Defence for Children International
the worldwide movement for children's rights

24th session of the Universal Periodic Review
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RECOMMENDATIONS ON THEMES RELATING TO CHILDREN'S RIGHTS PRESENTED BY DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL

1. INADEQUATE SUPPORT TO EBOLA AFFECTED CHILDREN	
SUBJECT	Children are the most vulnerable group affected by the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), which broke out in Sierra Leone in May 2014
SUMMARY	• More than 18,000 children have been affected in different ways by the Ebola outbreak (some exposed to an infected person, other have lost one or both parents, etc). One in five people infected with EVD is a child. The outbreak of the EVD in Sierra Leone increased children's vulnerability to abandonment, violence, exploitation and abuse. During the EVD outbreak the health service utilization dropped significantly and put children at even more risk. • The outbreak has affected the national economy, the availability of food and the ability to make a living for a large part of the population a challenge. • Investments should be prioritized within the short, medium and long-term recovery plans to better build back a strong foundation for the children of Sierra Leone.

SPECIFIC OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE INTL. LAW

Article 24, UNCRC: 1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services (…)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Rapidly establish and guarantee adequate and accessible support to vulnerable children.
- ✓ Establish an effective inter-ministerial coordination forum on Ebola.
- ✓ Allocate sufficient resources to monitor and report on the care and protection of children affected by Ebola.
- ✓ Expand the Free Health Care Initiative to cover all EVD affected children.
- ✓ Develop concrete plans to ensure continuous education support for EVD affected children.
- ✓ Increase efforts to address food insecurity and malnutrition, ensuring that EVD affected children are provided with a food safety net.

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2. DISCRIMINATION AGAINST GIRLS ACCESSING EDUCATION, PARTICULARLY PREGNANT GIRLS	
SUBJECT	After the Ebola outbreak, the Government of Sierra Leone reopened schools on 14th April 2015. However, there are restrictions on attending schools for girls who are pregnant.
SUMMARY	• The Government of Sierra Leone decided that girls who fell pregnant during recent months (with the Ebola outbreak) would not be allowed to return to school before childbirth. • 28% of girls aged 15-19 years are already mothers or currently pregnant (according to 2013 Demographic and Health Survey). • Poor level of education for girls and women is a major issue with a high level of negative consequences in Sierra Leone. • Educating mothers has been globally proven to improve the overall health of their children, as well as provide opportunities to receive an income.

SPECIFIC OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE INTL. LAW

Article 2, UNCRC: States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination

Article 28, UNCRC: right to education, with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Provide reparative and supportive interventions for children who have suffered from discriminatory practices in education. In particular, repeal the restriction on pregnant girls attending school. All children have the right to benefit from a quality education, including pregnant girls.
- ✓ Address gaps and weaknesses in interagency collaboration and improve joint planning to address the special needs of adolescent girls.
- ✓ Re-introduce family life education in schools, and expand sexual and reproductive health services to all children and youth.
- ✓ Effectively implement the Sexual Offences Act (2012) that confirms 16 as the age of sexual consent.

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3. SEXUAL ABUSE AND VIOLENCE	
SUBJECT	Gender based violence and sexual abuse of women and children in Sierra Leone.
SUMMARY	• There is a lack of effective implementation and enforcement of the Sexual Offences Act (2012) and three other gender Acts, which makes girls and women particularly vulnerable to such crimes. • Many children are being abused without any legal recourse due to their limited access to justice. • One of the visible effects on girls is the increasing number of teenage pregnancy, due to the necessity of girls to exchange sex for money and food in order to fend for themselves and/or other family members. • The persistent problem of early marriage also contributes to the high rate of teenage pregnancy with 16% of girls married before the age of 16 and 28% before the age of 18. • These problems continue to exist largely because of prevalence of impunity.
SPECIFIC OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE INTL. LAW	
Article 19, UNCRC: prohibit all forms of violence against children. **Article 34, UNCRC:** States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. **Article 39, UNCRC:** States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim.	
RECOMMENDATIONS	
✓ Ensure full and effective implementation of the Sexual Offences Act (2012). ✓ Review laws, policies and practices in line with the United Nations Study on Violence against Children (2006). ✓ Prioritize prevention measures to address poverty and other social issues that continue to increase children's vulnerability to sexual and other forms of violence. ✓ Strengthen community based child protection mechanisms and raise awareness of children and families to use these mechanisms. ✓ Raise public awareness on the provisions of the Sexual Offences Act, Domestic Violence Act and Referral System; as well as provide redress and rehabilitation for victims of sexual and other forms of violence.	

