Rising Concerns for the State of Girl Child in Nigeria

Following the persistent abuses and violation of Girl Child Rights; the recent kidnapping of schoolgirls by the insurgent group; and rising menace of human trafficking in Nigeria, Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) observed as follows:

1. Girl Child Right has hitherto been ignored across African continent; and rapid population growth characterized by poverty and food insecurity has resulted in demand continuous for child labour to enhance agricultural productivity.

2. As confirmed by UNICEF, trafficking of girl children for the purpose of domestic service, prostitution and other forms of exploitative labour remains a widespread phenomenon in Nigeria.

3. A report by UNFPA revealed that nationwide, 20 percent of girls were married by age 15, and 40 percent were married by age 18.22 Child marriage is extremely prevalent in some regions; in the Northwest region, 48 percent of girls were married by age 15, and 78 percent were married by age 18.23; only 2 percent of 15–19-year-old married girls are in school, compared to 69 percent of unmarried girls; three out of four married girls cannot read at all; and almost one out of four married girls gave birth before age 15.

4. In Nigeria, hapless young women and girls in the age bracket of 10-21 years have fallen victims of human trafficking as they are deceptively procured by some barons through their Nigerian agents who traffic them to different countries abroad where they suffer sexual exploitation, emotional distress, disorientation, depression and sometimes death.

5. Instead of moral support, proper up-binging, good education and respect for Child Rights, thousands of girl children are enslaved by parents or guardians to engage as domestic workers or forced to early marriage across the country, primarily to mitigate socio-economic challenges facing their families as against AU Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights which promotes right to live and personal integrity; Section 33 and 35 of 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria which promotes rights to live and personal liberty respectively; and 2003 International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions on Child Rights.

6. Child marriage remains a fundamental violation of human rights as many girls are married without their free and full consent; and persistent deprivation of girl children rights to good education and personal liberty have altered their efforts to secure befitting future which includes improved health, lower fertility, and increased economic productivity.

7. Rising level of poverty in the country has resulted in girl child prostitution and neglect.

8. Various records from Northern parts of Nigeria such Kano, Jigawa, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara states have revealed pathetic concern for girl child and intensifying rate of child marriage.

9. In Northern parts of the country, girl child is exposed to myriad of challenges such as persistent child marriage, genital mutilation and consequent Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF) which experts attribute mainly to early marriage and early child birth.

10. Early child marriage as opposed to the 18 years minimum promulgated in the Child Rights has resulted in severe diseases and subsequent abandonment of girl child by her husband.
11. Poverty, high level of illiteracy, existing socio-cultural resistance, inadequate awareness, have threatened efforts to address challenges facing girl child in the country.

12. Corruption and slow judicial process remain the main obstacles in bringing offenders of child abuse to justice.

CISLAC recommends as follows:

1. Full implementation by all levels of governments various regulations/laws backing child rights including access to education, to encourage and re-install personal liberty and dignity of girl child.

2. Concerted efforts by all level of governments, National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), civil society, Community Base Organisations, Faith Base Organisations to effectively combat human trafficking scourge and abuses against girl child.

3. Effective collaboration between NAPTIP and foreign human trafficking experts to assist it in the surveillance and monitoring of the nation’s porous borders.

4. Strengthened Nigeria’s criminal justice system to checkmate abuses and violation against girl child.

5. Workable implementation by all levels of government, federal law that establishes 18 as the legal age of marriage for girls.

6. Massive employment opportunities and workable poverty alleviation structures across the country to avert girl child labour and early marriage for a living.

7. Improved access to education and eliminating gender gaps in education, proper individual orientation, mass public awareness and sensitization on the provisions of the Child Right Act.

8. Effective rehabilitation, recovery and reintegration programmes through medical, psychological and legal services for the victims of child labour, sexual abuse and human trafficking.

9. Persistent awareness of parents, community leaders, and policymakers about the health and rights implications of young girls marrying much older men.

10. Development of special social and health support structures for young, first-time mothers, and socio-economic programs for out-of-school girls, including informal education programmes.

11. Strict efforts to strengthen judicial system to provide timely justice to all manners of abuse against girls.

12. Exploring holistic approach to addressing child marriage through integrated education, health, economic and participatory community development programmes at grassroots level.

Signed:

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