

AFRICAN UNION

**African Committee of Experts on the
Rights and Welfare of the Child**



UNION AFRICAINE

**Comité Africain d'Experts sur les
Droits et le Bien-être de l'Enfant**

الاتحاد الأفريقي

*"An Africa Fit for
Children"*

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**CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF
EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD (ACERWC) ON THE
INITIAL REPORT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ON THE STATUS OF
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE
OF THE CHILD**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC/the Committee) extends its compliments to the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and wishes to acknowledge with thanks receipt of the initial report on the status of the implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (the African Children's Charter/the Charter). The ACERWC, during its 30th Ordinary Session, which was held from 6 to 16 December, 2017, considered the Republic of Sierra Leone's initial report which was submitted in accordance with the State Party's obligation under Article 43 of the African Children's Charter.
2. The Committee extends its compliments to the Government of Sierra Leone for ratifying the Charter and submitting its initial report.
3. The Committee welcomes the constructive dialogue it held with the delegation of Sierra Leone, which was led by Mrs. Kadjiatu Buya Kamara, Director of Children Affairs of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children Affairs. The dialogue informed the Committee about the measures the State Party has undertaken towards the implementation of the African Children's Charter and the various challenges that the State Party has been facing.

II. PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHARTER

4. The Committee commends the measures that the State Party has undertaken to implement the Charter. Particularly, the Committee appreciates the Government for taking the following measures:
 - a) The ratification of various international human rights instruments such as; the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Protocols on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (OPSC) and on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention No. 138 and the ILO Convention No. 182 on Worst Form of Child Labour.
 - b) The adoption of the Child Rights Act in 2007; the National Youth Commission Act, 2009; the Education Act, 2004, the Human Rights Commission Act (2004), the Anti-Human Trafficking Act (2005), and the Adoption Bill (2010)

- c) The adoption of various policies and strategies such as the Alternative Care Policy (2012), the National Protocol on Gender Based Violence, the Child Justice Strategy, Agenda for Prosperity, the Age Assessment Guidelines, the National Standard for the Protection of Children in the Criminal Justice System, Guidelines for the management and sustenance of child justice: the Bombali Chain-Links initiative, 2012 and Quality Care Standards for Children's Homes.
- d) The establishment of the Steering Committee for the implementation of the Child Rights Act of 2007 and designing of an implementation plan.
- e) The establishment of the National Child Protection Coordination Committee at national and district levels by the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children's Affairs, for coordination of child protection in the State Party. And the establishment of various multi-sectorial committees, sub-committees and taskforces established to coordinate the development, implementation and monitoring of interventions for especially vulnerable groups of children or specific child protection issues.
- f) The establishment of The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) in terms of the Human Rights Commission Act (2004) as well as the establishment of the parliamentary human rights committee and the Office of the Ombudsman.
- g) The delivery of trainings to different role players that take part in the implementation and administration of the child rights including the systematization of the distribution and dissemination of information about the ACRWC to adults and children through training and advocacy programmes.

III. AREAS OF CONCERN AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. General measures of implementation

5. The Committee notes that despite the enactment of the Child Rights Act, there are various legislative gaps that hinder the full realisation of children's rights in the Country. These include, discriminatory clauses in the Constitution of the State Party under Section 27 which gives leeway for discrimination in the laws dealing with adoption, marriage and divorce; lack of provision for access to services by victims of trafficking; failure to incorporate a provision for regularization of status of victims in the Trafficking in Persons Act and lack of provisions for procedures of arrest investigation, remand as well as lack of a stipulated time period for pre-trial detention for children in conflict with the law. The Committee recommends that the State Party

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revise the Child Rights Act in accordance with the Charter in order to fill the legislative gaps. The Committee further recommends that the State Party finalize the revision of the Constitution and ensure that the non-discrimination cause is in full alignment with the Charter.

