

THE LAWYERS CENTRE FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE SIERRA LEONE



Women's Forum Sierra Leone



in partnership with

UNIFEM

Human Rights Award

This certificate is awarded to

L.A.W.C.L.A

for outstanding contribution to

The Campaign for Defending Women's Rights

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National Chairperson


Western Area Co-ordinator

ANNUAL REPORT 2008

Mission Statement

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance being a Public Interest Human Rights Law Centre endeavours to make the Law and Justice more accessible , to indigent members of the Public through Legal Advice, Impact Litigation and Research, with the ultimate aim of Protecting and Promoting Human Rights through Law in Sierra Leone.

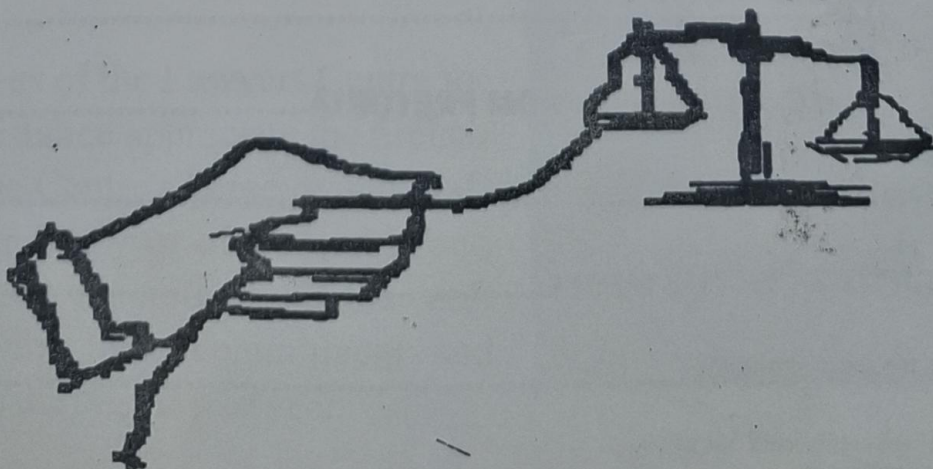


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FOREWORD

When the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance LAWCLA opened its doors to the Public in Sierra Leone in 2001 it was with the aim of providing free legal services to the poor, undertaking research and facilitating the training of Law enforcement and Public Officials in Human Rights Standards.

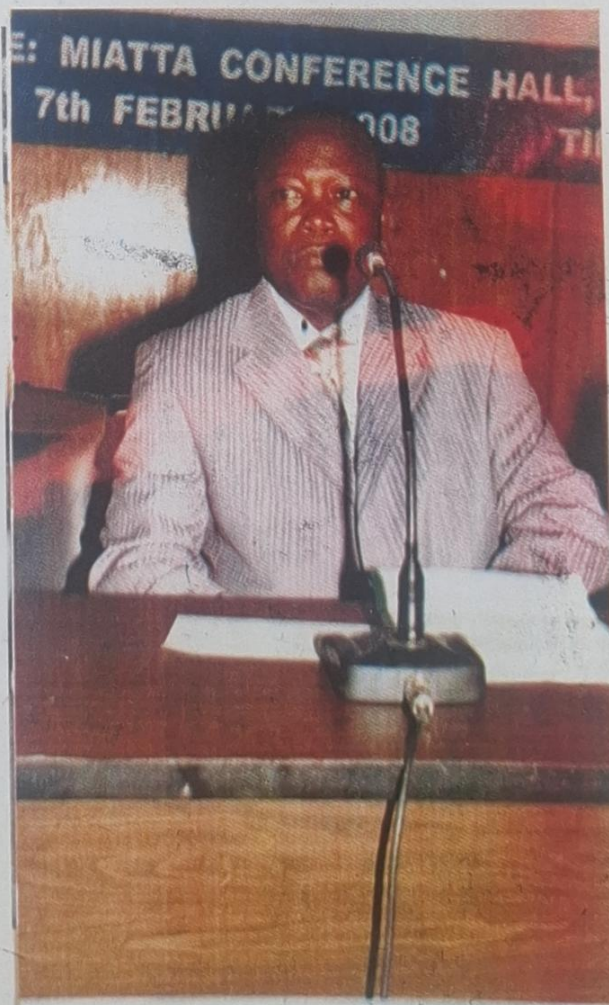
In its 7th year of existence, the centre remains committed to creating and maintaining a human rights culture in Sierra Leone.

This report highlights another year in the life and work of the centre. The range of beneficiaries highlighted in this report shows the continuing need for our work. The centre works with Parliament, Government Ministries, Law Enforcement Officials, Women's Groups and Civil Society Groups in its desire to achieve equality and justice for all.

The Trustees of the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance appreciate the tireless work of the Centre's Director and Staff for another fine year of leadership and achievement, as well as all the staff members for their commitment and dedication during the past year.

Finally, on behalf of the Trustees and

the Staff of the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance, our deep gratitude goes to our donor partners, especially the DOEN Foundation in the Netherlands for enabling the centre to continue its work. Without their generous and continued support, the centre would not be able to operate and continue its mandate of furthering a human rights culture in Sierra Leone.



*David Tam-Baryoh Chairman
Board of Trustees*

OVERVIEW OF REPORT

Sierra Leone has now moved away from the post conflict to the development phase and as such Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are becoming increasingly important. As an institution dedicated to promoting Human Rights, it is important to draw a link between Human Rights and Poverty. Human Rights abuses often attack the most vulnerable in society: those without economic means to defend themselves. The economically marginalized, who struggle to afford the most basic services, have little recourse to defend their human rights and human dignity.

As a Public Interest Law Firm we aim to give a voice to those who would not otherwise be able to speak out about their rights. We strive to make the law accessible to all through Litigation, Legal Education, Advocacy and Research.

During the period under review, the centre completed the simplification of Laws recently enacted by Parliament by promoting Women and Child Rights, as well as Training Manuals we intend to use for our community Training Program next year. The centre also published a major research document advocating for the decriminalization of Libel in Sierra Leone, among others. The centre also provided legal advice to hundreds of clients who access our offices in Freetown, Makeni and Kenema on a daily basis.

I will like to thank the Trustees of the centre for their support and guidance. I will also like to thank our committed staff for another Year of achievement. It is gratifying to see that there are people who are committed to promoting Human Rights and working on behalf of the poor.

As always the centre applauds its donor who make the work possible and helps provide services to those who can least afford them. While funding for Human Rights work is becoming increasingly difficult to attract, this makes us doubly appreciative to those donors who continue to believe in the value of the centre's work.

As we look towards 2009, we pledge to continue to serve the communities we work with as effectively as possible and to give a voice to voiceless.



Melron C. Nicol-Wilson
Director

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

This year the centre was given a contract by Plan International to develop a training manual that deals with child rights in Sierra Leone. This book extensively deals with child rights.

The book focus on the fundamental human rights, protection of children under international instruments, protection of children under The Child Right Act 2007, Child trafficking and children that are caught up with the law. The essence of such a book is to serve as a training manual on child rights in Sierra Leone.

