



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child

Concluding observations on the combined second to fourth periodic reports of Liberia, adopted by the Committee at its sixty-first session (17 September-5 October 2012)

1. The Committee considered the consolidated second to fourth periodic reports of Liberia (CRC/C/LBR/2-4) at its 1728th and 1729th meetings, held on 18 September 2012 (see CRC/C/SR.1728 and 1729), and adopted, at its 1754th meeting, held on 5 October 2012, the following concluding observations.

I. Introduction

2. The Committee welcomes the submission of the consolidated second to fourth periodic reports of the State party, as well as the written replies to its list of issues (CRC/C/LBR/Q/2-4/Add.1). The Committee appreciates the presence of a very high-level and multi-sectoral delegation and the positive dialogue, which enabled the Committee to gain a better understanding of the situation of children in the State party.

II. Follow-up measures undertaken and progress achieved by the State party

3. The Committee welcomes as positive the following legislative measures:

(a) The Children's Law of 4 February 2012 designed to domesticate the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the national legal system;

(b) The Education Reform Act of 8 August 2011;

(c) The Anti-Corruption Law of 21 August 2008;

(d) The Act to amend the Penal Code of 17 January 2006, known as the Rape Law;

(e) The Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons within the Republic of Liberia of 14 June 2005, known as the Anti-trafficking Law; and

(f) The Independent National Commission on Human Rights Act of the Republic of Liberia of 11 March 2005.

4. The Committee also welcomes the ratification or accession to the following international and regional human rights instruments:

- (a) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in July 2012;
- (b) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in September 2004 and its second Optional Protocol in September 2005;
- (c) Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in September 2004;
- (d) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol in September 2004;
- (e) African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in August 2007; and
- (f) Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa in December 2007;

5. The Committee appreciates the State party's efforts to put in place policies and plans aimed at promoting child rights, in particular the following measures:

- (a) National Plan of Action for the Prevention and Management of Gender-based Violence (2011-2015);
- (b) National Plan of Action against Human Trafficking (2008);
- (c) National Policy on Girls' Education (2006);
- (d) National Youth Policy for Liberia: A Framework for Setting Priorities and Executing Actions (2006); and
- (e) Education Sector Master Plan 2000-2010 and the Action Plan 2004-2015: Education for All.

6. The Committee commends the establishment of a Criminal Court mandated to handle gender-based violence cases in 2008, as well as the creation of the Women and Children's Protection Section within the Liberian National Police service in 2005.

III. Factors and difficulties impeding the implementation of the Convention

7. The Committee notes that years of political instability followed by a 14-year civil war that ended in 2006 led to severe destruction of physical and social infrastructure, disruption of governmental and social institutions, displacement of the vast majority of the population internally and externally as well as severe loss of human capital, all of which constitute obstacles to the full implementation of the Convention.

IV. Main areas of concern and recommendations

A. General measures of implementation (arts. 4, 42 and 44, para. 6, of the Convention)

The Committee's previous recommendations

8. While welcoming the State party's efforts to implement the concluding observations on its previous report (CRC/C/15/Add.236, 2004), the Committee regrets that some of the recommendations contained therein have not been fully addressed.

9. The Committee urges the State party to take all necessary measures to address those recommendations from the concluding observations of the initial report under the Convention that have not been implemented or sufficiently implemented,

particularly those related to legislation, coordination, non-discrimination, harmful practices and juvenile justice.

Legislation

10. The Committee welcomes the enactment of the Children's Law in February 2012. However, it remains concerned that the State party has not undertaken a complete review of its legislation in order to harmonize it with the Convention, and that some provisions of the existing legislation and customary law are not consistent with the principles and provisions of the Convention, in particular those relating to the minimum age for marriage, adoption, and juvenile justice.

11. The Committee recommends that the State party ensure the full and effective implementation of the Children's Law. It reiterates its recommendation (CRC/C/15/Add.236, para. 10, 2004) that the State party undertake a comprehensive review of all domestic legislation to ensure full conformity with the principles and provisions of the Convention, and in the meantime ensure that in case of conflict, the Children's Law prevails over all statutory and customary legislation.

Comprehensive policy and national plan of action

12. The Committee notes the adoption of several policies and plans relating to children, notably the National Health and Social Welfare Plan, the National Plan of Action against Trafficking, the National Youth Policy for Liberia and the National Youth Action Plan and the National Social Protection Policy and Strategy. However, it reiterates its concern (CRC/C/15/Add.236, para. 11, 2004) about the lack of a comprehensive policy to guide the implementation of the Convention as a whole and the lack of a clear mechanism such as a national plan of action on children to link the implementation of the various child-related plans.

13. The Committee recommends that the State party develop a comprehensive national policy on children, in consultation with children, civil society, community and traditional leaders, for the overall realization of the principles and provisions of the Convention and its Optional Protocols; as well as a national plan of action on children, linked to the national budget, on the implementation of the Convention and the Children's Law and application of the national policy.

Coordination

14. The Committee notes that the Children's Protection and Development Unit, upgraded to the status of a Division in 2008 under the Ministry of Gender and Development, has responsibility for overall coordination of activities to implement the Convention in the State party. The Committee regrets the lack of information on the resources allocated to the Division, while noting that its parent Ministry receives one of the lowest budgetary allocations from the national budget. It is seriously concerned about the lack of capacity and authority of the Children's Protection and Development Division to carry out policy level and strategic coordination among the various ministries and between the national and provincial levels on child rights-related matters. The Committee notes that a National Child Well-being Council is mandated by the Children's Law; however it is concerned that the Council has not yet become operational and its mandate clarified with regard to other institutions.

15. The Committee urges the State party to reinforce the coordination by ensuring that an appropriate body with high status, sufficient authority, clear mandate and adequate human, technical and financial resources is designated to effectively coordinate action for children's rights across different sectors and from the national

to the county and municipal levels. To this effect, the State party should take into account the Committee's general comment No. 5 (2003) on the general measures of implementation for the Convention (CRC/GC/2003/5). The Committee recommends that the State party expedite the operationalization of the National Child Well-being Council with a clear mandate and adequate human, financial and technical resources.

Allocation of resources

16. While noting that Liberia was one of the countries in Africa that performed fairly in 2006-2008 in allocating resources to sectors that benefit children, the Committee remains concerned that national budgetary resources for the implementation of the Convention remain very insufficient. It is also concerned that the heavy dependency on donor funding of the social sectors benefiting children is not sustainable. Furthermore, the budgeting process in the State party does not allow for clear identification of the resources allocated to children, and prevents the tracking of expenditure on children and the evaluation of its impact.

