



Joint statement before the 47th session of the UN Human Rights Council

**Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women,
its causes and consequences**

Thank you, Madam President.

Defence for Children International commends the efforts of the Special Rapporteur to give particular attention to rape.

According to UNICEF, 1 in 10 girls under age 20 have been subjected to forced sexual acts, globally.

At the international level, although many of the “child-focused” resolutions of both the HRC and UNGA do discuss the issue of sexual violence, these mentions tend in general to be gender-blind. They have failed to recognise the specific vulnerability of girls to rape, as well as the gender unequal social structures that fuel such violence.

In Sierra Leone, DCI trains lawyers on strategic litigation for sexual and gender-based violence at regional and international level. But many gaps and challenges remain for victims of rape to be heard and supported. Access to essential services, survivors and witness support and protection, poor investigation and lack of effective collaboration between police prosecutors at the magistrate courts and investigation officers, remain serious issues to be addressed.

Therefore, we urge States to:

- Criminalise rape with specific legislation in cases involving children, given the severity of offense, and covering gaps when rape occurs in the context of child marriage;
- Explicitly include lack of consent and set the age of consent not below 15 years;
- Address barriers to the reporting and to the accountability of perpetrators, particularly in rural areas, and protect survivors from revictimisation.

I thank you.