



## **Pre-session 52 Statement of Defence for Children International, Sierra Leone**

**Geneva, February, 2026**

This statement is delivered on behalf of the Child Rights Coalition, Sierra Leone, established in 2007. The coalition constitutes national and international NGOs to monitor and advocate for children's rights. In developing this child centered UPR report, the coalition organised consultations in all 5 regions of Sierra Leone targeting children, young people and adults. The report is based on children's rights specifically focusing on Child Exploitation, Child Justice and Access to Education.

### **1. Exploitation of Children- Child Trafficking, Child Labour and Child Prostitution**

- Strengthen efforts to combat trafficking of children and women (Holy See, India, Brazil, Ukraine and the Islamic Republic of Iran)
- Widen the presence of labour inspectors across the country so as to strengthen monitoring, enforcement and awareness-raising, with a view to identifying victims of trafficking for their rehabilitation and enrolment in school, as well as prosecution of perpetrators (Botswana)

#### **Actions of government and Key Concerns**

- Passage of new laws such as the Trafficking in Person and Migrant Smuggling Act 2022 and the Child Rights Act 2025, which criminalize Child Trafficking, Child Labour and Child Prostitution.
- The Establishment of Trafficking in Person Secretariat
- Adoption of a national policy on street children
- Training of judges and prosecutors in collaboration with UNODC, DCI, IOM and WHI

Despite all these, it is very common and alarming to openly see many of children engaged in street hawking, begging with adults with disability, stone mining, and farming during school hours and street hawking and prostitution at night especially in major cities like Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Koidu. Most of these children have been trafficked from rural communities. 16.4% of Children aged 12-14 years are engaged in 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work and nearly half (41%) of Children aged 15-17 years are engaged in 43 hours of economic or domestic work or even hazardous work. With increasing rate of child labour and commercial sexual exploitation of children in the country, child trafficking continues to be among the highest forms of child abuse and exploitation and this has exposed children to risk of harm. Yet prosecution is hardly done and programmes for victims' protection and rehabilitation are quite limited to NGOs' donor driven projects



## Recommendations

- Empower social workers and labour inspectors to monitor and regulate child work and rescue victims of child labour for rehabilitation
- Strictly enforce legislative ban on night child street hawking and child prostitution and prosecute perpetrators in accordance with Child Rights Act and other relevant laws
- Implement community-based policies and programs involving community leaders that regulate transfer of children from rural to urban areas
- Combat both internal and cross border trafficking of children by implementing youth led awareness raising programmes and strengthening border security and immigration checks particularly at road borders
- In the absence of legislative ban on FGM, government should pronounce its position on FGM and instruct paramount chiefs to protect girls that are running away from it

## 2. Child Justice

- Further promote access to justice through the appropriate policies and programmes (Sri Lanka);
- Implement all possible measures to expedite the processing of judicial cases, especially those related to children detained without charges (Ecuador);
- Adopt measures to prevent overcrowding in penitentiary centres and improve the conditions of persons deprived of their liberty (United States, Mexico and Libya)

## Actions of Government and Key Concerns

Government has passed the Child Rights Act 2025 and the Criminal Procedure Act 2025, that have made progressive and child friendly provisions that would improve access to justice for children in conflict with the law if implemented. However, at the moment, access to justice for children remains challenging. There is yet only one juvenile court in the entire country located in Freetown only. Investigation and trial processes remain slow, expensive and heavy for children, leading to prolonged trials and pre-trial detention of children under horrible conditions. On the average about 20 children are always locked up in single rooms in each of the Remand Homes in Freetown and Bo and Approved School in Freetown, whilst others are locked up together with adults in police cells.

## Recommendation

1. Implement the new Child Rights Act 2025 by developing regulations that guide effective implementation of the Act, develop and finance implementation of plan of action through the various institutions concerned.
2. Implement diversion programmes in accordance with the Diversion Policy and Child Rights Act



3. Provide timely food, health care services, and hygiene and sanitation supplies for inmates at the detention facilities.
4. Provide need based educational and rehabilitation programmes at the detention facilities
5. Implement child led prevention programmes such as life skills development for children and young people
6. Provide regular child rights in service training for professionals handling child justice

### **3. Access to Education**

Several states including Turkey, Fiji, Holy Water and India have admonished the government to continue to make education a priority by addressing obstacles to school attendance and completion such as removal of all additional costs and discrimination in order to facilitate the school attendance of all children

#### **Actions of government and Key Concerns**

Since 2018, Sierra Leone has achieved remarkable progress, including the INTRODUCTION OF THE Free Quality Education Policy, the passage of a new Education Act 2022, enrolment of over 2.5 million children, especially girls in schools nationwide; the recruitment of additional new teachers; the resuscitation of school feeding for thousands of children; the approval of over 3,000 new schools; lifting of ban on pregnant girls from attending school and the provision of teaching and learning materials.

Notwithstanding the above progress, significant gaps continue to exist that makes schools ineffective, prohibitive or learning challenging for many students. These include:

- Delays in subsidy transfers, which affects running of schools under free education system.
- Corruption practices including regular extortion of money from students, which has led to drop out of students
- Inadequate trained and qualified teachers especially in rural schools. On average Sierra Leone schools have one trained teacher per 59 students, which is under the sub-Saharan Africa average of 58 to 1 teacher (UNESCO update April 2023).
- Only 62% of the overall teaching staff are qualified teachers, which poses challenges to quality education.
- Though gross enrolment rate among students has increased, it is uneven across the country, with rural districts like Pujehun, Falaba and Kailahun scoring lower GER
- There are not enough special education needs schools across the country and teachers often do not have the capacity to integrate them into the mainstream at secondary school



## **Recommendation**

- Employ more trained and qualified teachers and introduce teachers' deployment policy that can equally benefit rural schools
- Regulate the practice of teachers extortion of money from students
- Identify out of school children and enroll them into schools or vocational institutions and social protection programmes depending on their age and educational need
- Improve learning outcomes of students particularly in rural areas by implementing evidence-based pedagogical approaches, integrating technology and encouraging participatory learning
- Increase access to education for children with special needs by establishing more special needs schools especially at tertiary level as well as making provisions in existing schools to integrate students with special needs especially the hearing impaired.