

UNIPSIL Human Rights Section Activities in December 2010

7th December 2010 -Symposium on the theme “Human Rights Defenders who act to end Discrimination”

In collaboration with the United Nations and the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL), the Western Area Human Rights Committee a coalition of CSOs working on human rights issues organized a one day Symposium on the 6th December in commemoration of the International Human Rights Day on the theme: "Human Rights Defenders who act to end discrimination". The programme was attended by representatives from various CSOs, NGOs, media houses and students from both secondary and tertiary institutions. Commissioner Rev. Khanu of HRCSL- who chaired the programme noted that there is a symbolic link between the 16 days of activism against gender violence which starts on 25th November and ends on 10th December on the International Human Rights day. He reiterated that Sierra Leoneans should work together with the Human Rights Commission and other key stakeholders to ensure the protection and inclusion of women, children and persons with disability as well as the elderly and the poor who usually experience discrimination, thereby limiting their enjoyment of civil and political rights as well as economic and social rights. He added that the theme of this year's celebrations calls on every one to recognize and acclaim Human rights defenders who in their drive to act against discrimination are often at great personal risk to both themselves and their families. Presentations were made by various speakers followed by an interactive sessions. Stickers with this year's celebration slogan "Speak up: Stop discrimination" were distributed to the audience.

8th December, 2010 - Drama Competition on the theme-“Speak up Stop discrimination”

A drama competition involving pupils from four primary schools in Freetown was organized on this year's slogan: Speak up: Stop discrimination. The participating teams included: St Anthony's Primary School, Cathedral Girls Primary School, Silmon Preparatory School and the St Joseph's Primary School. The competition was witnessed by pupils and staff of participating schools as well as other invited schools, representatives from various NGOs, members of the diplomatic core, Staff of UNIPSIL, Commissioners and staff of the HRCSL and other distinguished personalities. The St Joseph's Primary School emerged victorious and won a cash prize as well as human rights teaching and learning materials. St Anthony's Primary school, Silmon Preparatory school and the Cathedral Girls primary school came second, third and fourth respectively. Consolation prizes of school materials were given to the other three schools

9th December, 2010 Football match and Best Speakers Contest-Tertiary Institutions

A friendly football match between UNIPSIL football team and the combined team of Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone and CSOs working on human rights issues

was organized by the Western Area Human Rights Committee in collaboration with the Human Rights Commission and the United Nations. It was a keen competition as the combined forces tried hard to clinch the trophy from the defending champions. UNIPSIL team retained the trophy after a 2:1 goal against the combined forces of HRCSL and CSOs. A trophy was presented to the winning team and certificates were presented to all players by the Chief Human Rights of section.



Left: UNIPSIL Team pose for a photo and Right: Winning team displaying the trophy

The football match was followed by best speakers contest for tertiary institutions which was also centered on the theme of the year.-Speak up Stop discrimination. Five tertiary institutions participated in the competition. These include:-IAMTEC, Milton Margai College of Education and Technology-Congo Cross branch, LICSAI, Institute of Business Studies and Administration and EMIBEX. Aside the participating schools, other guest speakers also made presentations on the theme.



Left: contestants for the Best Speaker's line up and Right: Sierra Leone Police making a statement on the occasion.

10th December, 2010 Official Human Rights Day Celebration- Cultural Celebration and general March Past

Following sets of activities ahead of the Human Rights Day, the 10th December programmes which marked the International Day of Human Rights involved all regions and districts in the country. In Sierra Leone's capital Freetown for example, the day's celebration started with a float parade from Annie Walsh Memorial school in the east end of Freetown to the National stadium in west end of the city. Participants of the float parade included staff of Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, UN agencies, school children, civil society groups, other organizations and various cultural dancers all dressed in their t-shirts with various human rights messages. TRC awareness raising music blared from giant musical sets on moving vehicles/trucks. Several banners and placards cards with human rights messages were displayed. The ceremony was climaxed by performances from various groups including the blind school portraying human rights messages and speeches made by national and international stakeholders. The winning school for the drama competition also presented their skit to the admiration of all present.



Upper left, float parade in Kenema. Right and below moments of the parade in Freetown.



National Consultative Conference for persons with disabilities

On November 30th and December 1st, UNIPSIL Human Rights in collaboration with the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) organized a National Consultative Conference for persons with disabilities in Freetown. The Conference was opened by statements from the Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children Affairs, a disabled

Member of Parliament, and the ERSG. The conference was scheduled short ahead the International Day for persons with disabilities (December 3rd) in order to raise public attention towards this commemoration. To ensure broad participation in the two days consultative conference, 80 groups were invited taking into consideration a fair representation from each district (at least five representatives per district). Over 100 participants attended the meeting, coming from all different regions of the country. (Attach list of organizations/city)

The conference highlighted two key objectives:

- a) To map-out strategies to tackle challenges faced by disabled persons in the promotion and protection of their rights.
- b) To devise strategies to fast track the enactment of the domestication of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disability.

The turnout was very good as participants actively took part in the consultations thus proving that disabilities are not an obstacle to active participation in the society. The need for better integration, involvement in decision making, empowerment and independence was common to the many recommendations that constituted the outcome of the Conference.



Upper left: Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs Dr. Soccoh Kabia making a statement; upper Right: the Executive Representative of the Secretary General Mr. Michael Schulenberg making a statement.

Lower left: A cross section of the Milton Margai School for the Blind quire showing their musical talent; lower right: Consultations in progress



UNIPSIL Human Rights Section jointly with UNDP also provided financial and technical support for a pre-legislative forum for parliamentarians on the Persons with Disabilities Bill jointly organized by the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) and the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee. The aim of this engagement was to discuss gaps, amendments and the way forward prior to the enactment of the Bill. Parliamentarians from both the Legislative and the Human Rights Committees suggested amendments, including expanding the scope of free education to primary and secondary schools; ensuring gender balance in the composition of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and independence in line with international standards; and not limiting legal aid to discretion of the Attorney General among others.



Upper left: High table of the pre legislative forum; upper right: parliamentarians giving attention to the presentations.

Training for CSOs in Kono

On December 22nd, UNIPSIL HRS commenced a two days training for 40 civil society activists constituting the Kono District Human Rights Committee. The main objective of

the training was to build capacity on human rights principles, monitoring and reporting and women and children's rights advocacy. The training also aimed at strengthening solidarity among human rights activists, share experiences and coordinate programme activities. Notwithstanding its wealth in mineral resources, Kono district is the hotspot of poverty, socio-economic deprivation and political intolerance; thus the need to build the capacity of activists in the area for continued engagements with relevant stakeholders.

Series of consultations with Sowies

With respect to activities marking the 16 Days of Activism, the Section conducted the final round of consultations with Sowies (Bondo secret society initiators) in Waterloo for the western area, Bo for the south and Kenema for the eastern region to address Sexual and Gender Based Violence and children and women's rights issues. A total of 210 participants were involved in the workshops and discussed SGBV and traditional practices. FGM remains a part of the rites of passage into the Bondo society as much as it remains a human rights concern. The initiators committed themselves to support initiatives and efforts to modernize the Bondo Society rites of passages.



Upper left: Sowies and human rights activists pose for a photo; upper right: Bondo 'mask devils' pose for photo. Lower left: Sowies consulting on key issues regarding the Bondo society.

