Sierra Leone excludes children of 'Blood Diamonds' amputees from accessing free education

Monday 5 November, 2018

In August 2018, the new Government of Sierra Leone launched President Julius Maada Bio's Free Quality School Education initiative.[i] Though designed to help many vulnerable communities, it failed to extend to the children of war amputees; the direct victims of Sierra Leone's ten-year civil war which ended 16 years ago.

According to the IRIN News report,[ii] war rebels in Sierra Leone brutally chopped off the limbs of around 27,000 people during one of West Africa's bloodiest wars. According to the Amputee and War Wounded Association, Sierra Leone barely has 2,000 war amputees alive today.

Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report [iii] recommended that reparations be made to the children of war amputees and war-wounded in the form of free education, but this has not been implemented to date. Many of these children are severely marginalised as their impoverished parents cannot afford to pay for their education.

The new Government's failure to include or prioritise the needs of these children has opened fresh emotional and psychological wounds for the already disadvantaged 'Blood Diamonds' victims - who mostly survive by begging on the streets.

Faith Okrafo-Smart, founder of Melqosh Mission International said: "Our charity has rendered support to the amputees for more than ten years. We are implementing the subventions that the present and past Governments have failed to do.

"Sierra Leone is in breach of the International Law of Human Rights to provide reparation for all war amputees. I was very hopeful that this new Government would uphold the promises made in its Manifesto to prioritise the educational needs of children of the war amputees. I was greatly disappointed when schools reopened on the 16th of September and they were not supported.

"I travelled to Sierra Leone on the 3rd of October to appeal to the Minister of Education, Hon. Alpha Osman Timbo on behalf of the war amputees together with the National Secretary General of the Amputee and War Wounded Association (who is an amputee and a former Special Court Officer during the war crimes trial of Charles Taylor), Mr Tamba Finnoh. Our appeal was rejected."

"I am appalled that even when attention was brought to the Minister of Education of this faux pas, immediate action was not taken to resolve this governmental mistake."

Eleanor Abdulai, an amputee and an Ambassador for Melqosh Mission International in Sierra Leone said: "We just want our basic rights as any other person in Sierra Leone. We want inclusion, we want employment. As a person with a disability, we need education just as it is given to any abled person."

Her video appeal to the Sierra Leonean Government on behalf of war amputees and their children has already had over 45,000 views and been shared over 600 times on Facebook alone, watch here http://bit.ly/EleanorAbdulai

Ends

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Notes to editor:

Melqosh Mission International sponsored 350 children of war amputees, young war amputees, war orphans into Schools, Colleges and Universities in 2017/2018 Academic year in the West, South, North and East of Sierra Leone; making their Educational Project a national roll-out to foster equality and fairness.

The much-publicised news of Sierra Leone's free education prevented the charity from raising funds to

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execute their Educational Sponsorship Programme as many donors in the community believed that the Government of Sierra Leone would fully deliver the Free Quality School Education initiative it promised. The Government of Sierra Leone has also not been able to deliver what it also promised, many children in Senior Secondary Schools, did not get the Free Education.

To know more about the work of Melqosh Mission International visit www.melqosh.org

To make a donation to Melqosh Mission International visit www.melqosh.org/waysofgiving

Eleanor Abdulai has been a beneficiary of Melqosh Mission International since 2014 and has benefitted from the Charity's educational Sponsorship Programme, studying I.T. at the University of Sierra Leone.

[i]

[ii] http://www.irinnews.org/report/94037/sierra-leone-amputees-still-waiting-reparations-almost-10-years

[iii] TRC Recommendation 177-183, TRC Report Recommendations Vol Two, Chapter 3 Page 194, TRC Recommendations 493

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