



Mr. President,

Despite the Liberian Government's noted steps to fight sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), for Suedwind the high prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) remains a matter of major concern, as do rape and other forms of sexual violence committed in Liberia. Over half of the rape cases reported involve girls under the age of 16. FGM performed on young girls is still widely prevalent, particularly in rural areas, as part of initiation rites linked to secret myths.

FGM constitutes an extreme form of gender discrimination. It violates the very rights of children and women, including their rights to mental health, security and physical integrity, their right to be free from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and their right to life when the procedure results in death. Over 20% of the initiates die from excessive bleeding, killing hundreds of girls annually. This cannot be in the "best interests" of the child, which constitutes the primary guideline of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Liberia's deep-rooted gender inequalities, inefficient justice system, and immense poverty are all factors that constitute major obstacles to the elimination of SGBV and FGM. Another decisive factor is the lack of economic opportunities that could offer appropriate alternatives to harmful traditional behaviour.

As a matter of priority, Suedwind urges the Republic of Liberia to

- i. Declare FGM a criminal act and take specific measures to prevent the same in conformity with its international and regional human rights obligations, including the CRC, CEDAW, CAT, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa; and
- ii. Combat impunity and promote accountability through full and impartial investigation, as well as ensure the prosecution via fair trials of all reported cases of SGBV.

In order to eliminate weaknesses in the justice system, the Government should meet its primary obligations and provide all necessary resources to support the newly established Criminal Court E and enable the Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission to fulfil its mandate. Furthermore, it should monitor the work of the Sexual and Gender Based Violent Crimes Unit, strengthening its operation across the country.



The abolition of SGBV and FGM on a sustainable basis calls for broad awareness-raising campaigns at both the local and national levels through multi-sectoral action. This includes explicit education on the harmful consequences of FGM, as well as the introduction of economic empowerment programmes for women, thereby making them less vulnerable to exploitation.

Thank you, Mr. President.