4. CHILD TRAFFICKING AND CHILD LABOUR	
SUBJECT	Children continue to be exploited
SUMMARY	• The exploitation of children needs to be tackled in areas such as domestic work and hazardous labour especially in the mining sector, commercial sex and trafficking. • Gaps identified include: the lack of concerted efforts to educate the population on the dangers of trafficking and ways to prevent it; limited services to identify trafficking victims to provide them with protective services; and weak prosecution of trafficking offenders. • The majority of trafficking cases involve children being trafficked within the country, where they are at risk of hazardous labour and prostitution. • Poor quality education and difficulties in accessing schools, contribute to children dropping out of school and becoming involved in exploitative labour or other high risk activities. • 50% of children are engaged in some form of child labour, though the majority are balancing work with education.

SPECIFIC OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE INTL. LAW

Article 35, UNCRC: States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

Article 32, UNCRC: States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

No. 138, ILO Convention: Minimum Age for Admission to Employment.

No. 182, ILO Convention: Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Accede to the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect to inter country adoption.
- ✓ Effectively enact the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and Children.
- ✓ Review the Trafficking in Persons Act of 2005 and the adoption Act of 1989 in line with international instruments and put in place mechanisms for the implementation of such laws in order to prevent recruitment of children for adoption and trafficking.
- ✓ Establish proactive measures (such as awareness raising on trafficking laws) in order to rescue and support victims of trafficking, and provide reintegration services for victims and prosecute perpetrators.
- ✓ Develop and implement policies that control child labour and increase opportunities for children to access quality education.
- ✓ Establish adequate measures and monitoring mechanisms for Ebola affected children who would otherwise remain at extremely high risk of trafficking (as was the case of war affected children).

5. HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES – FGM AND CHILD FORCED MARRIAGE	
SUBJECT	FGM is widespread and is deeply rooted in tradition, signifying the rite of passage for girls into womanhood. The practice is secret and is carried out as part of initiation into the Bondo society.
SUMMARY	• Approximately 94% of women in Sierra Leone are members of a secret society which means by proxy they are subject to FGM. • FGM has many social and health consequences on girls who are initiated at very early ages. • Circumcision leads to early marriage, increases the risk of exposure to early sexual activity, to pregnancy and to child bearing at relatively young ages. These may result in premature but permanent interruption of a girl education. • Forced and child marriages deny children their childhood, disrupt their education, jeopardize their health and limit their opportunities. • Forced and child marriages are also more likely to become violent because the relationship is based on the power of one spouse over the other. • Young girls with low levels of education are more likely to experience violence by an intimate partner.
SPECIFIC OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE INTL. LAW	
Article 19, UNCRC: prohibit all forms of violence against children **Article 39, UNCRC:** promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of **Article 3.2, UNCRC:** ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being **Article 12, UNCRC:** assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child	
RECOMMENDATIONS	
✓ Amend the Child Rights Act (2007) to prohibit FGM for anyone under the age of 18. ✓ Facilitate and create an enabling environment for open dialogue on FGM. ✓ Provide comprehensive package of services to address retirement compensations and alternative livelihood for Bondo societal heads to incentivize them to give up the practice of initiation. ✓ Enforce the Sexual Offences Act (2012) that confirms the age of sexual consent at 16 years and holds perpetrators accountable for sexual violence. ✓ Increase universal birth and marriage registration and establish additional registration locations. ✓ Codify and endorse bylaws at district and community level that prohibit marriage for persons below the age of 18. ✓ Ending child marriage and violence must remain a priority for the government and all child protection agencies.	