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance has decided to launch a book that deals with the simplification of the Child Right Act 2007.

The Centre has always being anxious that with the passage of the child right act, a lot of individuals would find it difficult to understand this piece of legislation. The centre has the strong conviction that children whom this law was passed to protect would not be able to comprehend the benefit this act holds for them.

The Centre plans to launch this book in 2009 and would also organize workshop to train both children and other stake holders about the content and provisions of the child right act so that they would understand the essence of protecting and promoting the right of children.

In addition to the simplification of the Child Right Act 2007, the centre also embarks on the simplification and the creation of A Training Manual on the three prominent Gender Acts which are:

- The Domestic Violence Act 2007
- The Devolution of Estate Act 2007
- The Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2007

The centre is very conscious of the fact that women are the most vulnerable set of individuals in this country and everyday they are maltreated and discriminated against. The Centre has always being in the forefront advocating that laws which discriminated against them be immediately removed from our statute books as this has a negative impact towards Sierra Leone's

international obligation. The Centre's staff that is the Legal Officer, Selwyn Nicol and the Director did research and wrote short articles on contemporary human rights.

The Director wrote an attention-grabbing article titled "Addressing Female Genital Mutilation without Human Rights: My Experience." Whilst the Legal Officer Wrote an article titled "A critique of The Recently passed Gender Legislation". Two interns also wrote an article titled Juvenile Delinquents and the Legal System, and Dangers of Forced Marriages. All these articles are published in The LAWCLA News of June 2008.

The centre has decided to revise The Hand Book for Paralegals that was written in 2004. The reason for such a decision is to update this book so that it could reflect recent legislations.

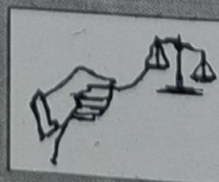
The revised Handbook contains the following: The Office of the Ombudsman, The Sierra Leone Human Rights Commission, International Protection of Human Rights under United Nations Mechanisms, The African Union Court of Justice, the ECOWAS Court, Promotion of Child Rights in line with the Provisions of The Child Right Act 2007, Juvenile Justice, Disability Rights, Refugee and Asylum Seekers Rights and a Chapter on Anti-Corruption.

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A REVISED HAND BOOK FOR PARALEGALS IN SIERRA LEONE

BY

**LAWYERS CENTRE FOR LEGAL
ASSISTANCE (LAWCLA)**



JUNE 2008

SPEECH BY LAWCLA DIRECTOR AT LAUNCHING OF HANDBOOK ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Mr. Chairman, His Excellency the Vice President of our Republic, Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament, Members of the Diplomatic Corp, My Lords, His Worships, Assemblage of Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I salute the Journalists of Sierra Leone and Human Rights Activists on whose behalf we are gathered here this evening and greet you all in the name of Allah and God, the precious and omnipotent. Your presence is highly appreciated by LAWCLA and your names would be written in the indelible historical record of activists in the struggle for the promotion of human rights. Ladies and Gentlemen give me your attention.

In 1965 an Act of Parliament The Public Order Act was enacted. This Law deals with a number of issues of public concern, such as public insult and provocation, insulting conduct, throwing of missiles, public meetings etc.

Part Five of this law deals with Defamatory and Seditious Libel and criminalizes the malicious publication of any false statement about an individual that will defame his character or publication of any false statement about an individual that will bring into disrepute any person who holds an office under the constitution in the discharge of his duties. In 1965 Freedom of Expression was not only criminalized in Sierra Leone but also in about one hundred other countries around the world.

It is no longer fashionable to criminalize freedom of expression. And at the moment, criminal defamatory and seditious libel laws are no longer operational in over one hundred and twenty countries in the world but Sierra Leone shamelessly continues to maintain it in its statute books.

Section 25 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone guarantees protection of freedom of expression and the press. This Constitutional safeguard has been the provisions of Part Five of the Public Order Act. It is important to

note that section 171 (5) of the very 1991 Constitution is very clear on the issue. It provides that the Constitution is the Supreme Law of Sierra Leone and any other Law found to be inconsistent with any provision of the constitution shall to the extent of the inconsistency be void and of no effect.

Since 1965, this law has mainly affected Journalists in the print media as they become shackled by the demagogue of the anti-press provisions. The Handbook that will shortly be launched was conceived by LAWCLA as a response to several disturbing arrests carried out under Part Five of the Public Order Act which criminalizes defamatory and Seditious Libel.

Last year the Editor of Standard Times Newspaper and the present President of Sierra Leone Association of Journalists Mr. Philip Neville was also arrested and detained under Part Five of the Public Order Act.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up by the Government of Sierra Leone after the Civil and Political impasse, realized the global trend and recommended the repeal of provisions that create the offences of Seditious and Criminal Libel, denouncing them as leftovers of the colonial era. However the then Government and the present Government has not heeded to this recommendation.

The Goal of this Handbook is to contextualize Sierra Leone's domestic seditious and criminal defamation laws in terms of their compatibility with International Human Rights norms. The handbook will show that recent limitations on freedom of expression imposed on journalists and follow the global trend eradicating criminal defamation and seditious libel laws.

Consequently the Handbook is recommending that the Criminal Defamation and Seditious Libel provisions of Sierra Leone's Public Order Act should be discarded altogether. Seditious Libel laws in particular only protect the Government.

Nowhere does it show that suppressing speech leads to stronger Government.

Freedom of expression should not be a casualty of efforts to preserve national unity; rather it should be a means of its attainment.

The question is what redress can an individual whose reputation has been defamed by a newspaper editor seek if the criminal libel laws are abolished. The answer is simple Sierra Leone has sufficient Civil Defamation Laws providing adequate recourse for those suffering injuries to their reputation.

Defamation can either be a Criminal Offence or a civil action. Criminal Defamation carries the threat of imprisonment. Civil defamation carries the threat of the payment of monetary compensation.

Defamation laws are necessary. If there were no Defamation Laws people could publish untrue stories about anyone without fear causing unjustifiable injury to people's reputation.

However civil defamation laws provide adequate protection to ensure that such situations do not leave victims without a remedy.

The aim of this Handbook is to suggest a new direction for legislators in Sierra Leone to embrace as we rebuild a strong and democratic society on solid legal foundations.

Mr. Chairman, His Excellency it is not only Seditious and Defamatory Libel Laws that needs urgent attention within the legal system in Sierra Leone.

The Death Penalty which is the ultimate cruel, inhuman, degrading punishment must be abolished for all crimes that it is presently provided for. The TRC has also called for the abolition of the death penalty in Sierra Leone in the same way it has been abolished in Liberia and Rwanda after the civil conflicts in those countries.

The Office of the Attorney General must be

separated from that of the Minister of Justice.

The Anti-Corruption Commission must be given powers to institute prosecutions and not to be sending files to the Attorney General for decisions on prosecution.

The new Government has still not given the Anti-Corruption Commission prosecutorial powers as such it remains a vehicle without an engine. It can bark but cannot bite. It can investigate but cannot prosecute.

