

STATEMENT
UPR Pre-session 38 on Sierra Leone,
Geneva, 22nd March 2021
Delivered by: Child Rights Coalition - Sierra Leone

1- Presentation of the Organization

This statement is delivered on behalf of Child Rights Coalition – Sierra Leone (CRC-SL), a coalition of civil society organizations that monitors and reports on the implementation of international human rights instruments on children’s rights. CRC-SL has participated in UPR processes since 2015.

2- National consultations for the drafting of the national report

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation led inter-ministerial consultations for the development of the National Report and invited Civil Society Organizations. CRC-SL invited the Human Rights Commission Sierra Leone to participate in consultations for the development of their alternative report.

3- Plan of the Statement

This statement addresses the following issues: (1) Child Labour, (2) Child Trafficking, and (3) Right to Education.

(1) Child Labour

a. Follow-up to the first review

Four recommendations (A-111.132 – A-111.135) were made to prohibit child labour in the second UPR cycle. Two of the recommendations from Albania and Angola urged the GoSL to implement the National Action Plan against Child Labour exploitation while the other two were general recommendations. The other two recommendations from Libya and Oman were quite general.

The 2018 household-level survey on child labor and employment reported that the worst forms of child labor occur in the mining sector and in commercial sexual exploitation. Hazardous work also includes street trading (mostly in the urban areas), fishing at the high seas, and quarrying. About 26% of children are involved in various forms of work. Child labour is mostly connected to human trafficking. The types of hazardous work prohibited for children do not cover all sectors where child labor is known to occur such as street trading. Labour laws are not adequately enforced.

b. New developments since the first review

Some steps taken by the GoSL to address the general recommendations include: the adoption of a National Employment Policy and the formation of a National Technical Steering Committee on child labour. Data collection and reporting on child labour in Sierra Leone has progressively improved.

c. Recommendations

We therefore urge the upcoming UPR to prioritize child labour and to GoSL to:

- i. Regulate the involvement of children in apprenticeship and informal skills training programmes.

- ii. Design and implement strategies necessary to achieve target 8.7 of the SDGs and which address the situation of children involved in street trading, domestic work and in the agricultural sector.
- iii. Adopt and fully implement a comprehensive strategy that addresses the situation of children in the street.

(2) Child Trafficking

a. Follow-up to the first review

Only one general recommendation (A-111.131), from the United States of America, was made on human trafficking, which also covers child trafficking. Recommendations on child labour have implications for child trafficking as well. In addition, general recommendations A-111.139 – 142 on fighting impunity of perpetrators and increasing access to justice for vulnerable groups also enhance the fight against child trafficking. Internal child trafficking remains high due to widespread cultural practices of fostering and increase in child labour and commercial sexual exploitation of children. With the COVID-19 pandemic, we face the risk of reverting years of progress. The many porous borders enable child trafficking out of the country.

b. New developments since the first review

Significant steps taken to address human trafficking, including child trafficking are the commencement of the review of the Trafficking in Persons Act of 2005, a functioning Trafficking in Persons Taskforce that coordinates policy reforms and programmes, and the adoption of a new National Plan of Action on Human Trafficking in September 2020. Sierra Leone moved from Tier 2 watch list to Tier 2 list in the 2019 Report of the State Department of the United States of America because of the landmark conviction of child traffickers that were arrested due to enhanced cross border collaboration.

c. Recommendations

The coalition recommends that the Government of Sierra Leone:

- i. Finalizes and passes an amended child-centered Trafficking in Persons Bill;
- ii. Sets up and fully implements a community-based surveillance mechanism on child trafficking in all border communities;
- iii. Leads efforts to ensure equal access to justice for all as required by SDG 16.3 target and put an end to trafficking to achieve SDG 16.2 target;
- iv. Takes action towards the ratification of the OPIC acknowledging the legal empowerment of child survivors by giving them the capacity to take legal action on their own with child-friendly rules of procedure.

(3) Right to Education

a. Follow-up to the second review

While many of the recommendations on the right to education were general, 7 of the recommendations from Uruguay, Germany, Belgium, Canada, Ireland, Jamaica, and Tunisia, specifically urged the GoSL to reverse the ban that prevented pregnant teenagers from continuing their studies.

b. New developments since the second review

The GoSL took major steps on general and specific recommendations. The GoSL prioritized education in Medium-term National Development (MTNDP) Plan. Launched in 2018, the Government's flagship programme, the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) expands educational opportunities for children. Progress include: increased budgetary allocation to the education sector to 22%, the construction of schools, the approval of new schools, the approval of up to 5,000 teachers, increase in teachers' salaries by 30%, the review of the national curriculum framework to meet the nation's development needs, and the expansion of the Radio Teaching Programme to cover all levels and reach more pupils.

In March 2020, the GoSL lifted the ban on pregnant girls attending school, replacing it with Radical Inclusion Policy and Comprehensive Safety Policy, which ensure that all children are able to live and learn in safety and dignity. The ECOWAS Court had earlier ruled against the ban as being discriminatory and a human rights violation in December 2019. MBSSE also led a nationwide campaign on zero-schoolgirl pregnancy during the closure of school to contain COVID-19 impact in 2020.

c. Recommendations

In order to guarantee the right to education for every child, we recommend to GoSL to:

- i. Fully implement the Radical Inclusion Policy, ensuring community ownership of its implementation;
- ii. Fully implement the Education Act 2005, enforcing the provision of compulsory basic education improving the quality of education at all levels;
- iii. Establish interventions that support pregnant girls to attend, progress, and complete school, including promoting safe school environments free from GBV, broader school health programmes and comprehensive sexuality education in curricula.