

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Media advisory

27 March 2015

Index: AFR 51/1342/2015

Sierra Leone: Let pregnant girls take exams

The suggestion that visibly pregnant girls in Sierra Leone will be excluded from school exams this Monday will do nothing but damage their education and harm their chances to better their lives, Amnesty International said today.

On Wednesday Sierra Leone's Education Minister Minkailu Bah reiterated previous comments that visibly pregnant girls could be banned from taking their exams. One key reason given by the minister is that they would provide a bad example to other girls. Passing the exams is a requirement to progress from junior to senior high school.

"The government should be striving to get more girls into school, not turning them away at the door. Girls must not have their right to education and their hopes of a better life dashed because of an early and in some cases unwanted pregnancy," said Sabrina Mahtani, Amnesty International West Africa Researcher.

"I dread to think how schools will implement such a policy. What girl would go to school if it meant being singled out, physically examined and shamed? Schools are meant to test student's ability, not whether they are pregnant."

The threatened measures would further disadvantage girls in Sierra Leone, where 28% of 15-19 year olds have a child or are pregnant according to the 2013 Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey.

Schools have been closed for eight months due to the Ebola outbreak, and during that time girls have had less access to reproductive health services or clinics, have been under more pressure to have sex for goods or money, and have been at increased risk of sexual violence.

Schools are due to reopen in April, and it is not known whether or not pregnant girls will be allowed to attend.

Background

A [March 17 article](#) quotes the Minister as saying the pregnant girls' "presence in the classroom would serve as a negative influence to other innocent girls".

More information on Amnesty's call on Sierra Leone is available [here](#).

To arrange an interview with Amnesty International please contact the Amnesty International press office in Dakar on +221 77 658 62 27 or in London on press@amnesty.org, +44 (0)777 847 2126.