The Government of Sierra Leone must also support the establishment of a National Legal Aid Board which will provide free legal services to poor Sierra Leoneans in conflict and in contact with the law.

The remaining laws in our Statute books that continue to discriminate against fifty one percent of the population women must be urgently repealed.

His Excellency, a journey into a thousand miles begins with a single step. Let us start the journey of reforming the justice sector by repealing the criminal defamatory and seditious libel laws. It will not be as expensive as providing Electricity to Freetown. As a matter of fact it requires nothing more than Political Will.

I thank you all for lending me your ears.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

From pg. 5

This year under review, the centre launch a Handbook titled "**Criminalisation of Freedom of Expression in Sierra Leone: Time for Change.**" The book looks at the inimical presence of the seditious libel law in The Public Order Act 1965 and how such a draconian law has been used by successive government to silence the press. LAWCLA exposes the unconstitutionality and anti human rights tendencies of this law.

THE PRESENT SITUATION OF JUVENILE JUSTICE IN SIERRA LEONE

By Abdoul Samad Kamara

The detention of juvenile defaulters at the Central Maximum Prison (Pademba Road) do not only amount to criminal contamination which is a violation of Article Six of the Children and Young Persons Act, but it is also at variance with international principles for the welfare and protection of juveniles.

Research indicate that fifteen juveniles are currently languishing in Pademba Prison under very terrible conditions. Amidst the worsening condition of prisoners in an overcrowded prison, placing children together with hardcore criminals who are engage in drug abuse is like putting a cat in a lion's den. The juvenile justice situation in Sierra Leone has been undoubtedly worsened by the war, which contributed in weakening the institutions and mechanisms that generally protect and promote Child Rights' and Welfare.

Interestingly things were much better for juveniles during the colonial period. The facilities for their rehabilitation and reformation were quite functional and adequate. Authorities fought hard to arrest the problems before they arose. Bail homes existed during those days. Probation officers mandated by law sought the welfare of juveniles during colonial days. Even orphans, street children and child beggars were picked up and provided with care in bail homes.

However, successive governments after Independence neglected the right and welfare of children. The system totally collapsed during the war. Seven years after the war, structures and mechanisms that are suppose to handle juveniles are largely ineffective and under resourced.

The protection and welfare of children is a big challenge faced by governments and Child Protection Agencies. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs which has the mandate to seek the interest and welfare of children is hugely underfunded and understaffed.

Some of the factors responsible for children to be in conflict with the law are lack of parental care, poverty, broken homes, polygamous family connections, a culture of neglect and disregard for the welfare of children by the state, and communities. Respect for Human Rights begins with the way society treats its children. A caring society will give freedom and dignity to young people, creating the conditions in which they can develop their full potential and look forward to a full and satisfying adult life.

The Children and Young Persons Act (cap 44) and the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (cap 31) of the Laws of Sierra Leone deal with the children in the Criminal Justice System, but these laws are outmoded and do not adequately conform to international standards. Sierra Leone is a signatory to the Convention of the Rights of a Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child. Unfortunately both Conventions are yet to be domesticated by Parliament.

One of the major problems inhibiting the juvenile justice system is the determinaiton of age. Some parents and guardians suggest that police officers normally increase the ages of juveniles who commit very serios crimes.

Unfortunately the absence of birth certificates to determine the ages of juveniles is a major set back. Parents or guardians do not normally accompany their children to court. In the absence of birth certificates, the polcie determine the ages of juveniles based on physical appearance.

However, police ought to use scientific methods such as DNA or medical evidence on pubic hair, teeth etc to determine the ages of juveniles.

Article 40 and 17 of the Convention of the Right and Welfare of a Child (ACRWC) respectively place greater emphasis on the child's age for purpose of criminality and urge that the age be set at an appreciable minimum standard taking into consideration the child's best interest and sense of dignity.

Unfortunately there is only a single juvenile court in Freetown which meets once a week for 3-4 hours. The continuous delay of juvenile cases is another major factor undermining justice for these vulnerable kids. Juveniles at remand home stated that they have appeared for more than five or six times without the presence of the complainant. On several occasions the courts adjourn either due to lack of complete panel (Magistrate and two Justices of the Peace) or because the presiding Magistrate is overwhelmed with other work for the day. According to Magistrate Shyllon, he presides over 35 cases for the month. He also mentioned that the lack of witnesses to appear in court and the ineffectiveness of police prosecutors is another cause for delay. Juveniles right to privacy and confidentiality is also compromised because of open hearings.

The lack of probation officers for juveniles to carry out their duties effectively because of poor remuneration is another problem affecting juveniles. At the remand home in Kingtom, juveniles sometimes go without food for a good number of days. The rise in the price of rice globally has worsened the situation. Lack of transport facilities to carry juveniles to court for trials, and the lack of educational and recreational facilities at the remand home in Kingtom is a common phenomenon. There are no proper medical facilities for the inmates. And when they get hungry and disgusted, they revolt against authorities. There are no detention facilities for juveniles in police stations. Female detainees are vulnerable to police officers who use them as sexual pawns with the pretext that they will be released if they agreed on sex. Sometimes juveniles are subjected to intimidation, harassment and victimization in the hands of police.

We are however encouraged because of the construction of a new Approved School by the Justice Sector Development Programme (JSDP) at Wellington after a protracted delay to transfer the juveniles from Pademba prison. However the

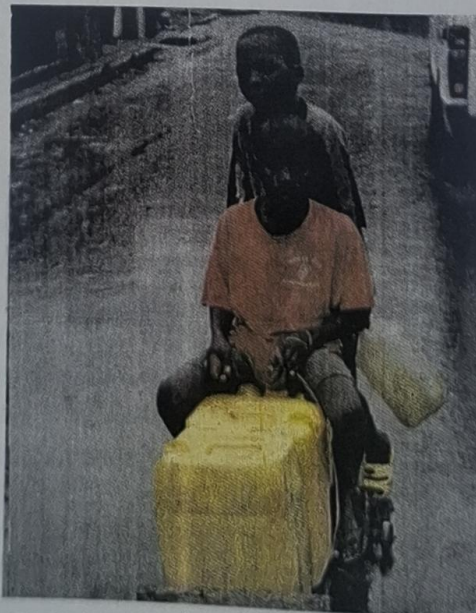
EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDREN UNDER THE CHILD RIGHTS ACT 2007

This Child Right Act 2007 made provision for children to be protected from being subjected to exploitative labour. Section 32(2) of this act explains the meaning of exploitative labour, by saying it "deprives the child of its health, education or development".

Furthermore, the statute also made provision for children to be gainfully employed. But who is a child? According to this act, a child is a person below the age of 18. The Child Rights Act 2007 creates three employment categories in order to protect children:

- full time employment
- minimum age for light employment
- minimum age of hazardous employment

The minimum age for children to be lawfully employed in full time employment is fifteen years of age and the minimum age to be employed in light employment is thirteen years of age. The Act has also termed certain employment opportunities as hazardous and children should not do such jobs like: Mining, and quarrying work, going to sea, carrying of heavy load, manufacturing industries where chemical are produced and used, working in places where machines are used, Working in places such as bars, hotel and entertainment spot where they would be exposed to high level of immorality. It also prohibits children from working at 8:00pm in the evening to 6:00AM.



