

# URGENT ACTION

## PREGNANT GIRLS' RIGHT TO EDUCATION AT RISK

**According to credible reports, the Sierra Leonean government is considering putting in place a policy that would exclude pregnant girls from taking crucial exams and attending school. If implemented, this discriminatory policy would violate girls' fundamental right to education.**

Schools in Sierra Leone have remained closed for eight months due to the Ebola outbreak that has claimed over 3,700 lives in the country according to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). As the government prepares to re-open schools and conduct the crucial Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), currently set for 30 March, there are serious concerns that the authorities may prohibit girls who have become pregnant during the crisis from taking the BECE. The BECE is essential in order to get into higher learning institutions. Such a policy, whether existing in law or in practice, would violate girls' fundamental right to education. This type of regressive policy punishes girls and discriminates against them on the basis of their sex, and can only result in increased stigmatization.

During the Ebola crisis, a majority of clinics, health care centres and pharmacies were closed. Access to sexual and reproductive information, services and goods has been severely limited. Girls have had little or no access to post-rape care services including access to emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy. There are reports that during the quarantines there was an increase in sexual violence.

It is unclear at this time how schools may enforce the exclusion of pregnant girls. But girls' right to privacy and physical integrity may also be at risk, should the authorities attempt to ascertain their pregnancy status. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women has raised its concern with Sierra Leone about girls' lack of access to education, including for reasons such as pregnancy. In 2008, the UN Committee urged the Sierra Leonean government to "implement measures to ensure equal access for girls and women to all levels of education and retention of girls in school." A policy of excluding pregnant girls from education flies in the face of this recommendation.

### **Please write immediately in English or your own language:**

- Urging the President and Minister of Education to publically confirm that all pregnant girls will be able to take the BECE exam on 30 March 2015;
- Urging the President and Minister of Education to take measures to comply with their international and regional legal obligations to respect, protect and fulfil all girls rights to education, non-discrimination, privacy, and physical integrity and issue an urgent directive to all schools to guarantee pregnant girls can continue with their education, attend classes and exams;
- Urging the authorities to take action to guarantee girls' human rights to sexual and reproductive health care information, services and goods, particularly post-rape services for survivors of violence.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 6 MAY 2015 TO:**

#### President

Ernest Bai Koroma  
State House  
Freetown, Sierra Leone  
Email: jkawusu-konte@statehouse.gov.sl  
jaramenajara@yahoo.com  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### Minister of Education

Dr Minkailu Bah  
Ministry of Education, Science &  
Technology  
New England, Free Town, Sierra Leone  
Email: beflim.zain@gmail.com  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sierra Leone's health system, which was already struggling to deliver essential services, was completely overwhelmed by the Ebola crisis which has killed over 3,700 people in the country. Thousands of people have been subjected to quarantines in Sierra Leone over the last eight months. There has also been limited provision of sexual and reproductive health care information, services and goods during this crisis. Further, there are widespread reports including in the media of a rise in sexual violence during this time, as well as pressure on girls to have sex in exchange for goods or money, given the desperate economic situation. Post-rape health care has notably been severely curtailed.

Even before the Ebola outbreak, teenage pregnancy rates in Sierra Leone were high. In 2013, official statistics confirmed that 28% of all girls aged between 15-19 had already had children or were pregnant.

In addition to its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect girl's human rights to non-discrimination, education, privacy and physical integrity, Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, to which Sierra Leone has been state party since 2002, requires that the state take special measures to guarantee girls equal access to education.

Name: Unknown

Gender m/f: f

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