

# **AFRICAN UNION CAMPAIGN ON CHILD MARRIAGE**

## **SUMMIT TO END CHILD MARRIAGE: 11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2016** **(SOUTHERN REGION)**

### **CHILDREN'S POSITION PAPER**

Child marriage is a human rights violation that impedes the development of girls in Sierra Leone and Africa as a whole. Studies have indicated a high prevalence of early/child and forced marriage in Africa as compared to other continents.

In Sierra Leone, 44% of girls are married before they are 18 years old, whilst 18% of them are married before they are 15.

The African Union (AU) has launched a campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa and expects every African Country to launch this campaign and work towards ending child marriage.

**In this regard:**

**WE**, the Children in the Southern Region (Bo, Bonthe, Moyamba and Pujehun) currently participating in the Girls' Summit to End Child Marriage;

**HAVING**, exchanged our views on critical issues affecting girls as it relates to early marriage and other forms of child abuses punctuated with role play/skit and songs on child marriage are;

**AWARE**, of the growing disparity in education between boys and girls in the southern region;

**CONSCIOUS**, of the fact that child marriage affects the growth, dignity and development of children especially girls nationwide;

**NOTING**, the prevalence of child marriage in most communities contrary to article 34 of the Child Rights Act (2007) and other laws and policies protecting children;

**HEREBY** identify the following root causes, effects, allies/perpetrators and solutions to end child marriage as follows:

Causes of Child Marriage:

- Abject poverty
- Poor parenting
- Illiteracy
- Negative attitude of children
- Religious and traditional beliefs
- Peer group influence
- Lack of knowledge
- Single parenting

Effects of Child Marriage

- Fistula

- Untimely death
- High mortality rate
- Diseases and infections (e.g. STIs, HIV/AIDS etc)
- Sexual harassment/violence
- Complications in child birth
- Stress
- School dropout
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Family disunity
- Peer discrimination
- Stigma
- Street hawking

### Allies/Perpetrators of Child Marriage

- Parents/Family Members
- Service providers
- Teachers

- Peers
- Local Authorities
- NGO workers
- Commercial Bike Riders (Okada Riders)
- Government Workers

### Solutions to end Child Marriage

- Provide support to Ministry of Health and Police FSU in addressing victims of child marriage;
- Strengthen chieftom bye-laws and create new ones not yet in existence in certain chieftoms;
- Impose heavy fines and jail sentence on perpetrators of child marriage;
- Undertake mass campaign to end child marriage in communities across the country;
- Increase community sensitization on child protection;
- Implement chieftom bye-laws without bias;

- Strengthen existing laws on child protection including the Child Rights Act (2007);
- Child related offences especially child marriage, must be tried speedily in the courts;
- Provide livelihood support to victims of child marriage
- Visit homes and provide regular counseling to victims of child marriage including their parents;
- Strengthen retention of girls in schools
- Organize regular workshops to end child marriage
- Provide funds to roll out the Child Rights Act (2007) and the Sexual Offences Act (2012)
- Refer issues of child marriage to the appropriate authorities for prompt action
- Shame perpetrators publically
- Increase community sensitization through radio discussions and public drama
- Engage and involve children on the effects of child marriage

- Punish parents who give their children into early marriage

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## **IN CONCLUSION, WE RESOLVED AND CALL ON YOU STAKEHOLDERS TO:**

1. Stop giving children into early and forced marriage below 18 years (**Actors:** Parents/caregivers).
2. Strengthen national laws and policies on child protection whereby perpetrators will be given stiff punishment if found abusing children (**Actors:** Local Councils, Chiefdom Committees, Parliament)
3. Encourage Child Protection Agencies and Service Providers to increase their level of support towards children at all times (**Actors:** UNICEF, World Vision, Save the Children etc)
4. Discourage every attempts of compromise in matters relating to child marriage when such issue is reported for prompt action (**Actors:** Paramount Chiefs, Section/Town Chiefs, FSU, Parents/Care-Givers)

5. Intensify sensitization on child marriage at chiefdom and community levels. ( **Actors:** Child Friendly Agencies, MSWGCA, Faith Base/Organizations, Civil Society, CBOs, NGOs)
6. Prosecute and punish child marriage perpetrators as prescribed by the Child Rights Act 2008 (**Actors:** Courts, FSU)
7. Encourage more girls in schools and learning institutions (**Actors:** Ministry of Education, Parents/Care-Givers)
8. Provide livelihood support to victims of child marriage (**Actors:** Child Friendly Agencies, Local Councils)
9. Ministry of Education to facilitate the deployment of more female teachers in rural schools
10. Encourage girls to stay in school by providing scholarships for especially those who are performing well

**PRESENTED TO STAKEHOLDERS IN BO THIS 12<sup>th</sup> DAY OF  
AUGUST 2016**