*Children have a right to survival
development and protection*

Contd. on pg. 18

ADDRESSING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION WITHOUT HUMAN RIGHTS:

My Experience by Melron C. Nicol-Wilson

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is normally considered by Human Rights Activists as an act of violence against women and girls and a human rights violation. But it is also a cultural tradition, deeply rooted in religious and social convictions, and ensures marriage prospects for girls and young Women. Many who choose to deviate from other patriarchal social norms accept FGM because there is tremendous social pressure to go through with the practice. Also many Young girls have no choice as the practice is imposed on them by their Parents. Simply condemning FGM as inhumane, or a human rights abuse, does little to stop it.

In a Country like Senegal for instance the passing of a Law to stop FGM did not reduce the Practice. In my recent discussions with local women in Makeni, I have found it more effective to avoid the cultural and religious rationales of the practice and instead concentrate on the associated health risks, creating a more comfortable atmosphere in which to discuss this highly charged issue.

Most women who have gone through the practice accept the fact that FGM causes numerous health-related problems that they would not like their daughters to experience; some have themselves experienced such problems, including chronic infection, damaged organs, intermittent bleeding, and infertility. Thus they more readily accept health-based rather than human rights arguments as justifications for resisting long-standing practices.

A rights-based approach, on the other hand, which claims that a woman's culture violates her and her daughters' civil rights, is difficult for her to understand and controversial to accept.

Using the health approach to work toward the eradication of FGM requires a lot of patience, particularly as one is often dealing with uninformed and uneducated women. One argument women in the Makeni presented to me is that FGM is the same as male circumcision: boys are circumcised, therefore girls should be too. I counter such thinking by pointing out that FGM is

usually performed when a girl is between the ages of five and ten, whereas boys are circumcised shortly after birth, which rarely has harmful effects.

Using such an approach, I find that I am often able to convince women that FGM should be halted. Thus it is not all the time that Human Rights language should be used to address Human Rights Issues. When it comes to raising awareness of domestic violence, however, I can use human rights language because it is a comparatively less culturally entrenched issue than is FGM.

Patriarchy in Sierra Leone runs deep and wife beating is culturally sanctioned, but domestic violence is not a community-wide celebration and female rite of passage as is FGM.

When addressing domestic violence among groups of women, I begin by defining basic human rights and explaining the protections offered at the local, regional, and global levels. I then teach them about more specific topics such as violence against women, inequality, and human rights tools and treaties such as the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). I often ask the women to talk about their status within the family and how they are treated.

Then, using their experiences, I point out examples of the concepts I have already explained and the specific human right that is being violated, such as the right to human dignity or the right to freedom from torture and degrading treatment. The women are usually surprised.

I remember one woman in particular in Kailahun who was astonished to learn that when her husband beat her and refused her food, he was violating both national law and international human rights treaties. She had thought that this was just a part of marriage, but now she knows it is wrong.

I have found that being an educated, male Sierra Leonean greatly helps my cause, whether I am discussing FGM or other women's rights issues. Because women's rights are usually violated by men, the women are more open to arguments against such behaviour coming from one of these men, and they believe that a man advocating their rights will be more effective in changing the attitudes of other men within the community.

JUVENILE DELINQUENTS AND THE LEGAL SYSTEM

By Mamadu Juldeh Jalloh

Despite the comprehensive sets of standards formulated to maintain international standards in juvenile justice, states all over the world have retained an overwhelming punitive response to young offenders.

In many countries of which Sierra Leone is no exception, youths have become synonymous with crime and anti-social behaviors. There has been a significant and alarming increase in youth crime. Available statistics indicates that over one hundred and fifty youths are currently remanded in Pademba Road Prison under very terrible conditions. It is evident that the existing poor structures and the seemingly ineffective criminal justice system undermine juvenile justice in Sierra Leone.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and the Ministry for Justice are mandated to handle issues relating to juveniles. The Chief Justice appoints court officials and magistrates to preside over juvenile matters. The situation of juvenile justice is exacerbated as a result of economic hardship arising out of poverty and deprivation compounded by broken family institution and limited opportunities at the end of the war.

Young people by circumstance are forced to fend for themselves and thus, indulge in all sorts of vices to survive. Consequently, young people are often arrested and detained in a manner completely contrary to minimum international standards dealing with juvenile offenders.

Though there is an increase in juvenile cases in the criminal justice system, there has been little or no corresponding increase in facilities to accommodate juvenile defaulters in prison and police stations across the country.

In addition, there has been no marked improvement in the condition of juveniles. To further strengthen this argument young people

including children are sent to under resourced and under staffed remand homes, sometimes going without food for a good number of days. Others are languishing at the Maximum Security Prison at Pademba Road.

The Children and Young Person's Act (Cap 44) is not definite on the treatment of young people in conflict with the law. By law, young people should be entitled to bail with or without a surety, but the prosecution has the discretion to refuse bail based on the gravity of the offence.

Additionally, though Cap 44 of the same Act provides for the separation of juveniles from adults; they are still held together in the same prisons at Pademba Road. The law states that juveniles should be separated from adult prisoners. To substantiate, presently at the Pademba Road Prison, children are held together with adults at the same cells which lead to sexual harassment (mostly anal sex), abusing the rights of children. Facilities for the administration of juvenile justice are extremely limited and unsatisfactory. Attempts to establish juvenile courts in various parts in the country are yet to materialize.

Probation officers and social welfare officers from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs have limited support and are poorly remunerated to conduct investigation of offenders for the attention of the magistrates. This state of affairs has resulted in undue delay of trials of young people often held in remand for longer periods.

Another major factor affecting the growth of juvenile justice is the lack of legal aid for offenders. These are all contributing factors in the delay of trials for poor and vulnerable offenders in the criminal justice system.

However, organizations like Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) and Defense for Children International Sierra Leone (DCI-SL) are among the few that have provided legal assistance. It should be noted that Sierra Leone has ratified all major International Treaties, but unfortunately they have a poor record of domesticating these treaties.

TRAINING PROGRAMMES

The main thrust for the establishment of the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance in 2001, was as a result of the ignorance of human rights norms and values in the country particularly in rural communities that have a high percentage of illiterate persons.

The centre in 2004 developed the initiative to publish a hand book that would be used by paralegals as a training manual and a reader friendly guide in providing legal first aid. Hence, the first sets of over sixty paralegals were trained in Kabala, Kono and Kailahun.

This year, LAWCLA trained paralegals in the northern and south-eastern province of Sierra Leone. The training programme for paralegals started in the northern district headquarter town of Makeni, where LAWCLA trained fourteen paralegals from various communities in the Northern Region of Sierra Leone.

The primary aim of this training workshop was to train these individuals so that they can be human rights activists in their respective areas thereby assisting their communities in accessing justice. They are also expected to fill the vacuum in areas where there are no lawyers.

