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African Council of Non-Governmental Organisations
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African NGO Council commends President Bio for launching sexual offenses model court

Freetown, Sierra Leone: The African NGO Council and its members in Sierra Leone, including the Institute for Public Affairs, commend the leadership of President Julius Maada Bio for successfully instituting the sexual offence court.

For too long the issue of rape has ravaged the lives of vulnerable women and girls in Sierra Leone, with little redress or no durable solution. The African NGO Council is pleased with the decision of the President and his government to put legal modalities in place to address rape and its related issues, which often have devastating consequences such as psychological effects on women and girls across the country. The number of rising rape cases and consistent gender-based violence reports in local communities across Sierra Leone are compelling and difficult to understand.

“It is on this note that we are applauding the leadership steps taken by President Julius Maada Bio and his government for stepping up the fight against rape and the culture of gender-based violence against women and girls in Sierra Leone,” says Peter SaSellu, President and CEO of the African NGO Council.

Now, more than ever before, parents and vulnerable members of society, particularly girls, would have a sense of relief believing that there is ‘light at the end of the tunnel’ in the legal system. This brings hope because it seeks the interest of those most vulnerable to the culture of rape in society.

“It is now time for community members to support the government by providing vital information and whatever other support they could in order to play a viable part in urgently addressing this national emergency. This is also an opportunity to continue to explore new ways of collaborating very closely to change attitudes and end the violation of the rights of women and girls in local communities across the country,” adds Peter SaSellu.

“We are a nation of good people. We should be better. We must do more to rid this nation of this menace,” said President Bio at the launching on Friday, 24 July, 2020. “Impunity must be stopped and every perpetrator will be held accountable within the full remit of all existing laws of our country,” he warned.

“We also acknowledge Mrs. Fatima Bio the First Lady of the Republic of Sierra Leone for being an indefatigable campaigner on sexual and gender-based violence, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and breaking the stigma around menstruation that deters girls from being all they can be. Her enormous efforts and personal contributions to bring ‘rape culture’ to end in Sierra Leone is a

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welcome move, and we are in total support of her drive to make the country a rape free society,” said Rebecca Paulson, Executive Director of the African NGO Council.

We know that the Sexual Offences Act is tougher on perpetrators and the Honourable Chief Justice has taken steps to accelerate the course of justice and we are humbly waiting on the alleged rape and murder case of the 5year-old Khadija Saccoh as we are calling on the judiciary for a speedy trial. Now that there is a court for addressing rape cases in the country, the delay in handling rape matters in the Sierra Leone judiciary must come to an end because there is a saying that “justice delayed is justice denied.”

In line with African NGO Council’s Gender and Women’s Empowerment Programme, we call this as welcoming news and a very good step in the right direction in making sure that girls and women are never tagged with such stigma in society.

We affirmed our commitment to the government and the people of Sierra Leone and by far the African continent, that in our power as the global voice for African civil society, we would mobilize the national and regional civil society movement in support of this great initiative of the Bio administration.

About the African NGO Council

The African Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (“African NGO Council” or “AFRONGO”) is an inclusive membership organisation of NGOs and their networks as well as ‘un-networked NGOs’, which subscribe to and support the organisation’s vision, mission and values. It provides a regional platform for NGOs in their diversity, active nationally and regionally; to contribute to governance and development processes across Africa.

The Council is the pan-African umbrella organisation for NGOs operating at the national, sub-regional and Africa regional level. It was founded by a group of NGOs out of their concern to avoid duplication of NGO efforts, and to minimise conflict and competition between NGOs. The founders were also interested in ensuring maximum use of resources mobilised by NGOs for relief and social development purposes through collaboration, networking, and mutual reinforcement of each other's activities.

With its headquarters in Freetown, Sierra Leone, the African NGO Council empowers local and national NGOs and speaks as the global voice for African civil society. More information about the Council is available at www.africanngocouncil.org or email info@africanngocouncil.org.

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