17. The Committee recommends that the State party in planning its future budgets take into account its recommendations during the day of general discussion in 2007 on "Resources for the Rights of the Child – Responsibility of States" and specifically:

(a) Allocate adequate budgetary resources for children to the maximum extent possible in accordance with article 4 of the Convention and article III (2) of the Children's Law and in particular increase the budget allocated to the social sectors benefiting children, including from the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt relief resources;

(b) Initiate a budgeting exercise that utilizes a child rights approach to ensure strategic allocations from the State budget to implement children's rights, and implement a tracking, monitoring and evaluation system for the allocations and their use;

(c) Conduct a comprehensive assessment of children's needs; define strategic budgetary lines that provide clear allocations for those areas that progressively address the persistent disparities in indicators such as gender, disability and geographical location affecting children's rights; and ensure that those budgetary lines are protected even in situations of economic crisis, natural disasters or other emergencies;

(d) Conduct regular budget impact assessments with respect to children's rights utilizing the tracking system to assess how investments in any sector may serve the best interests of the child, while ensuring that the differential impact of such investments on girls and boys is measured; and

(e) Consider seeking technical assistance from, inter alia, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Corruption

18. While commending the State party on the adoption of the Anti-Corruption Act in 2008 and the establishment of an Anti-Corruption Commission, the Committee is highly concerned that corruption remains pervasive in the State party, as recognized by the State Party's delegation. Corruption continues to divert resources that could otherwise improve the implementation of the rights of the child and weakens the efficiency and efficacy of budgetary allocations for children.

19. The Committee urges the State party to take immediate measures to combat corruption and strengthen institutional capacities, including trained investigators and

prosecutors and the Anti-Corruption Commission, to effectively detect, investigate and prosecute corruption.

Data collection

20. The Committee notes the State party's intention to create a central data collection system in areas concerning children together with the Child Protection Network. However, it reiterates its concern about the lack of information and the inability to access disaggregated data about children on most areas covered under the Convention (CRC/C/15/Add/236, para. 19, 2004), in particular children in poverty, children subjected to violence, children with disabilities, children deprived of a family environment and children engaged in child labour.

21. The Committee encourages the State party to set up a comprehensive data collection system with the support of its partners and to analyse the data collected on children as a basis for assessing progress achieved in the realization of child rights and to help design appropriate policies and programmes to implement the Convention. The data collection should focus in particular on the aforementioned children. The data should also be disaggregated by age, sex, geographic location, ethnicity, nationality and socio-economic background to facilitate analysis on the situation of all children.

Independent monitoring

22. While noting the amendments made in 2005 and 2009 to the Independent National Commission on Human Rights Act, the Committee reiterates its concern (CRC/C/15/Add.236, para. 15, 2004) that the Commission continues to be ineffective and lacks an explicit mandate to investigate children's complaints. It is further concerned that this lacuna has negative consequences on children's enjoyment of their rights, particularly in rural and remote areas.

23. The Committee urges the State party to strengthen the capacity of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights to bring it into full compliance with the Paris Principles and reflect its general comment No. 2 (2002) on the role of independent human rights institutions in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child (CRC/GC/2002/2). The State party should ensure that the Commission has a mechanism accessible to all children under the age of 18 years, empowered to receive and investigate complaints of violations of child rights in a child-sensitive manner. The Commission should be equipped with adequate human, financial and technical resources to properly discharge its responsibility, and effectively address child rights' violations, especially in rural and remote areas.

Dissemination and awareness-raising

24. The Committee is concerned at the low level of awareness and knowledge of the Convention among professionals working with and for children, as well as among the general public, including children, largely due to the fact that the Convention is not available in local languages or in versions accessible to all and in child-friendly versions.

25. The Committee recommends that the State party ensure effective dissemination of the Convention, including through translating the Convention into local languages and making it available in accessible and child-friendly versions. The State party should also increase its efforts to raise awareness among the general public, community and traditional leaders and children (including children who are out of school), about the rights provided for in the Convention.

Training

26. While commending the increase in the amount of training provided to the child welfare committees, the Committee remains concerned that training is ad hoc, dispersed and not systematic; and in particular that judges and other personnel involved in juvenile justice are not trained on how to deal properly with young persons in conflict with the law.

27. The Committee recommends that all professional groups working for and with children be adequately and systematically trained on children's rights, including law enforcement officials, judges, prosecutors, teachers, health workers, social workers and personnel working in all forms of alternative care.

Cooperation with civil society

28. The State party is encouraged to strengthen its cooperation with civil society for the implementation of the Convention and the Children's Law, including the development and monitoring of the implementation of policies, legislation and the National Plan of Action for Children. The Committee recommends that the State party consider strengthening the capacity of civil society in order to allow it to effectively discharge its duties, including funding local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to support activities in communities where the State is not present.

Child rights and the business sector

29. The Committee regrets that multinational companies in the country, notably those operating in the rubber and steel producing industries, are operating in the absence of clear regulatory frameworks to ensure that international human rights, labour, environment and other standards are adhered to in order to protect workers and families and communities affected by their activities. In particular, the Committee is concerned that children are being engaged by their families in hazardous work in order to meet production quotas imposed by the companies, yet data on child employment is not collected and analysed for remedial action. It is also concerned that issues related to relocation affecting families and communities in mining areas, such as compensation for private properties to be left behind, new lands for housing, farming, and settlements, and access to other natural resources for income and subsistence, are not discussed with or communicated to the persons concerned, nor are they disclosed to the public.

30. The Committee recommends that the State Party establish and implement regulations to ensure that the national and transnational business sector complies with international and national human rights, labour, environment and other standards, particularly with regard to child rights, and in light of Human Rights Council resolutions 8/7 of 18 June 2008 (para. 4(d)) and resolution 17/4 of 16 June 2011 (para. 6(f)). In particular, it recommends that the State party:

(a) Expedite the revision of the Labour Act with a view to fully incorporating ILO Convention 182 into national law regarding the prohibition of hazardous work by children and regulating child labour in compliance with the Convention;

(b) Require assessments, consultations and disclosure by companies on plans to address environmental and health pollution, as well as on the human rights impact of measures such as relocation of communities or establishment of production quotas;

(c) Collect data on children engaged in hazardous work in private companies, disaggregated by age, sex, geographic location, ethnicity, socio-economic

background and type of work and analysed for policy formulation to prevent the occurrence of violations and provide effective remedies when they occur; and

(d) Take into account the United Nations Business and Human Rights Framework adopted unanimously in 2008 by the Human Rights Council to promote child rights in the context of business.

