



PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Government of Sierra Leone urged to demonstrate political will to address sexual and gender based violence in Koinadugu and Falaba districts

15th August, 2019- Freetown, Sierra Leone

Child Welfare Society, Women Against Violence in Society, Graceland – Sierra Leone, Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law, Women's Partnership for Justice and Peace together with Equality Now wish to draw your attention to the ongoing and increasing gross human rights violations being perpetrated against girls in Koinadugu and Falaba districts in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone.

Despite the severity and pervasiveness of violations, the Government remains slow in taking action. Girls are being subjected to rape, often leading to further trauma including pregnancy, and child, early and forced marriage.

Indeed, the fact that perpetrators of these heinous acts are rarely brought to book is indicative of the culture of impunity that dominates in this country and a damning indictment on the Government's failure to take effective action.

Whereas we recognize the Government's declaration of rape as a national emergency in February this year, time has come for the state authorities to act on its obligations to prevent, protect against and punish offenders of Sexual and Gender Based Violence.

The Government must take speedy, wide ranging action in ending sexual and gender based violence in Koinadugu and Falaba districts, as well as across Sierra Leone as a whole. It is indeed disheartening to note that six months after declaring rape a national emergency and promising to take a raft of measures designed to address this violation, the Government is yet to take concrete steps to protect women and girls

In this regard, we urge the Government to take up community-based interventions that will protect girls from these atrocities; uphold their rights; and hold perpetrators to account. We also call on the office of the First Lady to cascade the Hands Off Our Girls campaign to the districts and chiefdoms so as to reach and empower vulnerable girls at the grassroots.

We further call upon H.E. President Julius Maada Bio to ensure that the Special Division for Rape and Sexual Penetration of Minors is created by the Sierra Leone Police, and that the Government takes steps in setting up a Witness Protection Agency to ensure that survivors of



these violations are protected from perpetrators. Measures also need that survivors get compensation and psychosocial support.

We would also like to ask the Chief Justice Desmond Babatunde Edwards to create a Special Division with specially trained judges assigned to specialist courts dealing with cases of rape and sexual violence. These measures will help strengthen the way the justice system responds to victims of sexual violence and increase the rate of and offenders being brought to justice.

When the Government of Sierra Leone was declaring rape a national emergency, it observed that more than 70 percent of survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence were girls below the age of 15. The Government of Sierra Leone must therefore demonstrate the political will required to end sexual violence with the seriousness that it deserves.

ENDS

Notes:

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