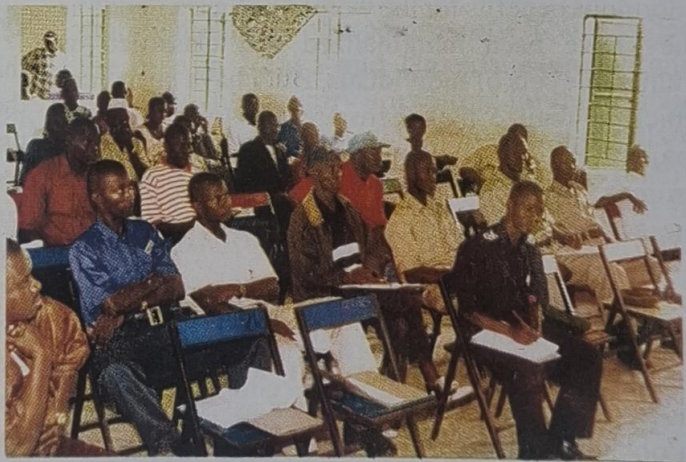
Prior to the commencement of the training, statements were made by representatives from UNIOSIL and also the Local Unit Commander of Police in Makeni. These statements extolled the virtues of LAWCLA in providing legal aid to those who cannot afford to pay for such services in an effort to reduce the spate of human rights violations in the country.

The training programme also focused on topics such as child rights and juvenile justice, women's Rights, the Sierra Leone Court structure, police powers of arrest and the right to bail.

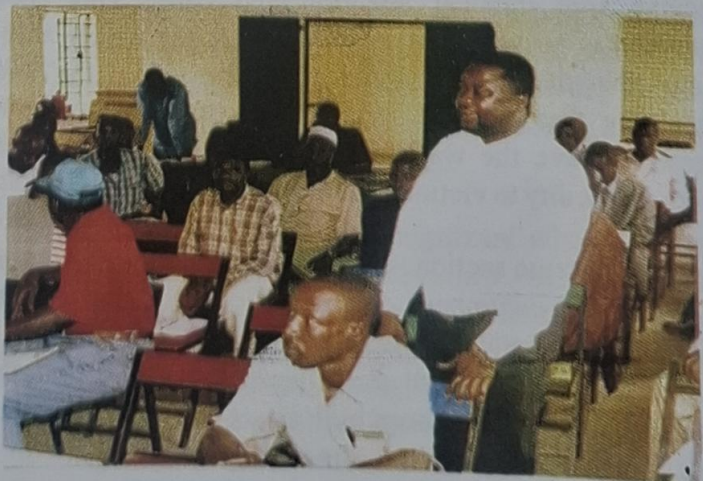
At the end of this two day workshop, Certificates were distributed to the various



Paralegal who acquired training in Makeni



Paralegals listening attentively during the training in Kenema



Training of paralegals in Bo- Southern Sierra Leone

A CRITIQUE OF THE RECENTLY PASSED GENDER LEGISLATIONS

By Selwyn Nicol

The Gender Acts which were passed in 2007 that is The Domestic Violence Act, The Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act and The Devolution of Estate Act need to be place under the microscope. The passage of these acts was a watershed in the legal annals of this country.

These acts main pivot and thrust was to fashion gender parity and to promote the rights of women so as to fulfil Sierra Leone's Obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. (CEDAW)

The provisions made under these statutes have enormous benefits for the women of Sierra Leone as they have been marginalized and classified as vulnerable sets of individuals. But I have been very quick to realize that there are several loopholes, major deletion of certain Provisions that would promote women's right and weaknesses within these three sets of gender acts.

Let me start with the **Domestic violence Act 2007**. Under section 7(1) (C). It states that when the Police received a complaint about domestic violence. The Police Officer must assist the victim in obtaining medical treatment. We all know that medical treatment in this country is not free. So was the drafter of the Act contemplating a situation wherein the victim of domestic violence would receive free medical attention and care? This question is answered in section 7(2) & (3) which states that the Police should assist the victim in obtaining free medical service. The Government needs to pave the way for the provision of free medical facility to victims of domestic abuse.

Under this same section at paragraph d it states that it should be incumbent on the Police to assist a victim of domestic Violence to find a safe haven if the victim expresses that she is unsecured. There is no safe house that has been built or set up to follow the dictates of this law. It is high time that Parliament passed a law that would enable the creation of this sanctuary to protect victims of

domestic violence.

Furthermore, in section 15(2) (A) (II) the law made provision for the perpetrator of domestic violence to "seek counselling or rehabilitative service". But there is no institution that deals with this in Sierra Leone. There is only one psychiatrist in Sierra Leone and he resides in Freetown. What is going to be the situation in other parts of the country that does not have such professionals? This is an issue that must be urgently looked at by the government and counselling/psychotherapy institutions should be set up nation-wide to answer to the call of this act. This Act also charges the minister to make regulation for the education and counselling of the victim which has not been done in Sierra Leone.

Moreover I was bolted from the blue to find out that the act does not make provision to deal with the act of genital mutilation. This is a rampant and unnecessary practice that posed serious health hazard to many young female children in the country and would have serious impact in their health and development. I believe that a new provision must be created within the Domestic Violence Act to strengthen it so that this nefarious practice could be prohibited under our laws. This same act states that the judge has the discretion to refer the case to an alternative dispute resolution body. This type of bodies are absent in Sierra Leone. Parliament has to create such bodies statutorily. They are necessary as they help to reduce the burden of cases in the judiciary.

The next Statute that I am going to examine that is fraught with weaknesses is the **Registration of Customary and Divorce Act 2007**. I was expecting a situation wherein the minimum age would be eighteen years before one can lawfully marry. But the act state that it should be the case that the minimum age for one to get married under this law should be eighteen years of age. It also goes further to state that if one of the prospective spouses is under age they could seek the consent of their parents. This I find to be a leeway for parents who can give their consent so that their girl child who is under age let say thirteen can get married to adults who are sometimes the age-equals of their grandparents.

The act failed to address this situation. Also the act fails to pay attention to the issue of forced marriages which is highly rampant under customary marriage. The act is completely silent on this issue. I believe that this was a very important issue that Parliament should have addressed as a lot of girls who have enormous potentials have been forced out of schools to get married to men whom they do not love.

When these girls enter the "matrimonial home" they are forced to become domestic slaves and to provide sexual gratification for their so-called husband.

It is not only this ugly picture that force marriages project but also the fact that most of this men whom they get married to are polygamous and there is the high probability that HIV virus could be easily acquired. Parliament must take a strong position on this issue and stop playing the demographic political card.

Forced marriage is an act that our constitution seriously condemns as it is tantamount to Cruelty. Section 20 of the 1991 Constitution in Sierra Leone clearly spells out that no individual should be made to suffer cruel and inhuman treatment. By forcing girls who are under-age to marry to adults could be termed as cruelty or child abuse.

In June 2007, in the territory of Sierra Leone, The Special Court in Sierra Leone delivered a verdict in which for the first time the crime of forced marriage was recognized as an offence under international humanitarian law. This should be a persuasive pointer to the fact that Sierra Leone must follow this good example set by Special Court to create a legislation that would put a complete halt to this imprudent and exploitative practice.