6. The Committee notes with concern that Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is highly prevalent in Sierra Leone, and the State Party Report indicates 70 percent incidence among girls aged 15 to 19 years, and a 10 percent incidence among girls aged 0-14 years. The Committee further notes that despite the high rate of prevalence there is no law or policy that explicitly prohibits FGM. The Committee recommends the State Party to explicitly prohibit and criminalize FGM, and to take the necessary measures to create awareness about the adverse effect of FGM on communities in general and the girls in particular among all relevant stakeholders with the aim of eliminating the practice. The Committee further recommends that the State Party works with secret societies towards changing mind-sets and promote positive cultural context to replace the practice.
7. The Committee Commends the establishment of the National Children's Commission (NCC) in 2014 with the mandate to monitor and coordinate the implementation of the Charter and other child rights instruments. The Committee recommends the State Party to regularly allocate sufficient financial and human resource to the NCC to enable it undertake its mandate effectively.
8. The Committee Commends the State Party for launching the African Union Campaign on Ending Child Marriage in 2016. The Committee notes with appreciation the decline in the rate of child marriage and recommends the State Party to accelerate the fight against child marriage.
9. The Committee appreciates the significant budgetary allocation made by the State Party to the various Ministries that contribute in implementation of children's rights. However, as alluded to in the State Party report, the Committee notes with concern that the budget allocated to the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) is less than 1% of the National Budget and as such it is not adequate for the fulfilment of its mandate. The Committee urges the State Party to allocate adequate budgetary resources for the implementation of children's rights and, in particular, increase the budget allocated to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs as well as strengthen efforts to ensure that all ministries adopt a child-sensitive budgeting approach.

10. The Committee encourages the State Party to provide technical and adequate budgetary support for the Human Rights Commission, particularly the Observatory of Children's Rights in the National Human Rights Commission, and the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee and the Office of the Ombudsman.
11. With regard to availability of statistics and data, the Committee notes that there is no formal national system for the collection of statistics and data about the overall situation of children and realization of their respective rights. Accordingly, the Committee urges the State Party to provide technical and financial support to the MSWGCA to operationalize the Information Management System in order to collect and analyse updated disaggregated statistics on the implementation of rights of children in all sectors.

B. Definition of a child

12. The Committee notes with appreciation the incorporation of the definition of the child, as a person below the age of 18, in the Child Rights Act, which is in line with the Charter. The Committee further commends the setting of the minimum ages of criminal responsibility at 14 years, minimum age for recruitment in the military at 18 years, minimum age for employment at 15 years and minimum age for hazardous work at 18 years. However the Committee notes with concern the contradiction between age of consent for marriage in the Child Rights Act and the Registration of Customary Marriages Act. The former puts the age of marriage at 18 years while the latter provides that a child below the age of 18 may lawfully get married on the condition that parental consent is given to this effect. This contradicts the definition of the Child under the Charter, as well as the obligation of Sierra Leone under article 21 of the Charter, which is to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory. While the Committee appreciates the establishment of a committee that is tasked to ensure the harmonization of the definition of the child in all relevant laws, it urges the State Party to expedite the process of harmonization of the definition of the child, and specifically amend the registration of Customary Marriages Act and ensure that the minimum age for marriage is 18 years in all forms of marriage with no exception.

C. General principles

Non-discrimination

13. The Committee commends the legislative measures the State Party has taken to ensure the implementation of the principle of equality and non-discrimination applicable to children. The Committee however is concerned about reports that indicate that there are still discriminatory practices, which are committed against children in vulnerable situations; such as girls living in rural communities, pregnant adolescents and children with disabilities. The Committee, therefore urges the State Party to take the necessary measure to ensure that these group of children are not discriminated, through sensitisation programs, particularly focusing on people living in rural areas. The Committee further recommends the State Party to repeal all laws, which discriminate against children. The Committee especially recommends for the State Party to address the challenges of discrimination that pregnant girls who are attending schools are facing with a view to ensuring that they are not stigmatised and can be able to exercise their right to continue their education after they give birth.

Best interests of the child

14. The Committee notes with appreciation the express incorporation of the principle of the best interest of the child into the Child Rights Act. However, the Committee is concerned about the low level of application of the principle in actions and decisions of authorities. The Committee recommends that the State Party take measure to create awareness among government officials in decision-making positions in all branches of government about the paramount importance of the principle of the best interest of the child and ensure that they always give consideration to the best interest of the child in all their actions and decisions affecting children.

