Local News

'Sowies' rule out child FGM

By Mohamed Massaquoi

President of the Sowie council and associates have unanimously resolved not to carry on with the female genital mutilation, FGM or initiate children below the age of 18 into the secrete bondo society; they however said they would continue the practice on those no longer considered children.

President Ya Koloneh Sesay, Ya Bundu Kamara, Sampah Soko Turay and others during a skills training workshop organized by Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) for media practitioners on the harmonization of language in the coverage of FGM and harmful traditional practices at the British council in Freetown, said they are committed to the protection of children from any harmful practice and that they will ensure children below the age of 18 are not initiated into the bondo society.

Sesay said bondo is part of their cultural trait and that it is difficult to abandon because it is closely connected with mystical powers and a source of income generation.

"I have given birth to 20 children without any complications. My children are going to school; we conduct our ceremonies during the holidays so it is malicious to say we deprive children from going to school," she said. Sesay noted that income and other remunerations out of the bondo society are enormous but she will use her authority to talk to other practitioners so that they can play by the rules and regulations.

"We have agreed not to initiate children because there is a lot of sensitization from NGOs with regards the initiation of children. We are however dismay with the attitude of some people who go to radio stations and make baseless statements against us. This meeting is important because it gives us the opportunity to explain our position so that people will actually understand," she said.

Secretary for the National Movement for Emancipation and Progress, John Marrah said they have been working with the initiators so that they can adhere to the best practice.

He said his organization is a coalition of civil society organizations working on the right of women and children against harmful traditional practices and create alternative activities for those engaged in the practice.

Marrah said they have succeeded in changing the minds of practitioners in the Port Loko, Kambia and Kono districts and that they are still engaged in community sensitization programmes across the country to ensure that the practice of FGM is reduced.

"We want to see a better Sierra Leone and we can only succeed by working together. FGM is responsible for the retrogression of the country, though we are faced with a lot of challenges," he concluded.

Marie-Jo Proulx, lead trainer for Journalists for Human Rights, said the confab was designed to improve on the knowledge of reporters so that they can develop interest in reporting on initiative to reduce the prevalence of FGM and harmful traditional practices and to share best practices in interviewing and reporting on this sensitive issue.

She advised journalists to have respect for tradition and good practices of the people, adding that there are guidelines in reporting on issuers.