



PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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PRESS RELEASE



COMMITTEE ON GENDER AND CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS VISITS PORT LOKO ONE STOP CENTER

The Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Gender and Children's Affairs, chaired by the Opposition Whip 2 of Parliament, Hon. Zainab Catherine Tarawally has on Monday 24/06/2024 paid a on-the-spot visit to Port Loko District "One Stop Center" and the Family Support Unit of the the Port Loko Police Division.

The purpose of the visit was to ascertain the level of Sexual and Gender Based Violence in that part of the country.

Submitting, the Parliamentary Chairperson of Gender and Children's Affairs Committee, Hon. Catherine Zainab Tarawally outlined the mandate and functions of the Committee and went to underscore that the Committee's investigations and findings at the "One Stop Center" in light of the prevention of GBV and protection of victims would be taken to Parliament for consideration by the House. "We are here to save the lives of our children", she said and went on to inform that, recently Parliament had passed into law the Prohibition of Child Marriage in the country.

"We want this law to be effective and implemented, in order to prevent SGBV on children", she remarked. The Chairperson however expressed concerns relative to the implementation of the new law and that it should be done in partnership and in collaboration with local authorities.

Giving an overview of the "One Stop Center in Port Loko District, Chernor Jorgo Timbo, Assistant Director, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, who also doubles as the Center Manager for the "One Stop Center" in Port Loko District catalogued the successes and challenges of the center since its inception in the year, 2020.

On the successes, he said they were receiving support from partners including Rainbow Center, UNFPA and that they regular engagements with these partners in light of their activities.

He said on cases related to gender based violence, immediate investigations were carried out to enhance further actions.

He also informed the Committee that there was regular training for staff in order to keep up with their mandate based on the activities they undertake.

On the challenges, he said there is no safe home, limited funding and lack of office equipment. He also said that delays in processing investigations on GBV by the police were also serving as strong impediments to their work.

He continued to say, since the establishment of the center the absence of forensic laboratory was strongly affecting the smooth operations of the center. He also said that the absence of police presence at the center was affecting their operations. He also said that they had made several referrals to many police posts in the District on issues relating to GBV.

He also informed the Committee that since January to May 2024, they have recorded 23 SGBV cases at the center. He said these cases had occurred around the mining communities. He said other cases took place in Freetown, but were referred to the center for consideration.

Mohamed Kamara, Chairman Port Loko District Human Rights Committee said they have been working collaboratively to address SGBV and went on to commend the work of the One-Stop Center.

The Deputy Matron of the Port Loko Government Hospital, Agnes Sia Sourie also briefed the Committee on the status of the SGBV that were reported to the Hospital.

At the Family Support Unit in the Port Loko Police Division, the Committee also engaged the Unit's Head who briefed them on the shortage of personnel to be deployed to the One-Stop Center.

The Committee also engaged the Local Unit Commander (LUC) and the Chief Administrator in order to chart the way forward to support the One-Stop Center in the District.

Parliamentary and Public Relations Department

Parliament of Sierra Leone

+23278495023/+23276625960/+23278426851/+23278697776