Right to life, survival and development

15. The Committee appreciates the key policies and legislative instruments which include provisions on the right to life, survival and development.. The Committee, however; notes that the Sate Party is among the countries with the highest infant and maternal morbidity and mortality rates in the world. The Committee is concerned at reports that indicate that Child survival is threatened by nutritional deficiencies and illnesses, particularly malaria, diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections (ARI) such as pneumonia, and vaccine-preventable diseases. The Committee recommends the State Party to:

- a) Increase investment in child nutrition and health care system;

- b) Ensure that the health care system has sufficient trained personnel, and essential healthcare facilities;
- c) Increase and strengthen investment in agriculture to achieve food security and control malnutrition among children;
- d) Improve the implementation of the free healthcare policy;
- e) Increase the scale of the school feeding programme in order to contribute to healthy living among school children; and
- f) Undertake necessary measures to gradually eradicate child and infant mortality from preventable causes.

Child participation

16. The Committee commends the establishment of the Children's Forum Network (CFN) with an administrative wing and a children's parliament in 2001. The Committee recommends the State Party to take measures to ensure the sustainability of the children's parliament by providing the necessary financial and human resources. The Committee also recommends that children's parliaments are established by law at the district level, ensure that children in vulnerable situation including girls and children with disabilities are represented, and establish a mechanism through which the views of children's parliaments are given due consideration in the legislative and policy making processes in the country. The Committee further recommends the State Party to take legislative and other measures to ensure that in all judicial proceedings affecting a child who is capable of communicating her or his views, opportunity is provided for the child to be heard.

D. Civil rights and freedoms

Right to name, nationality and birth registration

17. The Committee notes with appreciation the significant increase in the rate of birth registration in the period of 2008 to 2010. However, the Committee has learnt that there are still challenges with regard to the realisation of free, universal and accessible birth registration in the Country. The Committee notes the existence of the low accessibility of birth registration facilities particularly in rural areas; the high number of unregistered children; the decline of the rate of birth registration from 2010 to 2013; incomplete birth registration records as a result of the culture of naming children months after they are born; low awareness among families and communities of the importance of birth registration; weak decentralized systems for birth registration data collection; and lack of data on the rate and number of birth

certificates issued. The Committee also notes that while a National Civil Registration Act was adopted in 2016, it is not effectively implemented. Hence, the Committee recommends the state party to take the following measures.

- a) Develop a policy and long term strategic plan for birth registration;
- b) Adopt innovative approaches to ensure birth registration, including mobile registration (particularly in rural areas where registration is low);
- c) Encourage retrospective registration, especially for the hard-to reach communities;
- d) Strengthen and scale up public awareness and campaigns on birth registration;
- e) Digitize birth registers to ensure the elimination of fraud and transcript errors; enhance easy control and verification of validity of documents as well as easy access to credible statistical data;
- f) Provide financial and technical support to the State registry;
- g) Take the necessary measure to implement the National Civil Registration Act
- h) Work in collaboration with civil society partners to create an enabling environment in the effort of enhancing birth registration and certification and
- i) Provide support to the National Task Force for Births and Deaths.

18. The Committee observed that there are ambiguous citizenship clauses, in the Country's nationality laws pertaining to nationality and citizenship, particularly relating to the status of children born to foreigners as well as children born to foreign fathers in Sierra Leone. The Committee recommends the State Party to amend the relevant clauses in order to clarify ambiguities in line with the Charter and other international treaties the State Party has ratified.

Freedom of expression, access to appropriate information, freedom of thought, conscience and religion

19. The Committee notes the enactment of the Right to Access Information Act (2013), which guarantees the right of every person, including children, to access information. The Committee further notes with appreciation the establishment of the Children's Forum Network (CFN) as a national "child-to child" network that has the objective of enabling children's access to information, rights to be heard and participate in national and provincial decisions and processes that affect them. The Committee recommends the State Party to ensure that the CFN adequately represents children from all backgrounds including children from urban and rural areas, children with disability and girls. The Committee further recommends the State Party to establish guidelines to support the work of the CFN and to establish centers in all parts of the country to encourage the participation of broad base of children.

Protection against abuse and torture

20. The Committee notes with appreciation the various legislative measures taken to protect children from abuse and torture. However, sources of the Committee indicate that various forms of violence, including physical, physiological and sexual abuse, are still being perpetrated against children. In particular, the Committee was informed that corporal punishment is prevalent within the home and school settings. During the Constructive dialogue with the State Party, the Committee has also observed that the Child Rights Act tolerates reasonable punishment being perpetrated against children; the Committee recommends the State Party to repeal the relevant clause in the Act with a view to completely prohibit corporal punishment in all settings.