In addition, the act does not treat the problem of levirate marriage or widow's inheritance. Widow inheritance, also known as bride inheritance, is a particular type of marriage in which a widow marries her deceased husband's relative most times it is one of the brothers of the deceased.

The main aim of this cultural practice is to serve as a form of consoling the widow that someone

has step into the shoes of her deceased husband and this can help decrease the grief of the widow and the children.

In most communities in Sierra Leone, it is the extended family of the late husband that has the duty to provide her with a husband. This ensures that wealth does not move out of the patrilineal family.

This customary practice that compels widows to be inherited by the deceased brother should be halted because the practice sullied the dignity of women and plunged them into poverty.

It is also very detrimental as women can be opened to acquiring deadly venereal diseases such as HIV and it can be an unconscious mechanism in spreading this deadly HIV virus among members of a community. This has been the case in Kenya and Uganda. Human rights groups in that country are calling for this practice to be abolished statutorily. Also it is compulsory for the woman to marry her late husband's relative as she would not be able to gain access to her deceased husband's property if she does not do so.

This same Act fails to deal with the issue of dowry, what normally happens in Sierra Leone under Customary marriage is that the prospective groom normally pays a bride price to the family of the bride.

In the event wherein there is a divorce even on a flimsy ground, the family of the bride should return the bride price to the husband. In most situations the wife would have made contribution to the marriage by taking care of the children, performing domestic chores, cook and even work on the farm of her husband.

This is not taken into cognizant when divorce is made under customary law in many rural communities. When the wife's family is unable to return the bride price, this has the tendency to lead to self banishment by some members of the family and also the estranged wife. Alimony is available under other forms of divorce but in this particular act, this issue was not given any prominence. This act should have contemplated

in providing alimony to women that have gone through divorce proceeding under customary law. As they faced enormous hardship after they have gone through divorce.

Shifting to another issue is the fact that this act talks about the registration of customary marriage but registration is highly centralize and it is done in local councils which are found in towns. What the act should have done is to decentralize the registration of customary marriage to be done in all the chiefdoms in the country.

The reason why I advance this point is the fact that a lot of villages are miles away from the nearest town. This would involve transport cost on the part of the person who wants to register the customary marriage and a lot of individuals who are living in the rural areas where 99.9% of customary marriage do take place, earn less than a dollar a day.

This would serve as a serious impediment to them. So it is high time that there is a rethink of this issue by members of Parliament.

Let me now turn my attention, to the **Devolution of Estate Act 2007**, acquiring property after the demise of an individual is always difficult when the deceased died without leaving a will. A person who dies without leaving a will is known as an intestate. This is the area where the complication starts.

The law states in section 8 "where the intestate is survived by a spouse, child and parent, the estate shall devolve in the following manner:-

- (A) thirty five percent to the surviving spouse;
- (B) thirty five percent to the surviving child;
- (C) fifteen percent to the surviving parents;
- (D) fifteen percent in accordance with customary law or Muslim law, as applicable".

These mathematical stipulations can create enormous problem. How can distribution take

place with such calculations? Imagine sharing the personal effect and real estate property of the deceased using this formula it would be very difficult. This is an area that must be look at.

Take also a simple example of a man dying leaving behind two mobile phones and three shirts and two shoes. The man is survived by his two sons, a wife and his mother. How can one distribute such properties with the mathematical percentages created by this Act?

Under section 2 of this act it gave various definition of who is a child of a deceased person

- (A) Any child born to the deceased while the deceased was unmarried and recognize by the deceased as his child;
- (B) Any child born to the deceased whilst the deceased was married and the other parent of the child was or is the lawful spouse of the deceased;
- (C) Any child born to deceased while the deceased was married and the child in question was recognize by the deceased and his spouse as the child of the deceased and
- (D) Any child adopted by the deceased under any applicable law'

This act has a loophole that must be filled, what would be the situation wherein a father wilfully fails to recognize his biological child because of the simple fact that he does not want to face up to responsibility.

During his life time he fails to provide him with support and maintenance. The father then dies intestate living behind property, should that biological child of his that he failed to recognize, should he not be entitle to acquire his deceased fathers' properties? This is a vexing question that needs to be answered.

I end by saying that it is Parliament that needs to set the ball in motion by filling these loopholes in these legislations so that women can enjoy their rights and be able to walk in a level playing field with men.

TRAINING PROGRAMMES

From pg. 12

participants by the Director of LAWCLA who thanked the participants and called on them to take the knowledge which they have acquired and make enormous impact in their communities.

The same training was replicated in Kenema in the eastern part of Sierra Leone, to benefit those paralegals that are living in the eastern and southern provinces of Sierra Leone. A total of eighteen paralegal were trained from these two regional areas of Sierra Leone.

Deputizing the Mayor of Kenema City Council was Councillor Brima Bawoh who said that the training of paralegals was a blessing, and prayed that those who received such training should ensure that their communities benefit from such venture. He also called on the paralegals to be able to face the challenges in their various communities by helping to reduce human rights violations in those areas.

He also thanked LAWCLA for such a wonderful initiative and stated that these are the kind of non governmental bodies that the nation need as it has just emerged from a decade of atrocious war. He called on LAWCLA to continue on a regular basis to carryout such training to increase the number of paralegals in the South and Eastern Region of Sierra Leone.

The training programme was facilitated by Oju-Wilson and Selwyn Nicol. Timothy P.M. Sowa Esq. Senior State Counsel and Customary Law Officer was also invited to serve as a guest facilitator in one of the sessions in Kenema

The training ended with the distribution of certificates by the Director of the centre who thanked the various participants including those who witnessed the training. He explained to them the essence of the programme and how these communities that these paralegals are representing will benefit from this venture.

DANGERS OF FORCED MARRIAGES

by Ahmeda Bangura

Under the common law, it is stated that marriage is a union between a man and a woman each giving their consent to such relationship. There is a system of marriage in Sierra Leone done in traditional setting in which the consent of one of the partners which should be of paramount importance in creating this union is absent or disregarded. Those who bear the brunt of these so called "marriages" are women. This does not mean that men are not victims of forced marriage but the statistics would show that it is only a minute figure that suffers from such marriages.

Forced marriages have so much negative effects that is why this piece is advocating that a law should be passed to put a stop to it. One of the most dangerous impacts of forced marriage is that male adults usually marry very young girls who are under age most times under 16 years of age. This is gross cruelty and a very inhuman treatment that law-makers as well as law enforcers should frown at.

Moreover, forced marriage cause very young girls who are brilliant and talented to become school drop-out thus depriving the country of a big pool of talents that would have help to facilitate development in the country.

Furthermore, forced marriages are highly detrimental because most of the individuals who engaged in it, practice polygamy. The danger of polygamy is that it can be a perfect means in the spreading of the HIV/AIDS virus. So it means that young girls are forced into situation wherein they would be exposed to this deadly non-curable venereal disease.

Forced marriage also creates a psychological wound/scar in the mind of the person who is forced into it. It also creates slavish relationship in which the woman would have to perform domestic chores and would work on the farm of his so called husband. It also degenerate the status of a woman in society and this does not augur well.

