

Network Movement For Democracy & Human Rights

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26/10/2019

Press Release for Immediate Release
October 26, 2019

RESTRICTING PREGNANT GIRLS FROM ATENDING NORMAL SCHOOL; A VIOLATION OF THEIR RIGHTS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

Network Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (NMDHR) has observed with keen interest and wishes to raise concern over government's (**Ministry of Basic Primary & Secondary Education**) "*pronouncement policy of 2016*" **to restrict** teenage pregnant girls from attending all government owned and government assisted schools and a recent clarification on that policy by government of Sierra Leone in October 2019 to maintain the same over the claimed that "*pregnant girls have the potential to negatively influence their peers to become sexual active and pregnant.*" We want to state that this action is unjustifiable and could bring huge inequality gap in educational attainment.

While the NMDHR complements and recognizes the government's effort in providing the free quality education to children in primary and secondary schools and by extension expanding primary school access which in the past years have increased school enrolments especially for female pupils, the coalition also want to draw government's attention to implication of the restriction and how it will discriminate the affected girls to never return to school in their life time.

The right to education is legally guaranteed for all without any discrimination, the government of Sierra Leone has the obligation to protect, respect, and

fulfill the right to education for all Sierra Leoneans (including pregnant girls) regardless of their present status without discriminatory ban.

It is NMDHR's belief that No girl child in Sierra Leone should be discriminated and denied her basic right to education because of her status (pregnancy). **Pregnant Girls have the same rights as to the boys or men who impregnated them.**

NMDHR would also want to state that Sierra Leone is a signatory to International human rights laws that sets out the obligations of the government to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights for all which means that all human rights apply to everyone.

Based on the above, NMDHR would want to take the following position that;

- 1. Pregnant girls should stay in schools as long as they have consented to continue their education during the early stage of pregnancy.**
- 2. There should be adequate infrastructure and trained teachers able to support the delivery of education for pregnant girls.**
- 3. The schools must be accessible to them like every other pupil, and positive steps are taken to include the most marginalized.**
- 4. We recommend for the Ministry of Basic Primary & Secondary Education to introduce sex education in schools that is relevant, non-discriminatory and culturally appropriate, and of quality; this will reduce the outcome of unwanted pregnancy and unprotected sex.**
- 5. Government to enforce by-laws that discourage communities forcing their girls into early relationships or co-habitation and to take appropriate measures to prevent teenage pregnancy at community levels.**

Many studies have shown that when girls are educated there are so many possibilities; society prospers, the home thrives and wealth is easily created. That is why NMDHR is calling on the Government to rethink its decision, fulfill its promise for girls by lifting the restriction. NMDHR will continue to support the government of Sierra Leone and Ministry of Basic Primary & Secondary Education in terms of monitoring the delivering of free quality education to ensure the benefit reach all for better learning outcomes.

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