E. Family environment and alternative care

Parental guidance and parental responsibilities

21. The Committee notes that the Child Rights Act recognizes and protects the rights of all children to parental care and that the State Party through the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children's Affairs has established a Unit called the Family Support Unit, and a Family Case Work Unit. The Committee recommends the State Party to provide technical and financial support to the Family Support Unit and the Family Case Work Unit and ensure their accessibility to families in all districts and marginalized areas of the country. The Committee further recommends the State Party to strengthen the support systems for vulnerable families and take appropriate measures to support and foster the capacity of parents, to perform their responsibilities in the upbringing of their children through family support programmes

Separation of children and family reunification

22. The Committee recommends the state party to strengthen the process of family reunification for children who are separated from their families as a result of conflict and the Ebola crisis. The Committee further urges the State Party to provide support to economically underprivileged families instead of resorting to alternative care to children who come from such families.

Alternative care and adoption

23. The Committee notes with appreciation the legislative measures taken to ensure that children deprived of parental care or their family environment are provided with alternative care arrangements. Form the Constructive dialogue with the State Party

the Committee has learned that 27 percent of the total population of children are deprived of a family environment. With regards to adoption, the Committee notes from the State Report that the State Party is in the process of reviewing the 1989 Adoption Act, which is not inline with the Charter and other international standards. The Committee recommends the State party to take the following measures:

- a) Fast track the adoption and immediate implementation of the Alternative Care Policy under the guidance of the Alternative Care Task Force;
- b) Establish effective monitoring and oversight mechanisms for formal and informal (menpikin) alternative care arrangements and inter-country adoptions;
- c) Give priority to the prevention of family separation and promote sustainable alternative local and family based care mechanisms, instead of keeping children in institutional based arrangements;
- d) Provide financial support to alternative care institutions and provide incentives for local family based alternative care;
- e) Accelerate the amendment of the Adoption Act based on the charter and international standards and
- f) Consider accession to the Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoptions.

F. Basic health and welfare

24. The Committee notes with appreciation the various policies and legislative measures which are established towards ensuring access to basic health services to children. While the Committee applauds the launching of the Free Healthcare Initiative (FHI) by the State Party, the Committee; however, notes that the FHI is predominantly supported by partner/donor funding. The Committee recommends the State Party to allocate adequate Government based financial and human resources to sustainably implement the Free Healthcare Initiative and take necessary steps to ensure that health care is both accessible and affordable to all children throughout the Country. The Committee further notes with appreciation the adoption of the Persons with Disability Act, which, among other things, guarantees equal access to healthcare. The Committee recommends the State Party to allocate adequate budget for the full implementation of the Act, and ensure equal access to health services, free health care for children with disabilities and the provision of assistive devices. The Committee further recommends the State Party to take the following measures.

- a) Provide technical and financial support to the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities to enable the organ to advance the right of access to healthcare services of children with disabilities;

- b) Undertake community sensitization to ensure that children with disabilities are able to access health services;
- c) Address the specific health needs of adolescents by providing age appropriate information and sensitization about reproductive health and sexually transmitted diseases/infections;
- d) Increase the annual budget allocated to health care at least to 15% as per the commitment made Abuja in 2001 at the African Union's Special Summit on HIV/AIDS;
- e) Provide psychosocial support to orphans and child survivors of the Ebola crises and;
- f) Strengthen the primary health care delivery systems to provide preparedness for future outbreak of infectious diseases and in particular provide protection for children affected by epidemics such as Ebola.

25. The Committee applauds the various efforts exerted by the State Party to ensure access to safe drinking water through targeted infrastructure development. The Committee further encourages the State Party to extend the coverage of improved drinking water to all parts of the country with the aim of ensuring safe drinking water to all children.

G. Education, leisure and cultural activities

26. The Committee applauds the State Party for the introduction of the Fee Free Primary Education Policy in 2002/03 and the enactment of the Education Act in 2004. The Committee notes that the unfortunate Civil War that the Country has passed through for more than a decade and the recent outbreak of the Ebola crises drastically affected the education system of the country through displacement of children, the interruption of schooling for many years for significant number of children and destruction of educational infrastructure, among others. The Committee has observed that the girl child, particularly, faces discrimination in the educational sector. It is further noted that even though the State Party has abolished school fees, primary education is still not completely free, due to the fact that many schools independently impose variety of charges on their students, which is unbearable for most families amidst widespread poverty. To address these and other related challenges regarding the full realisation of the right to education to all children, the Committee recommends the State Party to take the following measures:

