



RAINBO INITIATIVE PRESS STATEMENT ON SEXUAL ABUSE AND RAPE IN SIERRA LEONE

Today; we are making this press statement to talk about our journey with survivors of sexual violence across the Five Rainbo Centres located in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Kono and Makeni Government Hospitals respectively.

Rainbo Initiative is a registered Non-Governmental Organisation in Sierra Leone that is passionate to end SGBV across the country. We work with survivors of different age groups to provide appropriate lifesaving medical care including examination, treatment, psychosocial counselling, and referrals. We build a strong community outreach model that engages communities, raising awareness on the laws, services and encourages communities to prevent SGBV. We also work with partners to build a strong case by case evidence-based advocacy that influences policy change.

Rainbo Initiative is aware of the disturbing and shocking news of a diseased five-year-old survivor who died as a direct consequence of alleged rape. This case has indeed exposed the agony and pain suffered by thousands of other survivors we work with on the daily basis including girls and women who have experienced SGBV in their communities by their relatives, guardians, or close family friends.

We appreciate and stand in solidarity with the majority of the people (citizens) who came out in numbers to condemn this barbaric act of violence against women and girls in our beloved country Sierra Leone. We also want to express our heartfelt condolences to the Five-year old survivor's family and to other hundreds of survivors who have lost their lives because of rape or sexual penetration. We stand by you and we understand your pains and trauma you are going through at this challenging times.

We know that this is not an easy fight and we must win this fight. We have heard and seen horrible stories of survivors including two and three months old babies as youngest survivors and 70 years old woman as the oldest recorded for this year 2020 at our Rainbo centres. It is disheartening to note that some of our survivors suffered permanent injuries and some also lost their lives as a direct consequences of this act. The five year old survivor case is one example of many other thousands of stories we hear on the daily basis at the Rainbo Centres.

For this year alone we have recorded 1272 survivors of SGBV categorized by month as follows.

SUMMARY OF CENTRE DATA - JAN - MAY 2020

Month	Sexual Assault	Physical Assault	Pregnancies	STI	Disabilities	Total Referral
Jan-20	268	16	42	190	2	284
Feb-20	259	32	31	181	4	291
Mar-20	302	20	48	268	8	322
Apr-20	207	16	42	131	1	223
May-20	236	10	54	162	2	246

For more information contact Rainbo Initiative on +232 78244112/ +232 76900611

Total	1,272	94	217	932	17	1,366
-------	-------	----	-----	-----	----	-------

Rainbo Initiative vehemently condemns acts of any kind of violence against women and girls be it emotional, physical, and sexual. We also condemn publicizing the survivors' biography and pictures, which is in total breach of the survivor's confidentiality that has huge impact on their family and their wellbeing. As RI we are in direct contact with survivors daily and continue to be distressed over the following.

- A horrifying surge in cases of sexual abuse of minors that continue to be witnessed in Sierra Leone. For a majority of girls and women; the threat is more rampant in their home; where they ought to be safe. These are the silent girls and women trapped with abusive relatives and neighbors.
- Families and communities are doing less to identify early warning signs of child sexual abuse; supporting survivors to access services and there is a general lack of safe ways for child survivors to seek support without alerting their abusers.
- A significant number of cases go unreported; unrecorded with survivors suffering and even dying in silence. The culture of silence has allowed crimes to continue.

The consequences of reporting rape and of going through the criminal justice system are significant. Survivors have spoken to us about the re-traumatizing experience of reporting rape and sexual assault to the police and going through the subsequent investigation and court processes.

There are still widespread assumptions, judgements and victim-blaming attitudes held by members of the public around consent, what rape involves and how victims should respond, and these views will also be represented in communities and those who make up the system to investigate and prosecute perpetrators.

We therefore urge the Government of Sierra Leone to;

- Urgently set up a forensic labs and provision of DNA testing kits to support the collection of evidence and investigation
- Urgently make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of the national response to Covid19. The threat faced by survivors staying with abusers is equally dangerous.
- Support communities to set up survivor centred support systems to ensure that they get comprehensive care including medical, psychosocial care, safe homes, justice and integrate back into the society without fear of stigma.
- Accelerate efforts to prevent SGBV along with increased access to justice, including reparations, and access to comprehensive services, the empowerment of women and girls and the eradication of stigmatization of survivors.
- Adopt approaches at different levels and engage all segments of society, including ensuring the implementation of the National Strategy for Male Involvement in the Prevention of Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Sierra Leone.
- Ensure the implementation of legal and policy frameworks against SGBV.

Communities, families and individuals are urgent to;



- Listen to women and girls; desist from blaming, discriminating against and stigmatizing survivors and their loved ones. Bold steps to take survivors to access medical, psychosocial support, safe spaces and justice are required at community level.
- Use the 116 toll free line to report cases to ensure survivors access services.
- Speak up and take bold steps to link survivors to appropriate service providers. Rainbo Centres are open to provide immediate medical examination and treatment for SGBV survivors including provision of medical reports that are needed as evidence in a court of law. We are currently in partnership with the Family Support Unit; Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs; Ministry of Health and Sanitation; like-minded CSOs and partners to raise awareness on services.

It is crucial that survivors can have enough confidence in the justice system including police to come forward to report rape in the first place, knowing they will be believed and supported throughout the criminal justice process and without the fear of being labelled, blamed or judged. Otherwise we will continue to see fewer rape convictions, fewer rapists being held to account for their crimes, and ultimately fewer survivors seeking, and finding justice.

I thank you