluding observations takes us one step closer to a landmark agreement for a country where children are protected in both law and practice and safe environment is available to all,” Mr. Abdul Manaff Kemokai, Executive Director, DCI-SL said. “We welcome the inclusion of abuse and neglect, sexual exploitation and abuse, harmful practices, children with disabilities and education as the six major issues identified by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and we emphasize how important it will be to achieve.”

Since 2002, Sierra Leone has made significant achievements in various child protection areas, including the ratification of international human rights instruments, as well as the adoption of the Child Rights Act (2007), the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act (2007), the Sexual Offences Act (2012) and several child-relevant policies, in particular the National Child Justice Strategy (2013) and the Child Welfare Policy (2013).

Yet, in spite of the strong development of legal instruments, their implementations on the ground leave a lot to be desired. The UNCRC noted this concern while also acknowledging that the Ebola Virus Disease caused tremendous hardship and had a negative effect on the implementation of the rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child in Sierra Leone.

In its Concluding Observations, the Committee particularly addressed the issue of violence against children. It raised serious concerns over widespread incidents of sexual harassment and violence, including rape, in schools, at home and in many other settings. Moreover, the Committee was troubled by the low rate of reporting of cases of sexual abuse and exploitation, as victims, families and other witnesses are reluctant to report such cases, and the non-application of dispositions guaranteed in the Sexual Offences Act (2012) and the National Referral Protocol (2012), such as access to free medical examination and treatment, and compensation for child victims of sexual violence.

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Finally, the Committee was concerned by the low rate of convictions of perpetrators of such type of violence, and the lack of efforts to end impunity. In addition, the Committee encourages the State of Sierra Leone to ensure the full and effective prohibition of female genital mutilation through adequate support to former practitioners and child marriage through harmonization of national and customary laws.

DCI-SL, as a child protection organisation committed to strengthening existing child protection systems in Sierra Leone, therefore, urges the State to step up efforts and effectively implement the recommendations laid down in the Concluding Observations of the UNCRC Committee to end violence against children in Sierra Leone.

The Government should continue harmonising all domestic legislations relating to children with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including by reviewing the Child Rights Act and ensuring that it has precedence over all other laws and that all the gaps that have been identified in other laws that concern children, such as trafficking, child marriage, child labour and other issues, are adequately addressed.

The Government should ensure the effectiveness of mechanisms, procedures and guidelines for mandatory reporting of cases of sexual abuse and exploitation and ensure accessible, child-friendly and effective reporting channels for such violations;

Moreover, the State should prioritize and ensure adequate resources for the implementation of the Sexual Offences Act and other relevant legislations and adopt comprehensive measures to address such violence.

Defence for Children International – Sierra Leone joins the Committee on the Rights of the Child to urge the government of Sierra Leone to establish early detection and prevention mechanisms of child abuse at the community level, by, inter alia, strengthening the capacity of the existing local councils, child welfare committees and other community-based child protection mechanisms to effectively respond to child protection issues at community levels.

“As the government works towards improving the situation of girls and young women, it must not neglect the recommendations of the UNCRC in the present concluding observations. In the coming years, there is a chance to address these desperate needs to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals on ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children,” Mr. Kemokai said.

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The Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for the review of Sierra Leone can be downloaded

here: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/SLE/CRC_C_SLE_CO_3-5_25464_E.pdf

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