

by

Hon. Memunatu M. Koroma
Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Gender
and Children's Affairs and Leader of Delegation

at the

38th Session of the Committee on the Convention of All forms
of Discrimination against Women

on

Consideration of the Combined Initial, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Periodic Report of
the Republic of Sierra Leone in pursuance of its obligation under Article 18 of
the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against
Women

New York, May 17, 2007

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Madam Chair,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am highly honored and delig

Country periodic report. The UN continued to provide financial and technical support for the process.

The Government of Sierra Leone, especially our President Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and his cabinet, must be commended for their commitment to women's empowerment. The Government provided the first grant for the writing of this report and cabinet has followed the process to its final conclusion, including review of the list of issues and questions raised by the Committee of Experts and responses prepared by the Ministry. They eagerly await the concluding comments of this Committee.

Sierra Leone's Permanent Mission to the United Nations is also acknowledged for their interest and support for us to comply with our reporting obligation.

Madam Chair, in response to the vacuum created by non-reporting on CEDAW by Sierra Leone over a period of sixteen years since ratifying the Convention, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs held several nation-wide consultation on the need to redeem the image and classification of Sierra Leone as violating its international obligations and commitment.

As all of you are aware, Sierra Leone is emerging from an eleven (11) year civil war that destroyed most of the country's social, economic and physical infrastructure resulting in a break down of civil and political authority. Rebuilding the country's economic and social infrastructure to provide security and livelihood while guaranteeing the promotion and protection of rights for its citizens is a daunting challenge.

The Report Preparation Process

- Proposal and Work plan Development.
- Setting up of CEDAW Technical Secretariat.
- Situation Analysis on the Status of CEDAW Implementation.
- Training of Gender focal Points, staff of the Ministry and critical stakeholders on CEDAW reporting.
- Recruitment of Consultant and CEDAW program officer.
- CEDAW Data Collection and Mini Studies: - In order to d

- In April 2006 my Ministry in consultation with UNIFEM engaged an international Consultant to work with local Consultants and Gender Ministry officials in consolidating the composite report into first national draft report for scrutiny by a techn

the contrary, we are happy that the UN employed every opportunity to remind and support us to prepare this report.

In meeting our obligations to the Convention, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs as the national machinery tasked with promoting and advancing the rights of women has been undertaking series of Activities including the development of two policies, the National Policy on Gender Mainstreaming and the National Policy on the Advancement of Women which were adopted by Parliament in 2000.

Domestication of the Convention

The following measures have been undertaken by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs:

- Development of the twin policies policy on the Advancement of Women and the Gender Mainstreaming policy in 2000.
- Production of an abridged version of the operative articles of the Convention in 2002.
- Consultation and sensitization workshop for key stakeholders including Parliamentarians, Public and Private sector on the Convention in 2002.
- The Ministry collaborated with UNIFEM, International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Law Reform Commission to identify laws and practices that are discriminatory against women. This resulted in women's Law Reform Agenda in 2003.
- The Ministry in 2004 collaborated with the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights in holding District Consultations on the Convention primarily those related to marriage, Divorce, inheritance and property

- The Ministry and its partners including women's organizations have put together a proposal on supporting women's empowerment in the peacebuilding process.

National Policy on the Gender Mainstreaming

The Policy on Gender Mainstreaming forms an int

International Instruments and decisions relating to the advancement of women

- The Government's commitment to restructuring the national economy, reorienting educational, political and social institutions so as to ensure equity, social justice, and the well being of all, through sustainable development and
- Government's view of women's issues as Human

The President has informed the nation that the first three Bills above commonly referred to as the Gender Bills will be presented to Parliament by a Certificate of Urgency and enacted before Parliament is dissolved for the August 2007 Parliamentary elections. These Bills are now in Cabinet for

shall be non-refundable whether or not the contemplated marriage takes place. This means that women suffering in an unhappy or potentially violent marriage are not forced to remain in that marriage merely on the basis that their family cannot repay the dowry. This also provides security for children of such a marriage, who with the help of this clause can be moved to a place of safety.

b) Devolution of E state Bill

The Bill provides for Intestate Succession and other inheritance related matters. The interpretation section provides several instructive definitions. For example, the definition of dual includes children born to the deceased prior to his/her marriage, children born to the deceased and his or her lawful spouse during marriage who were recognized as such and accepted by the deceased spouse as children adopted by the deceased under applicable law. The aforementioned definition is elastic enough to include illegitimate children who under the present law are disadvantaged when it comes to succession.

Likewise, the definition of 'spouse' encompasses persons legally named to the deceased as well as single persons who cohabited with the deceased as if they were married for a period of not less than ten (10) years prior to the death of the deceased. When considering distribution of the estate of the deceased person, the Bill provides that where the deceased is survived by spouse or child or both, then the said spouse or child (or both as the case may be) shall be entitled absolutely to the deceased's household chattel.

c) Domestic Violence

Domestic violence against women is in law considered normal in most communities in Sierra Leone and acceptable up to a point. Under Customary law, a husband has the right 'to administer' reasonable chastisement to his wife. According to this he can 'beat her up but not to the extent of wounding her. Currently, certain extremely serious incidents of domestic violence can in theory be prosecuted under general common law, under The Offences Against The Persons Act 1861. The police and other Law Enforcement Agencies until very recently when the Family Support Unit (FSU) was set up, they were reluctant to investigate and prosecute in domestic relationship.

