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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press statement

The State of Liberia received several recommendations on the issue of child marriage during the [Second Cycle of the UPR](#) in 2015. Distinguished ladies and gentleman, Members of the Various Print and Electronic Media here present, members and Executive of the Liberia Child Rights NGO Coalition (ANPPCAN, Defence for Children-Liberia, Plan International-Liberia and SEARCH etc.), the Liberia Children Forum, and Members of the National Children & Youth Advisory Board.

I send you warm greetings from the family of Defence for Children–Liberia located on Russell Avenue, Sinkor-Monrovia, Liberia. This Statement is delivered for the adoption of the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Liberia.

Background of the alleged Abduction and Trafficking of Children.

The State of Liberia received 27 recommendations related to violence during the previous UPR cycle. Unfortunately, a widespread culture of impunity for SGBV, particularly for rape, persists and COVID-19 put young women and girls at increased risk of violence exacerbated by economic hardships and despair within families. Unintended pregnancies are also on the rise with potentially many deaths of girls from unsafe abortion and complicated births due to inadequate access to emergency care.

Efforts by the State to implement the international legal frameworks at the national level, gaps still exist between these legislations and the customary laws, in particular those relating to child rights issues. The Constitution dictates that national legislation should take precedence over customary laws. In practice, customary laws are much more widely used particularly in rural areas and affect the majority of the population primarily. Moreover, the Optional Protocols to the UN CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography, were both signed in 2004, but not ratified.

On March 18th 2021, the Human Rights Council in Geneva held the UPR adoption of Liberia as an outcome of the 36th session. Cllr. Frank Musah Dean, Minister of Justice, Attorney General of the Republic of Liberia, confirmed that 166 recommendations (out of 218) were adopted but 52 noted. Among the ones only noted, we regret the lack of political will to address female genital mutilations. Such statements are not justified by the facts given Liberia's continued lack of

accountability. Liberia's approach also runs counter to SDG target 5.3 'Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation'), and no significant progress on justice for victims has been observed.

In this regard, we wish to congratulate the state Party for accepting the following recommendations in the best interest of the Children of Liberia:

- I. Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.
- II. Expedite the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.
- III. Enact legislation that explicitly prohibits corporal punishment in all settings, including at home.
- IV. Ensure the timely implementation of the four-year National Action Plan for Child Welfare and Protection for Liberia, and allocate sufficient resources for the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to implement the plan.
- V. Ensure free birth registration of all children born in the country.
- VI. Carry on the efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.
- VII. Take effective legal measures to prohibit and eliminate child and forced marriages.

We are however disappointed in the Government of Liberia did not adopt the following recommendations made by UN Member States:

- Develop a legal framework in the Penal Code that explicitly criminalizes the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) including specific penalties.
- Prioritize the Strategy for the Protection of Girls against Child Marriage (2016) in conformity with the 2063 Agenda of the African Union and criminalize female genital mutilation.
- Intensify efforts to prevent and respond to SGBV, as well as to criminalize Female Genital Mutilation in all circumstances and ultimately eradicate the practice.
- Expand the existing public awareness campaigns against FGM and other harmful traditional practices to all the country's counties.

Setting aside these key recommendations is not in the best interest of the children of Liberia. It is unfortunate that the Government of Liberia will place a moratorium and Executive orders on the Practice of FGM but cannot banned its practices in keeping with the Concluding Observations and Recommendations of the UPR, CEDAW, UNCRC, and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child etc.

On the contrary, Liberia continues to celebrate, makes Speeches on February 6 of each year in observance of the eradication of FGM in the world but the Government is not in the position to commit its recommendations without the requisite preparation.



We are also reminding the Government of Liberia through the **Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection** to submit the overly due State Party reports since January 2018 of the UNCRC and to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC).

Recommendations:

The Liberia Child Rights NGO Coalition wishes to add its voice on previous recommendations and Concluding Observations of UPR, CEDAW, and the UNCRC to the State Party for Immediate actions. The Liberian government should unequivocally:

- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.
- Expedite the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.
- Ensure the timely implementation of the four-year National Action Plan for Child Welfare and Protection for Liberia, and allocate sufficient resources for the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to implement the plan.
- Develop a legal framework in the Penal Code that explicitly criminalizes the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) including specific penalties.
- Prioritize the Strategy for the Protection of Girls against Child Marriage (2016) in conformity with the 2063 Agenda of the African Union and criminalize female genital mutilation.
- Intensify efforts to prevent and respond to SGBV, as well as to criminalize Female Genital Mutilation in all circumstances and ultimately eradicate the practice.
- Expand the existing public awareness campaigns against FGM and other harmful traditional practices to all the country's counties.
- Submit the overly due State Party reports since January 2018 of the UNCRC and to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC).

Thank you.

For more information, please read our CSO joint submission to the UPR 36th session [here](#).

Media contact:

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