LITIGATION

This year under review, the centre was asked by a group of 306 people who hail from the Biafra region in Nigeria to assist them in other that they may be able to be granted refugee/asylum status in this country as there was reasonable and well founded fear that if they return to Nigeria they would be persecuted and imprisoned because of the political opinion they hold. The centre decided to put into test the newly passed Refugee Protection Act 2007 which has given National Commission for Social Action (NACSA) the power to grant refugee/asylum status.

The Centre wrote a letter to the head of this institution asking him to facilitate this process, but unfortunately this institution stated that they were unable to facilitate this process and that United Nations High Commission For Refugee had examined the request of these individuals in the past and they had not being successful as a result of this they are following the same decision.

LAWCLA view this as disheartening and is patiently waiting until the Refugee Status Appeal Committee is set up so that an appeal can be made on behalf of these individuals who are seeking refugee/asylum status.

The Centre has always viewed the flagrant injustice in the legal system as a clog in the wheel in human rights development in this country.

The Centre sent a team to the Pademba Road Prison to find out the number of individuals who had been in Remand for a long period of time and has not been sentenced or acquitted. Some of these individuals had spent such a long period of time in remand, if they had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment they would have already served it.

The Centre was also concerned about individuals whose cases had been committed from the Magistrate Court to the High Court and who have been waiting anxiously for a trial for a long period of time without this happening. A letter containing a list of 174 individuals was written to the office of the Attorney-General and Minister

of Justice asking him why all these individuals were being made to face injustice and asking him to immediately remedy this ugly situation.

Furthermore, the centre was given a brief by 55 police officers who were facing a negative administrative decision. These Police officers were attached to various tertiary institutions in the country and they were the ones who were paying their fees. The senior administrative cadre of the Sierra Leone Police Force decided that these officers should discontinue from their studies, failing which they would loose their position in the force.

The Centre consider that such a decision would be a blow to the Police force of this country as this was an institution which had been used in the past to perpetrate injustice and it had lost it credibility. The Police Force is now experiencing a transformation phase as it is now fighting very hard to be a force for good. It is definitely in dire need of this crop of upcoming professionals and graduates to help in its transformation phase.

The Centre wrote a letter to the Vice President of this country, who has been given the constitutional mandate as Chairman of the Police Board and he has the jurisdiction to deal with such cases, asking him to reverse such a decision and fixing a criteria so that officers would be in a position to obtain study leave.

LAWCLA also performed the service of a Child Protection Agency. The child (named with held) was accused of witchcraft and was detained by a "section chief" in Freetown. And this was having a negative impact on the child as he was unable to go to school and have access to his father. The "Chief" said the child was undergoing certain rites to remove the spirit of witchcraft in him. The centre asked that the child be immediately release and handed over to his father, if the "chief" failed to do so he would be prosecuted in a court of law. The "chief" heeded to this warning.

The Centre also had other huge chunk of cases that deals with unlawful termination of workers and failure to maintained children by their biological fathers. The centre is presently handling all these cases.

LAWCLA HOSTS STUDENTS FROM UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The Assistant Director of the Centre for Human Rights at University of Pretoria in South Africa, Norman Taku in June this year was accompanied by thirteen LL. M. students from the University of Pretoria to the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance Sierra Leone as part of a field trip. The rationale for such trip is part of the curriculum of the LL. M. programme. Though some students preferred other countries in Africa, these students choose Sierra Leone to keep abreast with the democratic and peace building process in the country.

The university of Pretoria has housed many Sierra Leoneans who have enrolled and graduated. They have also contributed immensely towards the work of human rights in the country. One such Sierra Leonean is the Director of the centre whose unwavering commitment to the cause of Human Rights was earned him the prestigious African Human Rights Lawyer of the Year 2007.

During their stay in Sierra Leone, the team also visited Forum of African Women Educationists (FAWE), the Master and Registrar of the High Court of Sierra Leone, the Kingdom Remand Home and the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

All thirteen students are from different parts of Africa including an American pursuing their Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratization in Africa



*Students from University
of Pretoria- South Africa*

INTERNSHIPS

The centre as an institution is always promoting human rights through out the country and has always been eager to provide internship opportunities for students so that they can be able to gain experience in the field of human rights. This year the centre hosted interns from Fourah Bay College and Milton Margai College of Education and Technology.

During their internship, these students had the task of interviewing prospective litigants to determine whether they could be given legal aid representation or advice. They also went to The Pademba Road Prison, Remand Home and Police cells to monitor these detention centers and find out those whom the centre would provide representation in court. In addition to this duty, the interns accompanied the legal officer to observe him conduct trainings and workshops in the provincial areas of this country.

The students who gained the internship were:

1. Arlene George- Final year Political Science Student, Fourah Bay College
2. Ahmeda Bangura- Peace & Conflict Student, Fourah Bay College
3. Ebronkeh Thomas- Student of MMCET
4. Mamadu Juldeh Jalloh- Peace & Conflict Student, Fourah Bay College
5. Alhassan Jalloh -Peace & Conflict Student, Fourah Bay College
6. Alusine Magona- Peace and Conflict Student, Fourah Bay College
7. Jotham J. Johnson gained admission, Law Department, Fourah Bay College.
8. Mamie Sulleh- Student MMCET

From pg. 9

Facilities at the Approved school should be standardize to meet both Domestic and International principles governing the Child Rights and Welfare. The Child Right's Act that was recently passed by parliament demonstrate commitment by government to the interest and welfare of children. We only hope that government will allocate adequate resources to the line Ministries for our future leaders to realise their full potential. Respect for Human Rights begins with the way society treat it's children.

RECOGNITION BY THE MEDIA

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance continues to enjoy excellent relationship with the media. The Print Media in particular consistently published the activities of the centre during the year under review.

The media was very much interested in the publication of the handbook '**Criminalization of Freedom of Expression: Time for Change**'. The book examines the unconstitutionality of seditious libel provided in Part V of the Public Order Act and how such a law has been used by successive governments to muzzle press freedom.

The book also calls on the ruling APC government to immediately repeal such a draconian law. The handbook was widely acknowledged by both the print and electronic media which gave an extensive coverage of the formal launching ceremony. One newspaper almost reproduced the entire contents of the book.

Journalists praised the efforts of LAWCLA for conducting research leading to the publication of the handbook. There has been a clarion call by the media over the past few years for PART V of the seditious libel law to be expunged from the law books.

Therefore the publication of the handbook complements the efforts of journalists in the struggle to repeal the 1965 Public Order Act.

The continuous detention of accused persons without trial was a growing concern for the centre. The centre conducted a research to ascertain the number of accused persons detained without trial and took up the issue with the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice by writing a strongly worded letter reminding the authorities that 174 accused persons have been detained ranging from six months to six years without trial.

The issue was copiously reported by the media. The centre is also in the process of printing handbooks for publication on the three gender bills. The centre has simplified the devolution of Estate Act 2007, the Domestic Violence Act, the Registration of Customary Marriage Act. Given the significance to educate members of the public about the dreadful HIV/AIDS, the centre has also decided to simplify the Prevention and Control of HIV and AIDS Act. Below are abstracts from some of the newspapers that reported our activities to the public in 2008.

