

## Oral Statement by DCI Sierra Leone

We would like to say thanks to the SRSG/VAC for carefully taking her/his time to do a comprehensive presentation of his/her report on children and the administration of juvenile justice to the UN Human Rights Council. We very much appreciate the fact that she is constantly following the situation of children in conflict with the law across the globe.

Let me take this opportunity to confirm the content of your presentation(s) by updating you with Sierra Leone specific information on the situation of children in conflict with the law, which are of grave concern to Defence for Children International. Sierra Leone is a post war country whose judicial and social service infrastructures are very weak and can hardly comply with both national and international standards. As a result the system itself continues to violate the rights of young people with impunity.

Let me quickly draw your attention to the following concerns: Arbitrary detention of children in poor conditions is still a common practice in Sierra Leone. In Freetown, 88% and 89% of juveniles at the Remand Home and Approved School respectively were detained with adults in police custody for at least 6 days on the average<sup>1</sup> at the time they were under police investigation

A graver concern is about 5 boys who have been in pre-trial detention at the Freetown Remand Home for over 2 years including 1 boy that has spent over 7 years in remand without any significant progress on their cases, irrespective of the fact that DCI and the Pilot National Legal Aid Scheme have done persistent advocacy including legal aid to enhance their access justice. These boys desperately need help, otherwise at 18, they shall be transferred to the adult prison to continue their remand, which will further complicate their cases. DCI-SL monitoring report also reveals that there are many children held in adult prisons across the country largely due to age verification difficulty. Their continued detention is not only in contravention of international standards but local legislations as well.

Please also note that detention conditions for children in Sierra Leone is very appalling with poor sanitation, frequent shortage of food and lack of education and health facilities. Children living in this condition are potential victims of poor physical and psychological childhood development, which is also a violation of a fundamental right of the child. The provision of social services for these children is entirely left in the hands of the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children's Affairs, which is apparently one of the least funded ministries<sup>2</sup> by the government of Sierra Leone.

---

<sup>1</sup> DCI-SL Juvenile Justice Assessment Report 2010: Beyond the Law

<sup>2</sup> Receives less than 1% of the national budget

Chairperson, Though the government have set up the Family Support Unit within the Sierra Leone Police to be investigating all matters concerning children whether in conflict with the law or victims of crime, the section has not been able to develop child-friendly complaint system, and so too is the judiciary. Hence police and judicial officers continue to violate the rights of children in conflict with the law with impunity. Additionally, despite the fact that Sierra Leone still have gaps in its legislations that govern the administration of juvenile justice, new policies and guidelines (including the Age Verification Guidelines) that government had developed with the support of UNICEF, NGOs and the Justice Sector Development Programme are not being implemented. This is a clear demonstration of the limited interest that government accords juvenile justice administration.

In this regard, we would like to encourage the Special Rapporteur to:

- Pay a visit to Sierra Leone or engage the government of Sierra Leone with the above issues;
- Advise the government of Sierra Leone to upgrade the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police and develop child friendly complaint system with the unit and also within the judiciary;
- Ensure that the government of Sierra Leone develops a strategy and plan of action to improve on the administration of juvenile justice.

We would also like to call upon the Human Rights Council to:

- Pay attention to juvenile justice issues when reviewing the next UPR report from Sierra Leone
- advice government of Sierra Leone to use inter-ministerial approach to address the issues of juvenile justice

Thank you Mr/Madam Chairperson for giving me opportunity to highlight these concerns.