



## UPR 36<sup>th</sup> Pre-Session of Liberia

### Joint Statement on Child Rights

Dear representatives of Permanent Missions and civil society, good morning/afternoon

My name is Foday M. Kawah and I am the Executive Director of Defence for Children International – Liberia (DCI-Liberia). I am honored to deliver this statement on behalf of the Liberia Child Rights NGO Coalition during the UPR 36<sup>th</sup> Pre-Session of Liberia.

The findings of our alternative report, developed in the context of the [Girl Advocacy Alliance](#) programme, indicates that since the end of the civil war in Liberia in 2003, the government and its partners have invested in policy and institutional reforms including rehabilitation and building infrastructure. However, the old and the newly passed laws do not provide a framework for establishing a child protection system and there is no road map for meeting the needs of children.

I will address three issues identified among the multitudes of vulnerabilities faced by children as being the most serious and urgent issues that require action at all levels: Violence against children, with specific reference to girls and young women; Child marriage; And finally access to education and decent employment, in particular for girls and young women.

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.

The Liberia Child Rights NGO Coalition urges the State of Liberia to strengthen the units for the protection of women and children by granting them the necessary financial and institutional capacity to gather all evidence and investigate all cases of sexual and gender-based violence. We also recommend urgent support to survivors of SGBV by improving access to justice and psychosocial support. The government must establish a fast track court system for all SGBV cases, provide prosecutors with extensive capacity building training on SGBV court proceeding; and allocate financial or technical support for NGOs to regularly monitor the cases.



The State of Liberia received several recommendations on the issue of child marriage during the Second Cycle of the UPR in 2015. We emphasize that in many cases in Liberia, child marriage may amount to the sale of children for the purpose of forced labour. Despite 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 Protocol 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 were not ratified.

The Liberia Child Rights NGO Coalition recommends to the State of Liberia to effectively: Set the minimum age of marriage for both girls and boys at 18 years old in national law; Abolish traditional harmful practices, which often is observed as a ritual before the wedding, by providing alternative jobs to female circumcisers; And ratify the Optional Protocols to the UN CRC, including the third one on Communications.

During the second cycle of the UPR, the State of Liberia received 5 recommendations on the issue of education which were accepted by the government. The TVET subsector is still fragmented among several government ministries and agencies (youth and sports, education, health and agriculture) and dysfunctional. It lacks the technical capacity to provide the skills required by young people in Liberia both in rural and urban communities. There are few opportunities to enter in paid employment putting more girls and young women at risk of working in precarious and hazardous conditions. More than a quarter of young people are unemployed and youth unemployment is higher among young women. COVID-19 is exacerbating this situation by putting thousand additional children and women at risk of being trafficked and forced into child labour.

The Liberia Child Rights NGO Coalition calls upon the State of Liberia to provide support and an enabling environment for young women and girls to participate in decision making processes, especially those affecting their lives; Promote gender equality and show zero tolerance policy for harassment in the world of work according to the latest ILO Convention; Apply a human rights-based approach to decent work, including in the post-COVID-19 recovery plan; and finally comply with Article 11 of the CEDAW by eliminating discrimination against women in employment.