B. Definition of the child (art. 1 of the Convention)

31. While noting as positive that the legal age of marriage has been set at 18 years for both boys and girls in the Children's Law, the Committee is concerned that section 2.9 of the Inheritance and Customary Marriages Act 2003 provides for customary marriage for girls from the age of 16 and that the Revised Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia permit marriage of girls at 15 years old. Furthermore, it is deeply concerned that early and forced marriages continue to be widely practised throughout the State party, in particular in rural areas.

32. The Committee urges the State party to harmonize the legal provisions related to the age of marriage in both customary and codified laws with the Children's Law, and to repeal section 2.9 of the Inheritance and Customary Marriage Act. It also urges the State party to take active and concrete measures to enforce the legal prohibition of early and forced marriage and strengthen its activities to raise awareness about the negative consequences of early and forced marriages on children and society.

C. General principles (arts. 2, 3, 6 and 12 of the Convention)

Non-discrimination

33. The Committee regrets that insufficient measures have been taken by the State party to implement its previous recommendations to eliminate all forms of discrimination, in particular against children in vulnerable situations (CRC/C/15/Add.236, para. 24, 2004). It is particularly concerned at the extent of gender-based discrimination in the State party, in particular against girls living in and coming from rural areas, who experience persistent discrimination in relation to access to education and social services, and their right to property and security. Statutory and customary laws which discriminate against women remain in force, in particular the Revised Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland. The Committee is also concerned about harassment and stigmatization of children with disabilities in the State party.

34. The Committee recommends that the State party take more active measures to end all forms of discrimination against children, with special attention to discrimination against girls, children belonging to ethnic groups in rural areas, and children with disabilities. In particular, it urges the State party to:

(a) Ensure that all discriminatory laws, including customary laws are amended or repealed and brought into full compliance with the Convention including the Revised Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia;

(b) Formulate a comprehensive strategy, including a clear definition of targets and the establishment of a monitoring mechanism to modify and eliminate negative attitudes and practices, and change deep-rooted stereotypes that discriminate against children in situations of vulnerability, in particular girls, children living in and coming from rural areas, and children with disabilities;

(c) Sensitize professionals working with and for children and the public in general on the prohibition of gender discrimination as provided in the Constitution and Children's Law, and undertake educational programmes, including campaigns that promote equality;

(d) Cooperate with the widest range of stakeholders, including children, women's organizations, community and traditional leaders, and all sectors of society to promote social and cultural change and create an enabling environment that promotes equality among children; and

(e) Monitor such efforts and regularly assess progress made towards achieving the established goals, and include an assessment of the results achieved in its next report.

Best interests of the child

35. While commending the incorporation of the principle of the best interests of the child in the Children's Law, the Committee is concerned that this principle is not systematically reflected in the State party's legislation and national policies. It is further concerned about the general societal perception in the State party that the best interests of adults should prevail over those of the child.

36. The Committee urges the State party to strengthen its efforts to ensure that the principle of the best interests of the child is appropriately integrated and consistently applied in all legislative, administrative and judicial proceedings as well as in all policies, programmes and projects relevant to and with an impact on children. In this regard, the State party is encouraged to develop procedures and criteria to provide guidance for determining the best interests of the child in every area, and to disseminate them to the public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities and legislative bodies. The legal reasoning of all judicial and administrative judgments and decisions should also be based on this principle. The Committee recommends that the State party launch awareness-raising programmes including campaigns to alter the prevailing societal perception that the best interests of the child are inferior to those of adults.

Right to life, survival and development

37. The Committee deeply regrets that, despite the adoption of the Children's Law and the ratification of the second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aimed at the abolition of the death penalty, the death penalty is still applicable to children aged 16 and 17 years according to the Penal Code in its current form, in contravention of article 37 of the Convention. It also remains seriously concerned at the persistence of ritualistic killings of children.

38. The Committee urges the State party to expedite the revision and amendment of the Penal Code in order to abolish the death penalty for children aged 16 and 17 years, and to ensure strict application of the Children's Law to eradicate the practice of ritualistic killings and ensure the swift prosecution of the perpetrators of such practices. It recommends that the State party step up its efforts to ensure the right to life, survival and development of all children in the State party, in line with article 6 of the Convention.

Respect for the views of the child

39. While commending the State party for establishing a Children's Parliament as well as child clubs at all county levels by virtue of the Children's Law, the Committee is concerned that the views of children on decisions affecting them are rarely given due

weight, especially in the home, and in particular that girls are expected to be less participative than boys. Children are not provided with the opportunity to be heard in all judicial and administrative proceedings affecting them, in accordance with their age and maturity, including in cases of deprivation of parental rights.

40. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to ensure that children, in particular girls, have the right to express their views, and that these are given due weight in all matters affecting them in both the public and private spheres, including through the effective operationalization of all county clubs/assemblies. It further recommends the State party to ensure that children are able to participate in judicial and administrative proceedings and make their views known, including through relevant legislative amendments. In this regard, the Committee draws the State party's attention to its general comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard (CRC/C/GC/12).

D. Civil rights and freedoms (arts. 7, 8, 13-17, 19 and 37 (a) of the Convention)

Name and nationality

41. The Committee regrets that, despite its previous recommendation, the granting of citizenship to children born in the State party remains restricted on the basis of colour or racial origin according to the provisions contained in article 27 of the Constitution and the Alien and the Nationalization Law, which are contrary to article 2 of the Convention.

42. The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation (CRC/C/15/Add.236, para 33, 2004) and calls upon the State party to take urgent measures to amend its Constitution and citizenship laws to eliminate discrimination on the basis of colour or racial origin.

Birth registration

43. While appreciating the efforts made by the State party to improve birth registration, which has culminated in the registration rate almost doubling in recent years, as well as the pilot project in seven counties aimed at universal birth registration with free birth certificates, the Committee remains concerned at the low rate of birth registration (seven per cent) and at the regional and gender disparities in birth registration, as well as at the low level of awareness among parents of the importance of birth registration.