The News Newspaper on Friday 29th February 2008 carried a front page story with the headline '**LAWCLA calls for Immediate Repeal of Public Order Act**'. The article was written after the launching of the handbook '**Criminalization of Freedom of Expression: Time for Change**'.

African Champion carried a front page story on March 18th 2008 titled '**Villagers call for U.N. LAWCLA Intervention**'. The newspaper reported a story about a group of villagers at Zimmi (Southern Sierra Leone) who claimed that a Lebanese National Hassan Alabi wrongfully accused one Joseph Kuyateh of stealing a bag full of money. The article stated that the accused is innocent and his detention was arbitrary. Therefore the people of Zimmi requested United Nations and LAWCLA to intervene on behalf of the accused person.

The Independent Observer carried a front page story on 7th March 2008 titled: **'LAWYERS AGGRIEVED OVER DEATH PENALTY AND TAKES ERNEST KOROMA TO TASK'**.

The newspaper discussed about the eight fundamental issues of Human Rights outlined by LAWCLA for the new government of President Koroma to address given the prevailing Human Rights violation in the country.

Standard Times carried a front page story on April 25th 2008 with the caption **'LAWCLA writes Chairman..... Human Rights Abuse Affects 55 Police Officers..... Administrative Blunder'**.

The newspaper explained in detail about the issue concerning the 55 police officers whose salaries were suspended for pursuing various courses in tertiary institutions without study leave. When the matter was reported to LAWCLA, the Director wrote a letter to the Vice President who is the Chairman of the Police Council informing him that the decision is an unfair administrative practice and should be reviewed to save the institution from further embarrassment.

The letter concludes that education is a right that should not be limited by administrative practice. The Director called for immediate termination and suspension of salary payment to the 55 police officers, development of criteria for the application for study leave by all personnel and establishment of a committee to decide on applications for study leave by junior and senior personnel.

For Di People published a front page story on 30th April 2008 with the screaming headline **'174 prisoners without trial Attorney General and Minister of Justice dragged to Court'**. The article states that the Director of the centre wrote a letter to the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice about the deplorable condition of 174 accused persons incarcerated at the Central Prison ranging from few months to six years without trial.

The letter stated that the accused persons have spent more time in prison waiting for their trial to commence than they would have spent if convicted, thus the presumption of innocence has been blatantly violated by the over incarceration "The States Must not be seen to be Violating the Right of its Citizens" the letter emphasized.

The Independent Observer Newspaper of 23rd June 2008 carried a front page story titled **'LAWCLA Rescues Remand Home'**. The article was written following the donation made by the Director to the Remand Home in Kingtom. The items donated include a 26" television set, DVD and a large modernised divider valued at three million five hundred thousand leones.

The Spectator Newspaper of Wednesday 15th October 2008 carried a front page story titled **'LAWCLA Launches Handbook'**. The story was culled from LAWCLA News June Edition.

The Independent Observer of 16th October 2008 also carried an article titled **'Juvenile Delinquents and the Legal System'**. The article was culled from LAWCLA news. However the article states that the situation of juveniles is exacerbated by poverty, deprivation and lack of adequate facilities to handle juvenile defaulters.

We Yone Newspaper on Thursday 9th October 2008 also carried an article headlined **'LAWCLA hosts Students from University of Pretoria'**. The article was culled from LAWCLA News.

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**SLPP Left Over
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SEE STORY PAGE 11


John Abdul Nasser Khamis - Attorney General


Mohamed Aliou Willem - Dir. of LAIRCLL


Houth Shewari-Prison Director

Responding to Sama Banya's Gibberish

SEE STORY PAGE 12

Come With Us To A Brighter Future...

NEWS PAPER CLIPS

Vol 5 No 120
Friday 15th February 2008
1st LBNB

SLPP to take on APC

LawCLA calls for immediate repeal of Public Order Act of 1965

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Awareness (LawCLA) is demanding immediate response to the call by the Executive Director of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to repeal the Public Order Act of 1965.

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Acting Mayor commissions trucks

In his first to improve the delivery of municipal services and other vital services within the city of Freetown, the Acting Mayor of the Freetown Municipality, Comrade Richard George Williams has commissioned two computer-monitored trucks to deliver essential services to the city.

FOC to host national conference

Forum of Churches, a leading human rights organization in Sierra Leone is in collaboration with Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEE) Foundation to host a national conference on human rights.

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Return to Page 2

STANDARD TIMES

SHAMEFUL!

Ex-President Kabbah dodges Special Court, escapes to Guinea

Attorney General's office to serve subpoenas

LAWCLA warns CHAIRMAN Human rights abuse affects 55 Police Officers administrative matters

CONCLUSION

The Centre was able to make immense achievements during the year 2008 by publishing and revising books that deal with human rights issues, engage in impact litigations, organise training workshops for prospective paralegals etc.

In 2009, the centre will be embarking on a range of activities including Training programs on Women's and Children's Rights throughout Sierra Leone as well as advocacy programs such as intensification of our struggle for the abolition of the Death Penalty and the establishment of a National Legal Aid Board.

The centre is also grateful to the DOEN Foundation for funding its activities in 2008 and for its continued support to the Centre.

SUPPORT LAWCLA

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance Sierra Leone, is presently one hundred percent dependent on donors, for its operational and staffing costs. We believe that this dependence threatens the existence of the Centre, in the absence of funding from donors. In order to complement funds received from donors, and to ensure the Centre's financial sustainability, the Centre undertakes the under mentioned tasks for modest costs:

1. Solicitors work including setting up of companies and other business entities, conveyance, lease/tenancy and other forms of Agreement.
2. Human Rights Trainings;
3. Human Rights and Legal Research;
4. Consultancy and Retainership;
5. Commercial adverts in our Newsletters and Reports.

Our ability to continue and expand the work of the Centre depends on your support.

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ABOUT THE LAWYERS CENTRE FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE (LAWCLA)

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) is one of Sierra Leone's newest but promising Human Rights Institution. LAWCLA was established in March 2001 partly due to a concern by the founder about the deplorable human rights situation in the country, and the limited access to justice and the law by the majority of victims of human rights abuses and violations especially indigent members of the society.

LAWCLA is an independent, non-political, non-profit making, Public Interest Human Rights Law Centre which among other things provides free Legal services to poor members of the public.

LAWCLA's mission is "to make the Law and Justice more accessible to indigent members of the public through Legal Advice, Impact Litigation and Research".

LAWCLA's human rights work is unique in one respect that, it is Sierra Leone's first and only organization to date involved in Public Interest Litigation and providing "Pro Bono" Legal Aid. This is appreciated against the fact that human rights work by the vast majority of local groups in the country is limited to monitoring, reporting and community education and sensitization.

As a non-Profit Making Institution, the Centre is dependent upon donation and grants from a wide variety of sources.

The Centre welcomes your Technical, Financial and Moral Support.

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