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27th November 2022

PRESS RELEASE



MPS AND CSOs DISCUSSES REVIEW OF CHILD MARRIAGE BILL

Parliamentary Members of the Committee on Gender and Children's Affairs chaired by the Deputy Opposition Whip, Hon. Catherine Zaniab Tarawally, in the Parliament of Sierra Leone, Civil Society Organisations, and Stakeholders have on Sunday 27/11/2022 ended a three-day stakeholder's meeting on "Child Marriage Bill" review

at Dohas Hotel, Bo City, to educate MPs and CSOs on the need for the enactment of the child marriage proposed bill into law.

The purpose of the engagement was to see the need to educate and later enact into law, the draft bill entitled "The Prohibition of Child Marriage Bill 2018", which seeks to prohibit child marriage to provide protection for the victims of marriage and provide for other related matters. A non-governmental organization, Save the Children is supporting the progress of the enactment of the bill into law.

Given an overview of the bill. Victoria Squire, Ending Child Marriage Manager Save the Children, said UN Women, Save the Children, UNFPA, Plan International, UNICEF, and other organizations started the development of the draft bill in 2018, but due to some challenges, it was not finalized. She said with recent engagement with the Gender Committee in Parliament and other stakeholders, they thought of it as an organization, to push for the enactment of the bill into law.

In his statement, the Country Director of Save the Children, Patrick Analo said the objective of the engagement is to educate MPs on the importance of the proposed bill and went further to highlight the role of saving the children in their work in Sierra Leone. He said 30% of girls get married before the age of 18 and 9% get married before age of 15. He also said 70% of marriages are conducted under customary marriage in Sierra Leone. He said Sierra Leone is 18th in the world, for the highest prevalence rate of child marriage and went further to state that 70% of girls have sex before the age of 18 and 38% would have given birth by then. He went further to highlight the negative effect of early childbirth and called on MPs to see the need to enact the bill into law to save the children of Sierra Leone.

The Parliamentary Chairperson of Gender and Children Affairs Hon. Cathrine Zainab Tarawally appreciated the work of Save the Children and went further to highlight the important roles of Parliament, relative to law-making, representation, and oversight, "As a Parliament, we would continue to do the needful, when the bill is in front of the House" she assured.

She commended the Leadership of Parliament and MPs for recently enacting into law, the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Bill 2022.

Hon. Cathrine said Parliament would continue to collaborate with all stockholders to promote and enhance the right of women in Sierra Leone and went on to call on her colleague MPs to support the gender process.

Representing the Law Officers Department Lynton O.R.D Jones Esq. Legislative Drafter and Parliamentary Counsel said as a Department they always work with Ministries, Department, and Agencies to finalize bills and send them to Parliament for enactment. He uses the occasion to highlight their roles and responsibility

Representing the National Commission for Children, Ansumana Fabundeh Deputy Commissioner, commended MPs for championing the issues of child marriages and underscored the work of the commission in promoting the welfare of children in Sierra Leone. "We pledge our support for this process, and we are looking forward to its enactment" he maintained.

Representing the Civil Society Organisation, Kadiatu Koroma disclosed that, child marriage is a social evil in Sierra Leone and called for utmost protection for all children in Sierra Leone

A Girl Champion Mariama JS Koroma, who doubles as a member of Children Forum Network in Kailahun District said child marriage is just a bad habit in the community and called on MPs to put a stop to it and underscored the negative effect of the menace in Sierra Leone.

A PowerPoint presentation was done on the importance of the Child marriage bill by Dr.Modufe Taiwo of Save the Children whilst Lynton O.R.D Jones Esq. Legislative Drafter and Parliamentary Counsel presented the entirety of the Bill to MPs and stockholders

The bill focuses on; the prohibition of Child Marriage, prohibition of cohabitation with a child, annulment of child marriage, compensation, protection for victims of child marriage, and miscellaneous provisions.

The engagement was climaxed by stories from children championed who happened to be victims of similar circumstances and also recommendations towards the enactment of the bill into law

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