44. The Committee encourages the State party to further strengthen its efforts at increasing the rate of birth registration, including through the effective implementation of the targeted joint projects with local partners and United Nations agencies. It further recommends that the State party launch extensive awareness-raising programmes including campaigns on the importance of birth registration, on the process of registration, and on the benefits thereof. In doing so, the State party should pay particular attention to the communities in outlying counties; it is further invited to consider the use of well-resourced mobile birth registration teams to cover remote and underserved areas and extending free-of-charge birth registration with free birth certificates for children of all ages.

E. Violence against children (arts. 19, 37 (a), 34 and 39 of the Convention)

Corporal punishment

45. While welcoming the incorporation of the legal prohibition of corporal punishment in correctional facilities in article IX, section 3.5, of the Children's Law, the Committee is concerned that corporal punishment remains lawful in schools, in the home and in alternative care settings. It is highly alarmed by the frequent incidence of corporal punishment, including extreme physical violence suffered by children at school and in the home. The Committee is also concerned about the lack of awareness among parents, persons working with and for children, and the general public of the negative impact corporal punishment has on children.

46. With reference to its general comment No. 8 (2006) on the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (CRC/C/GC/8), the Committee urges the State party to explicitly prohibit by law corporal punishment in all settings, including in the family, schools and other institutions and childcare settings. Furthermore, it urges the State party to step up its efforts in carrying out awareness-raising programmes through the Ministry of Gender and Development, together with civil society and community leaders, aimed at fostering a culture of non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing and alternative forms of discipline to corporal punishment. In this endeavour the State party should introduce public education on the harmful effects of corporal punishment on children and establish a confidential reporting system in schools and childcare settings for children who are victims of corporal punishment.

Abuse and neglect

47. While noting that the Children's Law contains various provisions on violence against children and that the State party has carried out training for police officers dealing with domestic violence, the Committee remains concerned about the widespread violence against children. It reiterates its concern (CRC/C/15/Add.236, para. 42, 2004) at the lack of sufficient measures, mechanisms and resources to prevent and combat domestic violence, abuse of children at school and neglect of children. It regrets the limited access to services for abused children, and the high level of impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of violence against children, against whom mostly social measures rather than prosecutions are applied.

48. The Committee urges the State party to:

(a) Undertake continuous public educational programmes, including campaigns, on the negative impact of violence on the enjoyment of children's rights;

(b) Strengthen the Women and Children Protection Section in the Police Service, by providing adequate human, technical and financial resources to fulfil its role effectively at all county levels, and strengthen child rights training for law enforcement personnel, in order to ensure that they can provide adequate support to child victims;

(c) Take all necessary measures to ensure that child victims of violence receive psychosocial and recovery services; that they are aware of the reporting procedures, and are encouraged to report cases of domestic violence, in particular child sexual abuse, to the authorities; and

(d) Ensure that criminal legal proceedings are systematically brought against the perpetrators of violence against children to eliminate impunity.

Sexual exploitation and abuse

49. The Committee welcomes the adoption of the Act to amend the Penal Code in 2006, known as the Rape Law, and commends the State party for establishing the Criminal Court, “Court E”, to handle cases of gender-based violence, along with the specialized prosecution unit, in 2008. However, it remains gravely concerned that:

- (a) Child rape and sexual offences are among the most commonly reported crimes in the State party, children are the majority of victims of sexual violence and the number of incidents of rape of girls under 12 years old has increased;
- (b) A high number of cases are settled out of the court due to pressure from the families of the alleged perpetrators;
- (c) Corrupt practices of judicial officials are an obstacle for victims seeking justice; and
- (d) The lack of sufficient investigative and forensic capacity remains a challenge.

50. The Committee urges the State party to:

- (a) **Take effective measures to enforce domestic laws that protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, and to provide intensive training to police personnel, judiciary and professionals working with and for children on the related laws;**
- (b) **Investigate effectively all cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation, including rape, in order to afford better protection for child victims, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice and punished;**
- (c) **Take active measures to discourage interference in the judicial process and prosecute and punish corrupt officials who obstruct justice in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse of children;**
- (d) **Provide the Criminal Court and its Prosecution Unit with adequate support, including human, technical and financial resources, to fulfil its role, and consider establishing branch offices at all county levels; and**
- (e) **Establish an effective system of reporting with a child-sensitive inquiry and judicial procedure that protects confidentiality, and develop programmes and policies for the prevention, recovery and reintegration of child victims in accordance with the outcome documents adopted at the 1996, 2001 and 2008 World Congresses against Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Stockholm, Yokohama and Rio de Janeiro.**

Harmful practices

51. While welcoming the efforts made by the State party, in cooperation with civil society and traditional leaders, to combat harmful practices; the Committee is seriously concerned that:

- (a) There is no explicit criminalization of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the State party and that the practice is widely carried out in many communities, especially in rural areas;
- (b) There is a persistence of harmful practices such as trials by ordeal, and early and forced marriages of girls, including polygamous marriages, which, according to the State party report, reduce the resources that a father devotes to a child; and
- (c) Forced recruitment of girl and boy children, respectively, into the “Sande” and “Poro” secret societies continues and so-called “Bush Schools” exist, where, children

are subjected to economic exploitation and initiation rites including female and male circumcision, among other things, which have a serious impact on children's school attendance, inter alia.

52. The Committee urges the State party to:

(a) Criminalize FGM and develop a comprehensive strategy with clear goals and targets to eradicate this practice while addressing special measures towards communities that continue to practise it, including in the counties of Bomi, Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, Gbarpolu and Montserrado;

(b) Rigorously enforce existing legislation prohibiting harmful practices including early and forced marriages and trials by ordeal; and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice;

(c) Strengthen efforts to raise awareness of both women and men, government officials, extended families, chiefs and other traditional, religious and community leaders and *zoes* (headwomen of the Sande society) of the harmful impact of FGM and early and forced marriages on the psychological and physical health and welfare of the girl child, and on the need to prevent these, while promoting positive cultural practices in childhood;

(d) Accelerate efforts and programmes to sensitize and assist practitioners of FGM to find alternative sources of income and livelihood to encourage them to abandon the practice;

(e) Take immediate measures for the Ministry of Internal Affairs to stop issuing licences and permits to all practitioners of FGM and other harmful practices affecting the well-being of children;

(f) Take all necessary measures to prohibit the recruitment of children into the so-called "Bush Schools" of the "Sande" and "Poro" secret societies and provide adequate protection to children who might be vulnerable to such recruitment, including in the counties of Bomi, Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, Gbarpolu and Montserrado;

(g) Discourage polygamy by applying legal and administrative measures and conducting educational and awareness-raising programmes on the adverse effects thereof on the well-being of children;

(h) Put in place monitoring mechanisms to regularly assess progress towards the elimination of harmful practices affecting children's rights and include such information in the next report; and

(i) Continue and strengthen cooperation in this regard with, inter alia, civil society and UNICEF.