- a) Take steps to eliminate all costs, direct and indirect, of primary education in public schools and ensure that free and compulsory primary education is attained in the Country;

- b) Ensure that girls equally enjoy the right to education by sensitizing communities about the benefits of sending girls to school, strengthening school feeding and “dry ration” programmes, working towards eliminating cultural practises that hinder the education of girls and undertaking other innovative interventions to encourage and foster girls education;
- c) Take necessary measures to ensure the accessibility of educational facilities to children with disabilities;
- d) Take measures to towards implementation of inclusive education provided for in the Persons with Disability Act;
- e) Ensure that teachers and other school personnel are adequately trained to provide educational services to children with disabilities; and
- f) Finance the interventions of the Education Sector Implementation Plan to Increase the primary school completion rate and decrease the primary school pupil: teacher ratio.

H. Special Protection Measures

Refugee children

27. The Committee notes with appreciation the adoption of the Refugees Protection Act, 2007. The Committee recommends that State Party to fully implement the Act and to provide basic services such as education and healthcare to refugee children. The Committee also recommends that the births of refugee children who are born in refugee camps be duly registered.

Children in armed conflicts

28. The Committee recalls that the civil war of Sierra Leone (1991-2002) left a devastating psychosocial impact on children. The Committee appreciates the legislative and other measures taken by the State Party to protect children from the impacts of armed conflict, including the endorsement of the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups, and the Paris Principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups. The Committee further encourages the State Party to take the following measures.

- a) Amend the Child Rights Act in line with the international instruments to provide clarity on criminal procedure that should be followed as a result of unlawful recruitment or use of children and ensure that children who have been associated with armed groups are free from criminal responsibilities;
- b) Establish an organ to monitor the status of interventions to protect children from recruitment; and

- c) Embark on economic alternatives and education opportunities to reduce the vulnerability of children and their recruitment into the armed forces or armed groups.

Children in conflict with the law

29. The Committee notes with appreciation that the Child Rights Act makes provision for the establishment of an additional formal specialized court, the Family Court, which is to be constituted by a magistrate supported by four other members with expertise in the area of children's rights. The Committee encourages the State Party to further take the following measures.

- a) Allocate adequate resources to ensure the establishment of the family courts and Child Panels;
- b) Ensure that Family Support Units and Police Stations are staffed with adequate social workers and provide training to police officers on child protection;
- c) Scale up and continue trainings to personnel of the justice system on the Age Assessment Guidelines of 2010;
- d) Implement the Legal Aid Act to ensure that children exercise their right to legal representation;
- e) Establish guidelines for non-custodial sentencing for children in conflict with the law;
- f) Ensure that sentencing children to imprisonment is done as a measure of last resort, and in cases where children are sentenced to imprisonment that they are kept separately from adults;
- g) Provide education, psychosocial support and recreational activities for children kept in remand homes and approved schools awaiting trial;
- h) Update the National Child Justice Strategy; and
- i) Establish guidelines governing the procedures for magistrate and high courts hearing in matters involving children.

30. The Committee commends the State Party for establishing Chiefdom Child Welfare, which also has mandate to deal with issues relating to (civil and criminal) cases involving children. However, the Committee notes that there are no safeguards to children who appear before these structures in light of the Charter. The Committee, therefore, urges the State Party to set out clear protective measures to children who come into contact with such structures in light of the provisions of the Charter.

Children of imprisoned parents or care-givers

31. The Committee notes that the State Party allows mothers with infants to keep their children with them in prison, and provides the mothers and the infants with medical, psycho-social and parenting support. However the Committee has been informed that children of imprisoned parents or caregivers have no access to a special diet and most mothers lack access to basic welfare items, such as toiletries or sanitary napkins, and medicines. Furthermore, once the children are removed from prison they usually end up in orphanages. Hence the Committee recommends the State Party to provide special treatment to expectant mothers and mothers/caregivers of infants who are accused or found guilty of a crime, in accordance the principles included in Article 30 of the Charter and the Committee's General Comment number 1 on Article 30 of the Charter. The State Party should in particular take the following measures:

- a) Assess the situation of children of imprisoned parents or caregivers;
- b) Undertake measures to ensure that non-custodial sentences should be prioritized when sentencing expectant mothers and mothers/caregivers of infants;
- c) Take legislative measures to ensure that death sentence will not be imposed on expectant mothers or mothers/caregivers of infants;
- d) Ensure that children and mothers in prisons have access to basic healthcare service and sanitation facilities; and
- e) Provide family based alternative care once the child is removed from prison.

