



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE

PRESS RELEASE

ENSURING THE RIGHT TO ACCESS EDUCATION BY PREGNANT GIRLS AND YOUNG MOTHERS

Wednesday 25th February, 2015: The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) is concerned about statements made by high ranking officials of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology that pregnant girls and pregnant young women would be barred from taking their exams and going back to school.

The Commission is of the view that this policy discriminates against women and girls and this pattern of stigmatising pregnant young women would only worsen their marginalization as well as their vulnerability. This would also lead to the violation of their economic, social and cultural rights, more especially their right to education, livelihood, adequate standard of living and their rights to participate and contribute to nation building. The effect of the implementation of this policy will undermine the right to education provided in Section 3 (2) of the Education Act of 2004 and Government's National Development Plan, 'The Agenda for Prosperity', particularly Pillar 8 which deals with Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

It would be recalled that in its State of Human Rights Report 2011, HRCSL raised the issue of discrimination by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) when they stopped pregnant girls from taking their exams and recommended that ***"WAEC should review its policy on forbidding pregnant girls from taking exams and should provide alternative facilities to ensure that every girl irrespective of their status can write their exams."***

Pregnant girls and young mothers must be protected from discrimination by the State as guaranteed in Section 27 (2) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991, which states that ***".....no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person acting by virtue of any law or in the performance of the functions of any public office or any public authority"***. Furthermore Section 4(1) of the Education Act 2004 states that ***"This Act and any other enactment and administrative instructions relating to education shall be administered and interpreted in such a manner as to ensure that there is no discrimination between pupils or students in the matter of their admission to and treatment in any educational institution in Sierra Leone..."***

HRCSL wishes to draw the attention of Government to the provisions of International Human Rights Instruments that it has ratified:

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1990) Article 28.1 which calls on *State parties to "...recognise the right to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal*

opportunity, they shall in particular; (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of dropout rates.”

- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1981 Part 3 Article 10, which requires **“State parties to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in the field of education”**.

Additionally, in its latest *Concluding Observations on Sierra Leone (2014)*, the CEDAW Committee called on the Government of Sierra Leone **“to remove all barriers to school attendance by pregnant girls and young mothers”**.

The Commission also draws Government’s attention to the imperative recommendation of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) Report Volume 2, chapter 3, page 212, which states that the Government must “abolish the practice of expelling pregnant girls from school”. One of the recommendations in the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) 2011 is the implementation of the TRC Recommendations which Government has undertaken to implement.

HRCSL therefore urges Government to take the necessary steps to create the enabling environment to ensure that pregnant girls and young mothers are accepted in schools, take their exams, continue their education and are not stigmatised and discriminated against.

Furthermore, HRCSL calls on Schools and Educational Authorities, National and International NGOs, Parents, Guardians, Religious and Community Leaders to take responsibility to support the education of pregnant girls and young mothers.

Whilst HRCSL does not condone children in schools to be sexually active, their right to access education must not be compromised.

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone remains committed to protecting and promoting the rights of all in Sierra Leone.



Commissioner Daphne Olu-Williams

Acting Chairperson

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone is an independent institution established by the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone Act (No. 9), 2004 with the mandate to protect and promote human rights nationwide.

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