Freedom of the child from all forms of violence

53. Recalling the recommendations of the United Nations Study on violence against children (A/61/299), the Committee recommends that the State party prioritize the elimination of all forms of violence against children, taking into account general comment No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence (CRC/C/GC/13), and in particular:

(a) Develop a comprehensive national strategy to prevent and address all forms of violence against children;

(b) Adopt a national coordinating framework to address all forms of violence against children;

- (c) Pay particular attention to the gender dimension of violence; and
- (d) Cooperate with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children and other relevant United Nations institutions.

F. Family environment and alternative care (arts. 5, 18 (paras. 1-2), 9-11, 19-21, 25, 27 (para. 4) and 39 of the Convention)

Family environment

54. The Committee commends the State party for incorporating many provisions on parents' responsibilities into the Children's Law and developing the National Social Welfare Policy in 2009, which attaches high importance to the family unit. However, it remains concerned at the insufficient resources and measures to enhance the capacities of parents, especially teenage parents, in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities. It is particularly concerned about the unequal roles of men and women in sharing child-rearing and parental responsibilities; and about the large number of fathers not providing for their children and the difficulties in the recovery of child maintenance allowance despite the existence of a legal obligation to do so.

55. In accordance with articles 9 and 18 of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to provide support services and facilities to parents and caregivers, including parenting education, in order to enhance their capacities for better childcare and child-rearing. To realize this goal the State party should, inter alia:

- (a) Consider activating the child welfare committees and take measures to implement the National Social Welfare Policy effectively;
- (b) Step up its efforts, in close cooperation with civil society and community leaders, to sensitize men and women on their shared responsibilities to children under articles 18 and 27 of the Convention and to change gender-stereotyping of the role of women and girls in the family and society; and
- (c) Take effective measures to inform parents of the provisions of domestic legislation concerning the recovery of children's maintenance allowance, and consider providing free legal aid and social work assistance in the recovery of child maintenance allowance for parents in need.

Children deprived of a family environment

56. While noting as positive the development of programmes to decrease the number of children in residential facilities, as well as the State party's efforts to offer foster homes instead of residential care for children deprived of a family environment, the Committee remains concerned that:

- (a) A large number of children remain in residential care and in orphanages, where many of the children are not orphans;
- (b) Despite the development of rules in 2010 to govern standards in care institutions, their implementation is ineffective and the conditions in most institutions remain poor; and
- (c) There is slow progress in the accreditation process for residential care institutions and the fate of the children in institutions which are not accredited is vulnerable and insecure.

57. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Increase its efforts to ensure that children in need of alternative care are placed in family-type care rather than in institutions, and that they maintain contact with, or are returned to, their families whenever possible;**

(b) **Close immediately all sub-standard orphanages while ensuring the relocation of affected children into safe living arrangements, preferably community-based and family-type arrangements; and**

(c) **Ensure a comprehensive monitoring and periodic review system as well as a complaints mechanism for children placed in alternative care throughout the State party.**

Adoption

58. While noting the establishment of a National Commission on Adoption in 2008 to examine domestic and intercountry adoptions, and the issuance of a moratorium on intercountry adoption due to identified malpractices, the Committee is highly concerned at the persistence of informal domestic adoption and intercountry adoption in the State party where in many cases the parents' informed consent is not provided. It is also concerned about the exploitation of children as a consequence of informal adoption, and at the lack of legislation on adoption.

59. The Committee recommends that, in all cases of adoption, the State party ensure that the best interests of the child are of paramount consideration, and that the parents or legal guardians have given their informed consent to the adoption. It further recommends that the State party take urgent measures to abolish informal adoptions and to expedite the enactment of the Adoption Bill, and to ratify the 1993 Hague Convention No. 33 on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

G. Disability, basic health and welfare (arts. 6, 18 (para. 3), 23, 24, 26, 27 (paras. 1-3) of the Convention)

Children with disabilities

60. The Committee notes as positive the incorporation of an inclusive policy in the Education Sector Plan 2010-2020 as well as in the Children's Law and commends the State party for establishing the Commission on Disabilities in 2008. However, it is concerned about:

(a) The high level of stigmatization of children with disabilities;

(b) The Education Reform Act, which does not include an obligation for the education of children with disabilities;

(c) The lack of trained teachers to cater for the needs of children with disabilities at schools;

(d) Children with disabilities who do not receive standard immunizations or basic health care, and face difficulties in accessing confidential reproductive health services due to the stereotyped misconception that they are not sexually active;

(e) The absence of support for families with children with disabilities; and

(f) The inadequate resources allocated to the Commission on Disabilities, which prevents it from fulfilling its role effectively, including the collection of disaggregated data on the situation of children with disabilities.

61. In light of its general comment No. 9 (2006) on the rights of children with disabilities (CRC/C/GC/9), the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Develop and launch active awareness-raising programmes including campaigns with a view to changing the societal misconceptions about children with disabilities and eliminating stigmatization;**

(b) **Strictly implement the Children's Law and amend the Education Act to ensure that children with disabilities have equal access to education;**

(c) **Provide sufficient numbers of specialist teachers and professionals providing individual support in all schools and ensure that all professionals are adequately trained so that all children with disabilities can effectively enjoy their right to quality inclusive education;**

(d) **Take effective measures to ensure immunization and access to basic health care to children with disabilities, as well as to reproductive health services;**

(e) **Provide adequate support to children with disabilities and their families, inter alia, to avoid children with disabilities being sent into residential care;**

(f) **Allocate sufficient human, financial and technical resources to the National Commission on Disabilities to permit it to fulfil its mandate, including the effective collection and analysis of data and information on children with disabilities; and**

(g) **Consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.**

Health and health services

62. The Committee welcomes the progress achieved in increasing access to primary health-care services and the recent improvements in child health and nutrition indicators. However it remains seriously concerned that many communities still lack access to basic health services, in particular in rural areas, and that there are persistent inequalities and regional disparities in the distribution of health personnel and in access to essential health services.

63. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Continue to strengthen its efforts to improve access to basic health-care services for all children and pregnant women, particularly in rural areas;**

(b) **Devise and implement a strong primary health-care system to cover the whole country;**

(c) **Take concerted measures to reach areas characterized by disparities in health services, facilities and health outcomes;**

(d) **Pay attention to the quality of care and provide well equipped health-care facilities and clinics with trained health workers; and**

(e) **Work with families, children, community and religious leaders to strengthen health education and to promote positive attitudes and healthy behaviours that may contribute to reducing the prevalence of infections, improving nutrition and reducing maternal and child mortality.**

Maternal and child health

64. The Committee remains concerned at:

(a) The various difficulties faced by pregnant women in rural areas in accessing referral services, mainly due to long distances, poor roads, and the non-availability of skilled and well-equipped health facilities and professionals, especially in villages and remote areas, resulting, inter alia, in an unacceptably high maternal mortality rate in the State party (one of the highest in the world);

(b) The high levels of child morbidity and mortality, mainly attributable to malaria (67 per cent), pneumonia (14 per cent) and malnutrition (13 per cent); and

(c) The increasing use of breast milk substitutes in recent years and the very low rate of breastfeeding.

65. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Develop an accessible system of antenatal care provided by trained caregivers at home or in clinics, including care at delivery and for new-born babies in well-resourced and adequately staffed health clinics in remote areas; ensure access to emergency obstetric care; and encourage pregnant women to seek antenatal care and have their babies delivered at hospitals wherever possible or in facilities attended by trained professionals;**

(b) **Prioritize work on the causes of maternal and child mortality and morbidity given their high prevalence in the State party, including underlying factors such as acute and chronic undernutrition and nutritional deficiencies, and establish monitoring mechanisms for mortality;**

(c) **Identify ways to address the causes in a coordinated and holistic manner;**

(d) **Provide all children from birth to five years old with a package of health services which includes immunization, prevention of malaria, oral rehydration therapy, nutritional supplements, control of respiratory infections, and growth monitoring, using, inter alia, scientifically proven, low-cost and community-based interventions;**

(e) **Develop nutrition programmes as a matter of urgency to reduce stunting and other forms of malnutrition and implement the Essential Nutrition Package in all health facilities; and**

(f) **Strengthen the promotion of breastfeeding and enforce the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, also as a means to combat the high prevalence of infant malnutrition in the State party.**

Adolescent health

66. The Committee notes that teenage pregnancy is one of the highest risks to children in certain areas of the State party, including Grand Kru, River Gee, Lofa and Montserrado counties and is seriously concerned at the high incidence of teenage pregnancies as well as the high level of clandestine and unsafe abortions among adolescent girls. The Committee is concerned that adolescent-sensitive and confidential counselling services and support, particularly for adolescent mothers, are scarce in the State party. Furthermore, smoking, alcohol consumption and drug use remain widespread among adolescents and there are limited programmes and services available for those affected by substance abuse.

67. In light of its general comment No. 4 (2003) on adolescent health (CRC/C/GC/4), the Committee urges the State party to:

(a) Develop and adopt a national strategy on the improvement of adolescent health, including adolescent-sensitive and confidential services, with particular emphasis on prevention of teenage pregnancies;

(b) Review its legislation on abortion, notably with a view to guaranteeing the best interests of pregnant teenagers and preventing teenage girls resorting to clandestine abortions at the risk of their lives;

(c) Ensure by law and in practice that the views of the pregnant adolescent are always heard and respected in abortion decisions;

(d) Develop effective programmes of education and awareness-raising on the harmful effects of smoking and substance abuse among adolescents and on the promotion of healthy lifestyles, and provide counselling and rehabilitation services for adolescents who smoke and engage in substance abuse; and

(e) Seek assistance from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and other partners to step up participatory adolescent health programmes focusing in particular on reproductive health rights and substance abuse.

HIV/AIDS

68. The Committee commends the high-level commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS through the National AIDS Commission, chaired by the President, and the State party's measures to increase the coverage and access to HIV testing clinics and the provision of antiretrovirals (ARVs) to pregnant women and children born to mothers with HIV. However, it remains concerned that HIV testing and ARVs are not equally available to all children, teenagers and pregnant women throughout the territory of the State party.

69. In light of its general comment No. 3 (2003) on HIV/AIDS and the rights of the child (CRC/GC/2003/3), the Committee recommends that the State party intensify and widen the comprehensive HIV information/education campaign, and step up its efforts to ensure proper coverage for HIV testing and ARV provision. In doing so, the State party should pay particular attention to pregnant adolescents in rural areas and children born to mothers with HIV. The State party should seek technical assistance from, inter alia, the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNFPA and UNICEF.

Standard of living

70. Despite the adoption of a Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2008 and the drafting of a second strategy from 2011 which clearly covers children's issues and social protection, the Committee is alarmed by the extremely high proportion of people living below the poverty line (80 per cent) and in extreme poverty (48 per cent). It is moreover concerned about the regional and gender disparities whereby children living in rural areas and children in female-headed households are poorer and more food insecure than children living in the capital city and children in male-headed households. Despite the approval in May 2011 of the Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector Strategic Plan for Liberia 2011-2017, the Committee remains concerned at the inadequate provision of drinking water, sanitation and housing, which affects the healthy development of children.

71. The Committee recommends that the State party enhance and step up its efforts in accordance with article 27 of the Convention to ensure an adequate and sustainable standard of living for all children within its territory, including provision

of drinking water, sanitation and housing, with a particular focus on the most marginalized and disadvantaged families, including female-headed households, in order to ensure their right to development. In this context, the State party is urged to pursue its cash transfer pilot scheme and expand this while focusing on the above-mentioned groups of children.

