

Mr. Chairman,
His Excellency The President of the Republic of Sierra Leone
His Excellency The Vice President
The Special Representative of the Secretary General in Sierra Leone
The Resident Representatives of United Nations Agencies in Sierra Leone
Honourable Ministers
Honourable Members of Parliament
Members of the Fourth Estate
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen and
My Fellow Children

I stand to represent the children of Sierra Leone through the door opened to us by the Convention on the Rights of the Child to express our utmost appreciation to the organizers of this programme for giving us the podium to express our view on the Child-Friendly-Version of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report.

Mr. Chairman, His Excellency the President and other protocol's observed, I believe that in the process of putting facts together about the ten year's conflict, children must have been recorded to be the ones that suffered greatly.

We became victims of exploitation and abuse;

We were molested and mutilated;

We suffered brutal murder and

We were deprived of our basic rights.

At that time, where was our protection?

But now, the children of Sierra Leone greatly appreciate the work of UNICEF, UNAMSIL, the Ministry (Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs), Child Protection Agencies and the Children's Forum Network for advocating for a Child-Friendly-Version of the Truth and Reconciliations' Report.

From the start, we participated in an International Conference at Javouhey House and we made some recommendation on the participation and protection of children in the TRC. We also participated during the opening and closing hearing where some children told their stories. The Children's Forum Network and the Voice of children also presented a paper on behalf of the children of Sierra Leone at the Thematic Hearings on Children and recommended among others that there should be a Child-Friendly Version of the TRC's Report.

Thereafter, in the process of writing the Child-Friendly Version, UNICEF initiated an expert to work on it. We were consulted and actively involved in it. We are very happy to see that our recommendation has been addressed, and would further recommend that this Child-Friendly Version be incorporated in the School Curriculum and that the version should be made available to every child.

Mr. Chairman, His Excellency the President and all other protocols observed, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission made us explain our plights of what happened to us during the war and our involvement in it. This helped us to reduce our traumatization, and those of our colleagues who made statements were being protected from public fear and embarrassment.

However, the children of Sierra Leone want the government to fully implement the recommendations presented in the Child-Friendly Version.

We want the Convention on the Rights of the Child to be fully implemented in this country. If I may ask: Is everybody aware about this Convention? NO.

We want the Child-Rights Bill in this country to be quickly implemented. This is because our rights being delayed are our rights denied.

We still clamour for the Sections in the Constitution that are about children to be fully implemented.

Our Recommendations:

We want to see an agenda promoted by the Government to look into Special Social Activities concerning our protection.

Your Excellency, the children of this country want to see the following issues being addressed by your Government as its being in the TRC and simplified in the Child Friendly Version.

- We want an end to the recruitment and participation of children in armed forces and groups. We thank the Government for ratifying the Optional protocol, but would like to lay emphasis on the Monitoring of the implementation of the optional protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.
- We want support to children both as victims and perpetrators of violence, especially family reunification and reintegration of returnee children and child soldiers including psychosocial support, drug rehabilitation and support to disabled children.
- We want to see the needs of war affected children being addressed in a much more pragmatic way: This includes measures to meet the basic needs of children and their families, including improved access to quality education, health care and nutrition, water and Sanitation, the elimination of child labour and sexual abuse/exploitation and recreational space for children;

- We want to see support to children's organizations at all levels in order to facilitate the participation of children in all aspects of public life affecting them, and this includes policies on children.
- We want the role of education in building a culture of respect for human rights, especially in relation to the development of educational materials on peace, human rights and democracy for use in both formal and non-formal educational settings.

We the children of this nation were the most vulnerable group during the decade long civil war. In this regard, we want to be the first priority on the Government agenda in terms of implementing the TRC recommendations.

I will like to conclude by saying that it is high time we not only be listeners to what I've said, but also doers. Remember, Vision 2005 and 2010 cannot be true visions if we the children are not at the core.

Your Excellency, we would like you to promise that you will always be there for us and put children first on the agenda. We are the future of the nation and you should build a strong foundation for the country through us.

Never again must the protection of the children of Sierra Leone be compromised for any reason.

We thank you all for your attention.