

28<sup>th</sup> June 2023

**Human Rights Council 53<sup>rd</sup> Session - Item 3 Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Siobhán Mullally**

**On behalf of Defence for Children International (DCI) – Sierra Leone**

Mr. President,

Defence for Children International (DCI) thanks the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons for her report and further commends the rapporteur for continuing to push for child trafficking to be among the top priorities of the international community.

DCI national sections in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia have been jointly providing capacity support to border security officials and communities in the Mano River region of West Africa, in particular at the borders between Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea to implement the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), signed in 2018, to Prevent and Respond to cross-border Child Trafficking. Through the implementation of these SOPs, significant successes have been achieved in rescuing victims and referring them to receive recovery services and be safely reintegrated.

Over 200 survivors have benefited from legal, recovery and reintegration services provided by DCI sections, World Hope International and IOM in the last two years. However, the major challenge is that perpetrators are not arrested and prosecuted, so they continue to operate with impunity. This is because they now use digital services (mobile phone and internet) to recruit victims and convey them to the transit and destination's locations without physically traveling with them.

Law enforcement officials lack the capacity to effectively pursue and investigate criminals operating in the digital space. Hence, more attention should be paid to this issue as online traffickers are able to recruit several victims at the same time and they can exploit them multiple times.

DCI calls on member states to build the capacities of developing countries like MRU countries to effectively fight cybercrimes and prosecute criminals.

We urge all member states to:

- Lead a multi-stakeholder approach in their countries and regions involving security and law enforcement agencies, other relevant state institutions, private sector, parents/care givers and children and young people to play their roles in ending online child trafficking;
- Strengthen cross-border cooperation including sharing of relevant information and digital collaboration between States;
- Map out the groups that are more vulnerable and provide them with awareness-raising;
- Carry out inter-country investigation about existing trafficking cartels in the region.

Thank you.