In practice, domestic violence is surrounded by a culture of silence. Clause 1 provides a new and comprehensive definition of domestic violence which includes physical and1t

behaviour. The elderly and those living in public care institutions in family-type situations (e.g. old people's homes, boarding schools and mental hospitals and homes) are now included in the definition of those affected by domestic violence. The Bill will provide an array of tools for dealing with domestic violence including mediation, punishment of the perpetrator through criminal law and protection of victim through civil law. Clause 7 (4) however makes it clear that family intervention/mediation shall not act as a bar to prosecution of domestic violence complaints. As long as the case does not involve ag

- National Electoral Commission
- Immigration Department
- National Commission for War Affected Children (NaCWAC)
- Independent Media Commission
- Human Rights Commission
- Development Secretary
- Judiciary Department – 2 female Supreme Court Judges and more female judges than men in the High Court

It is also worthy to note that women are holding senior positions in the civil service, Police, Army etc. We have made gains but there is still a lot do.

Eliminating Gender Disparity in Education

The Government of Sierra Leone considers education as everybody's right and this consideration has so far guided its education policies which are being implemented systematically and diligently. According to the 2004 Education Act Part III Section 3 (2) *"Every citizen of Sierra Leone shall have the right to basic education which accordingly shall be compulsory"*. The Girl Child education initiative in Sierra Leone has been inspired by the Sierra Leone Government's commitment and concern for the improvement and well-being of Sierra Leonean women. Government's intervention started in 1999 at the primary level by the payment of fees for pupils in classes 1-3. In the year 2000, free schooling was extended to classes 4-6 which led to rapid rise in enrolment.

To ensure retention at the secondary level, in the 2003/2004 academic year, government launched a Girl-Child support Education Programme. Through this programme, girls who are successful in the National Primary School Examination (NPSE) and enter the Junior Secondary School in the Northern and

- Advocacy for the education of girls in meetings held at district and community level
- Encouragement of women in tertiary education through the award of scholarships
- Infusion of gender issues into curriculum
- Construction of more schools in the rural areas so that girls have shorter distances to walk and feel safe and secured and
- Provision of opportunities for girl mothers to go back to school and continue with tertiary education.

The above actions have yielded positive results for the girl child education in the country. C

- For the reduction of mother to child transmission of HIV and AIDS, the Ministry provides niveraprin, it is free of charge and available in all centers within the country.
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Challenges

The Government is faced with serious challenges in implementing the provisions of the Convention, some of which include but not limited to the following:

- Sierra Leone still remains a male-dominated society.
- My Ministry receives less than one percent (1%) of the National Budget for the fiscal year which is grossly inadequate. Thus it depends largely on donor support.
- On the issue of technical staff in the Gender and Children's Affairs Division, the government in December 2003 recruited ten (10) professional staff including a Director, Deputy Director, 5 Programme Officers and 3 Regional Desk Officers. Currently the Division is understaffed by technical staff who should otherwise be represented at all Districts/Town Councils as Desk Officers.
- There is scarcity of resources and capacity. For instance, the limited technical capacity on use of gender analysis tools in both policy and programmatic interventions, particularly gender budgeting training for line Ministries. Sectoral budgets are not disaggregated to actually impact positively on women as everything is clustered in the name of programme/activity.
- Human Resource Development remains a very big challenge for the Ministry of Health and Sanitation.
- Cultural and traditional factors give priority to the boys for schooling to the disadvantage of the girls.
- Women still face prejudice in the work place for managerial positions.
- The low self-esteem of women themselves has not helped the situation.
- There are few women role models in the country, especially in the rural areas.
- Popularization the Convention to school children and making it part of the school curriculum.
- A lot of legal formulations have been made but the political will should be sustained and backed by resources.
- Our government signed the Optional protocol in 2000 but has not been ratified. However, Cabinet has approved sensitization of the populace before it can be presented in Parliament for ratification.
- The rural women even though in the majority remain disadvantaged in the areas of access to justice, education and health.

Lastly, Madam Chair, the report we have presented had the active involvement of the civil society, and no Sierra Leonean woman is a second class citizen either by policy or legislation, no matter their station or status.

Madam Chair, may I conclude by introducing the members of the Sierra Leone Delegation who are prepared to interact with you on the report.

1. H.E. Mr. Joe R. Pemagbi, Ambassador & Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the UN
2. Mr. Monfred Momoh Sesay, Ministry of Justice - member
3. Dr. Edward Brima Magbity, Ministry of Health and Sanitation - member
4. Ms. Isatu Kajue, Decentralization Secretariat – member
5. Ms. Pamela Williams, Ministry of Youths and Sports – member
6. Mr. Charles B. Vandi, Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs – member
7. Ms. Susan Sesay, Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs – member

And I am Memunatu M. Koroma, Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and leader of Delegation.

I thank you.