Children in situation of exploitation and abuse

32. The Committee applauds the State Party for introducing minimum ages for child employment and hazardous labor through the Child Rights Act, and for ratifying the International Labor Organization's (ILOs) Conventions 138 (on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment) and 182 (on the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor). The Committee further appreciates the establishment of the Child Labor Unit in the Ministry of Labor and Employment. However, the Committee is concerned that, despite the clear legal prohibition of children working in mines by the Child Rights Act (which defines mine work as hazardous work) and the criminalization, by the 2012 Sexual Offences Act, of obtaining the services of a child as a sex worker, child mine workers and child commercial sex workers are a common occurrence in and around the mines in Sierra Leone. The Committee is further deeply concerned that one of the identified causes of child labour is linked with the high cost of educational materials in schools. The Committee, therefore, urges the State Party to undertake the following measures:

- a) Revise and update the National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor 2013-2017;
- b) Ensure the full implementation of the laws that deal with child abuse and neglect;
- c) Develop a strategy for addressing the social norms and behaviour that underpin vulnerability to child labour, especially violence and neglect in the home environment;
- d) Support and capacitate community based early warning and early intervention protection mechanisms;
- e) Develop long term care and protection services for families and children;
- f) Building competences of social workers to provide appropriate follow up to children and families;
- g) Strengthen efforts geared towards the enrolment of victims of child labour in schools;
- h) Ensure the availability and accessibility of legislative and structural frameworks to investigate child labour cases and prosecute the perpetrators; and
- i) Accelerate the development of minimum standards and protocols for the extractive industry to prevent and mitigate the impact of child labor on children.

33. The Committee notes with appreciation the legislative measures taken to protect children from sexual exploitation, notably the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act in 2012. The Committee further encourages the State Party to provide rehabilitation and reintegration services to children who are victims of sexual abuse and strengthen preventive initiatives and interventions of sexual exploitation of children in mines.

Children in vulnerable situations

34. Committee has been informed that the phenomenon of children living on the street is a common problem noted in most urban settings of the State Party. The Committee notes with concern that thousands of children are living and working on the streets. The Committee, therefore, urges the State Party to identify the causes of the phenomenon of street children and take preventive measures, adopt and implement a strategy to take children off the streets and place them in to alternative care institutions.

35. The Committee notes with appreciation the progress made in preventing HIV/AIDS infection among children through Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS (PMTCT) services. However, the Committee has learnt that stigma and discrimination against children who are living with HIV are rampant and are the key

reasons why children cannot access antiretroviral. The Committee also notes that there is shortage of equipment for HIV testing for children who are below the age of 18 months, and lack of trained health personnel to handle psychosocial needs of children with HIV/AIDS. Hence the Committee recommends the State Party to:

- a) Strengthen partnership between CSO and government agencies in provision of paediatric care and support;
- b) Sensitize communities to halt the stigma and discrimination of children living with HIV/AIDS;
- c) Strengthen measures taken to increase access PMTCT services;
- d) Provide sufficient equipment for HIV testing for all children, particularly to those who are below the age of 18 months, with qualified health personnel; and
- e) Undertake psychosocial programs for children affected by HIV and AIDS.

I. Responsibility of the child

36. The Committee notes with appreciation the incorporation of the responsibilities of the child in the Child Rights Act. The Committee recommends the State Party to come up with initiatives to guide parents, teachers and other concerned bodies to facilitate the active participation of children for the greater good of society, in accordance with their age and without affecting the enjoyment of any of their rights under the Charter. The Committee further encourages the State Party to sensitize children about their rights and responsibilities and to empower them through education and the media to assume their responsibilities in the society and prepare them to develop in to well-rounded adult citizens using the Children's Forum Network and other platforms.

J. Conclusion

37. The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child appreciates the efforts invested by the Government of Sierra Leone and aspires for the implementation of these recommendations. The Committee would like to indicate that it will undertake a follow up Mission to ascertain the implementation of these recommendations in the foreseeable future. The Committee would also like to invite the State Party to submit its combined first, second, third, fourth and fifth periodic report in 2021, which the Committee considers as the first periodic report.

38. The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child takes this opportunity to renew to the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone the assurances of its highest consideration.