



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE

STATEMENT ON ZERO TOLERANCE ON FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

6TH FEBRUARY 2021

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) was established by Act No.9 of Parliament in 2004 with the broad mandate of protecting and promoting human rights of all in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone Joins countries all over the globe to observe The International Day of Zero Tolerance against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) under the theme "No Time for Global Inaction, Unite, Fund, and Act to End Female Genital Mutilation."

FGM is considered a fundamental violation of human rights particularly the rights to the highest attainable standard of health and bodily integrity amongst others, and it is a practice that violates the rights of women and girls to be free from all forms of discrimination.

Sierra Leone is a state party to regional protocols and international conventions prohibiting harmful traditional practices and violence against women and girls for which FGM is classified.

Sierra Leone is one out of twenty-eight African countries that practices Female Genital Mutilation. FGM in Sierra Leone is deeply rooted in the local social norms with over 89.6% prevalence.

This practice has been condemned by numerous international and regional bodies. FGM is a human rights issue- a gender-specific discrimination and has implications for the human rights of women and the girl child. This practice is wide spread amongst girls younger than 18 despite the precautionary measures highlighted against harmful traditional practices in Section 11 (2) (e) of the Child Rights Act 2007, Article 5 (b) of the Maputo Protocol, Article 21 (1)

of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and Article 24 (3) of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to which Sierra Leone is a state party.

Also, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 –Which is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, with a target to “eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation”.

To promote the elimination of female genital mutilation, coordinated and systematic efforts are needed, and they must engage whole communities and focus on human rights, gender equality, sexual education and attention to the needs of women and girls who suffer from its consequences. The continuation of FGM sustains massive gender inequalities in practicing societies, as it limits opportunities for women and girls to realize their full rights and potential.

The rights of people to participate in their culture is a human right as it is recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights... but the question is whether FGM is seen as a cultural practice- and therefore giving the communities the right to practice their culture as a human right- infringes on other human rights.

Till date, Sierra Leone has no legislation or policy that prohibits the practice. Persons involved in the initiation of girls do not suffer any form of penalty for their actions due to lack of legislation.

The HRCSL will continue in its advocacy and community engagements in the fight against FGM perpetrated against especially young girls and calls on the government to pass a law prohibiting the initiation especially of children under the age of 18 years.

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