H. Education, leisure and cultural activities (arts. 28, 29 and 31 of the Convention)

Education, including vocational training and guidance

72. The Committee welcomes the enactment of the Education Reform Act 2011, which aims, inter alia, at ensuring the provision of quality education to all children between the ages 3-15, the high level of the budget allocated to education, as well as the continuous efforts of the State party to reconstruct schools with the help of donors and development partners. However, it remains deeply concerned at the following:

- (a) The very high percentage (90 per cent) of the primary education budget spent on salaries and wages and the overall education budget, which is highly skewed towards tertiary education, thus limiting opportunities for all children to achieve universal primary and second cycle education;
- (b) The lack of trained teachers at pre-primary, primary and secondary school levels;
- (c) The unavailability of reconstructed schools in many rural areas, forcing children to travel significant distances to reach the nearest school;
- (d) Hidden school fees despite the existence of a free-of-charge education right;
- (e) The high number of illiterate children, with a higher rate among girls;
- (f) Inadequate provision of holistic early childhood development for all children;
- (g) The low rate of primary school enrolment, which is currently 37 per cent, of which only one-third complete primary school;
- (h) The fact that girls' school enrolment, which is only 33 per cent, compared to that of boys (98 per cent) at the primary level, declines in gender parity with grade, lack of adequate and sufficient sanitary facilities for girls in schools, the persistence of gender-based violence and negative societal attitudes towards girls, including girls facing harassment at school by teachers; the increasing rate of pregnancy among school-age girls and the prohibition by some schools on pregnant girls attending classes, which contributes to dropout from school;
- (i) High rates of school dropout and retention, especially when transiting from primary to secondary level, with regional and gender disparities, and the lack of opportunities for alternate forms of education, including vocational education, for children who drop out of school;
- (j) The practice of "Bush Schools" licensed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to be run by secret societies which deprives children of education, as well as a family environment and exposes them to economic exploitation; and
- (k) Outdated school curricula which perpetuate discriminatory and gender-stereotyped ideals, as well as the lack of human rights and peace education.

In light of its general comment No. 1 (2001) on the aims of education (CRC/C/GC/1), the Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) Allocate more funds to school facilities, services and training;
- (b) Ensure the provision of adequate training, including child rights and gender-sensitive training, to teachers and personnel at all school levels;
- (c) Increase the availability of schools at all levels, in particular in rural areas, in order to ensure equal access to education for all children;
- (d) Create motivating and child-friendly educational programmes for children who have never attended school so as to decrease the number of illiterate children, and integrate a gender perspective therein;
- (e) Adopt a holistic early childhood development (ECD) strategy and invest in the training of ECD teachers and provision of integrated formal and community-based programmes involving parents and covering healthcare, nutrition and breastfeeding, early stimulation and early learning for children from birth to the first year of school;
- (f) Strictly implement the 2011 Education Reform Act and existing policies to increase primary school enrolment and ensure that primary education is completely free of charge, including for textbooks and school materials in all regions;
- (g) Step up and expand efforts to encourage girls to complete the compulsory school years by modifying the school environment. In this endeavour, the State party should ensure the existence of clean sanitary facilities for girls in all schools, and launch countrywide awareness-raising programmes, including campaigns on gender equality and girls' equal right to education, with a view to changing the prejudicial societal attitudes against girls which contribute to the incidence of sexual abuse and harassment of girls at schools;
- (h) Step up its efforts to substantially increase the rate of secondary school enrolment, and take measures to ensure that children who have dropped out of compulsory education return to school;
- (i) Take firm measures to discourage "Bush Schools" and strictly monitor the operation thereof so that they do not contribute to children leaving school and do not subject children to child labour and economic exploitation;
- (j) Review and update school curricula at all levels with a view to eliminating discriminatory and gender-stereotyped texts and incorporating human rights education with a focus on child rights, as well as peace education; and
- (k) Create child-friendly reporting mechanisms on child rights' violations in schools; investigate thoroughly all such complaints, and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice and punished accordingly.

I. Special protection measures (arts. 22, 30, 32-36, 38-40 and 37 (b) and (d) of the Convention)

Asylum-seeking and refugee children

73. While welcoming the fact that the State party allows refugees to come into its territory, mainly from Côte d'Ivoire, and has put health and education services at refugees' disposal, the Committee is concerned that there is no mechanism to provide protection and

assistance to refugee children, in particular unaccompanied and separated children seeking asylum.

74. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its assistance to refugee children with particular attention to unaccompanied and separated children seeking asylum, and ensure that a specific mechanism is set up to protect and assist separated and unaccompanied children particularly, in compliance with international refugee and human rights law.

Children in armed conflict

75. While noting that the Children's Law protects children from involvement in armed or any other violent conflict, and criminalizes the recruitment or conscription of children into military service, the Committee is concerned that armed actors along the borders continue to recruit children into their ranks and that the State party has not taken any action to address the situation.

76. The Committee recommends that the State party implement the necessary measures to prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed actors operating in the border areas, conduct effective and systematic investigations in relation to those recruitments and provide the necessary psychosocial support and recovery assistance to child victims.

Economic exploitation, including child labour

77. The Committee is alarmed at the prevalence and level of child labour in almost all sectors of the economy, including hazardous work, mainly because of poverty, and at the serious implications that child labour has in the State party, specifically on children's health, development and education, resulting inter alia in two thirds of children not being enrolled in school. It is further concerned at the weak implementation of labour-related laws, and at the ineffectiveness of the Child Labour Commission within the Ministry of Labour, which is in charge of enforcing child labour laws and policies, thus allowing, inter alia, companies and businesses to allow children to help their parents meet their contract production quotas under hazardous conditions.

78. The Committee urges that the State party to:

(a) Step up its efforts and generate the necessary political will to prevent and bring to an end all forms of child labour;

(b) Allocate sufficient resources, including human, financial and technical resources, to the Child Labour Commission to allow it to properly discharge its duty in ensuring the effective implementation of child labour laws and policies;

(c) Draw up memoranda of understanding with companies and businesses to stop the practice of letting children help their parents to meet their contract obligations and production quotas;

(d) Progressively extend social protection programmes, mainly the cash-transfer scheme, to all households that may be pressured to allow their children to participate in paid and/or hazardous labour, with conditions including school attendance by the children;

(e) Undertake research on the extent, nature, root causes and impact of child labour in the State party in order to develop effective preventive and remedial strategies;

(f) Ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138 (1973) concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment; and

(g) **Seek technical assistance from the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour of the International Labour Office (ILO-IPEC) in this regard.**

Children in street situations

79. The Committee is highly concerned at the large number of children living in the streets, especially in Monrovia, including former child combatants, internally displaced children, children who have been sent by their parents for better opportunities and end up being used for vending on Monrovia's streets, or children who have fled orphanages and other residential care. It is further concerned at the extreme vulnerability of such children to becoming victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation.

80. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Undertake an in-depth study and statistical analysis on the causes and scope of the issue of children in street situations in Liberia;**

(b) **Develop a national strategy to support children in street situations;**

(c) **Prevent other children from working in the streets, in particular children from the outlying counties used for vending on the streets of Monrovia;**

(d) **Ensure that children in street situations are provided with adequate nutrition, clothing, housing, health care and educational opportunities, including vocational and life-skills training, in order to support their full development and return and reconciliation with their families and community; and**

(e) **Provide these children with recovery and social reintegration services when they are victims of physical, sexual and substance abuse.**

Sale, trafficking and abduction

81. While welcoming the enactment of the Anti-Trafficking Act in 2005, the adoption of an action plan and the creation of a task force against Human Trafficking, the Committee is seriously concerned at the increasing incidence of trafficking in children in the State party and at the fact that no perpetrator of human trafficking has ever been convicted or sentenced, which may be due to the high levels of corruption. It reiterates its concern at the widespread practice of relocating children from rural areas to live in Monrovia for a variety of purposes, including street vending, begging and domestic servitude. It is moreover concerned at reports claiming that orphanages and adoption agencies are used as hubs for child trafficking in the State party.

82. The Committee recommends that the State party strictly implement the Act to Ban Trafficking of 2005 and allocate adequate resources to the task force against human trafficking to enable it to fulfil its role effectively. The State party is urged to redouble its efforts to combat and bring to an end child trafficking, both internal and international, for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labour and domestic servitude. In this endeavour the State party should:

(a) **Pay particular attention to children in rural areas belonging to poor families and who are more vulnerable to falling victim to abduction and trafficking;**

(b) **Extend and strengthen the application of the cash-transfer scheme pilot to poor families in rural areas, and create more social protection programmes, with a view to preventing the practice of relocating children to Monrovia for reasons of poverty;**

(c) Investigate effectively all cases of child trafficking, in particular those reported to be organized by orphanages and adoption agencies, bring the perpetrators to justice and punish them accordingly;

(d) Provide child victims of trafficking with adequate protection and specialist assistance for speedy psychosocial recovery and reintegration into their communities; and

(e) Ratify the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflict, so as to offer maximum legal protection to children in the context of sale, trafficking and abduction.

Administration of juvenile justice

83. While welcoming the abolition of capital punishment and life imprisonment for children below the age of 18 in the Children's Law as well as the introduction of provisions on, inter alia, diversionary measures, the right to a fair trial, and training for personnel involved in juvenile justice, the Committee is concerned at:

(a) The lack of harmony between these improvements and the Penal Code in its present form;

(b) The fact that while the minimum legal age of criminal responsibility stands at 16, younger children are still held criminally liable;

(c) The lack of juvenile courts in all counties in the State party; and

(d) The extensive use of lengthy pretrial detention for children; lack of due process; extremely poor detention conditions; and the fact that child detainees are not separated from adults.

84. The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation (CRC/C/15/Add.236, paras. 67-68) that the State party continue its efforts to reform the system of juvenile justice in line with the Convention, in particular with articles 37, 40 and 39, its general comment No. 10 (2007) on children's rights in juvenile justice (CRC/C/GC/10), and other United Nations standards in the field of juvenile justice, including the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules), the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (The Riyadh Guidelines), the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty and the Guidelines for Action on Children in the Criminal Justice System. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) In the light of article 37, subparagraph (a) of the Convention, urgently amend the Penal Code to ensure that neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release can be imposed for offences committed by persons below the age of 18, also with a view to ensuring harmony among criminal-related provisions in national laws;

(b) With regard to the minimum age of criminal responsibility, ensure that children under 16 years of age who have committed an offence are dealt with through the Liberian Juvenile Court Procedural Code and face only protective and educative measures;

(c) Take all necessary measures to establish well-resourced juvenile courts at all county levels, and appoint trained juvenile judges in all regions of the State party and ensure that all children accused of a crime are accorded their right to due process;

(d) Take a holistic approach to addressing the problem of juvenile crime (e.g. addressing underlying social factors) advocated in the Convention, using more alternative measures to detention such as mediation, probation, counselling, community service or suspended sentences, wherever possible;

(e) Ensure that the deprivation of liberty is used as a measure of last resort, for serious offences and for the shortest period of time possible;

(f) Take all necessary measures to establish separate detention facilities for juveniles, including through technical cooperation;

(g) Implement post-release programmes for reintegration of juveniles, in order to facilitate their reintegration into society and prevent recidivism; and

(h) Seek technical assistance in the area of juvenile justice from the United Nations Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice and its members, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UNICEF, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and NGOs and make use of the tools developed by the panel.

J. Ratification of international human rights instruments

85. The Committee recommends that the State party take immediate measures to ratify the three Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on a communications procedure. It also recommends that, in order to further strengthen the fulfilment of children's rights, the State party ratify the core United Nations human rights treaties and the protocols thereto to which it is not yet a party, namely: the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

K. Cooperation with regional and international bodies

86. The Committee recommends that the State party continue to cooperate with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of the African Union to enhance the implementation of the Convention and other regional and international human rights instruments, both in the State party and in other African Union Member States.

L. Follow-up and dissemination

87. The Committee recommends that the State party take all appropriate measures to ensure that the present recommendations are fully implemented by, *inter alia*, transmitting them to the President, the Cabinet, the Senate and the House of Representatives, relevant ministries, the Supreme Court, and to local authorities for appropriate consideration and further action.

88. The Committee further recommends that the combined third and fourth periodic reports and written replies by the State party and the related

recommendations (concluding observations) be made widely available in the languages of the country, including (but not exclusively) through the Internet, to the public at large, civil society organizations, community and traditional leaders, media, youth groups, professional groups and children, in order to generate debate and awareness of the Convention and of its implementation and monitoring.

M. Next report

89. The Committee invites the State party to submit its combined fifth and sixth periodic reports by 3 January 2018 and to include in it information on the implementation of the present concluding observations. The Committee draws attention to its harmonized treaty-specific reporting guidelines adopted on 1 October 2010 (CRC/C/58/Rev.2 and Corr. 1) and reminds the State party that future reports should be in compliance with the guidelines and not exceed 60 pages. The Committee urges the State party to submit its report in accordance with the reporting guidelines. In the event that a report exceeding the page limitations is submitted, the State party will be asked to review and eventually resubmit the report in accordance with the above-mentioned guidelines. The Committee reminds the State party that if it is not in a position to review and resubmit the report, then translation of the report for purposes of examination by the treaty body cannot be guaranteed.

90. The Committee also invites the State party to submit an updated core document in accordance with the requirements of the common core document in the harmonized guidelines on reporting, approved at the fifth inter-committee meeting of the human rights treaty bodies in June 2006 (HRI/MC/2006/3).
