

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **SAVE THE CHILDREN, THE CHILDREN'S FORUM NETWORK, AND SIERRA LEONE ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS CALL FOR AN END TO THE ABUSE AND USE OF CHILDREN IN POLITICS**



**Freetown, Sierra Leone 15 June 2023** - Save the Children, in collaboration with the Children's Forum Network and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, express deep concern over reports of children being exploited, abused and involved in political activities during the 2023 General Election Campaigns in Sierra Leone. We strongly condemn such actions and urge all political parties and candidates to immediately cease using children in political campaigns or for conveying political messages.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Sierra Leone is a signatory, provides a clear framework for the protection and well-being of children. Article 3 of the Convention emphasizes that the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning them. Furthermore, Article 32 highlights the right of children to be protected from economic exploitation and any work that may interfere with their education, harm their health, or hinder their development.

The exploitation of children for political purposes not only violates their fundamental rights but also jeopardizes their well-being and future prospects. Children should never be used as pawns or instruments in political campaigns or activities. Such actions undermine their rights, expose them to potential harm, manipulation, and psychological distress.

In addition, we are deeply disappointed by recent developments that disrupted children's education. It has come to our attention that majority of over 220,000 pupils taking the West African Senior Secondary Education Examination (WASSCE), Primary and Secondary School children were either too scared to attend their exams or did not go to school Monday 12<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2023. This disruption to their education not only impacts their academic progress but also compromises their safety and mental well-being.

Eglantyne Jebb, the founder of Save the Children, initiated this movement to advocate for and protect children who suffer the consequences of political instability. In situations where children are exploited for political gains, it is imperative to remind everyone of the urgent need to protect and prioritize the well-being of children.

Save the Children, Children's Forum Network, and Sierra Leone Association of Journalists call upon all political parties, candidates, and their supporters to uphold the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We urge them to:

- Immediately cease the use of children in political campaigns, protests, events, or activities.
- Ensure the protection of children from any form of exploitation, manipulation, or harm during the electoral process.
- Raise awareness within respective party structures and among supporters about the importance of safeguarding children's rights.
- Encourage the reporting of instances of child exploitation to the appropriate authorities.

We also appeal to the media, civil society organizations, and citizens to remain vigilant and report any instances of child exploitation or involvement in political activities to the nearest police station. Together, we can create an environment where children are safe, nurtured, and free from political exploitation.

Save the Children, Children's Forum Network, and Sierra Leone Association of Journalists remain committed to working towards a society that upholds and protects the rights of every child. We call on all stakeholders to join hands in ensuring that children are shielded from harm and that their rights are respected, both during and beyond the electoral process.

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### **Note to Editors**

**Save the Children** is a leading global humanitarian organization dedicated to improving the lives of children. They work to protect children from harm, provide access to quality education and healthcare, and ensure their voices are heard. Their mission is to create a world where every child has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

**The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ)** is a professional body representing journalists in Sierra Leone. It promotes press freedom, ethical journalism, and the rights of journalists. SLAJ strives to uphold high standards of reporting and advocates for the welfare and protection of journalists, fostering a vibrant media landscape in the country.

**The Children's Forum Network (CFN)** is a platform for children to voice their opinions and participate in decision-making processes. CFN empowers children to advocate for their rights, promotes child participation, and works towards creating a society that values and prioritizes the well-being and development of children.