

***SIERRA LEONE JOINS THE WORLD TO CELEBRATE WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY 2023 WITH A TWO-DAY NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE RESULTING TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR SOCIAL WORKERS***



March every year, is the professional Social Work month to celebrate the Profession and Professionals. Social Workers in Sierra Leone celebrated this year in a more unique way. For the first time, the different sections of social work groups that were in existence promoting social work in the country agreed to come together and form a Committee to mark a national celebration of the month to celebrate and promote the Profession.

The Committee – “Sierra Leone Social Workers Steering Committee comprised of Social Work Schools in Sierra Leone, the Social Workers Sierra Leone (SWSL), and Sierra Leone Association

of Social Workers collaborated with the Ministry of Social Welfare, for a common goal to have a national celebration and to formally establish a National Social Work Association.



### **Cross section of members of Sierra Leone Social Work Steering Committee**

Such discussion led to a two-day national conference on the 21st & 22nd March 2023 celebrated the World Social Work Day with a National Social Work Conference at the prestigious Milton Margai Technical University Great Hall, Goderich Campus, Freetown, with the theme: “Respecting Diversity Through Joint Social Action.”

The conference brought together over five hundred social work practitioners, educators, researchers, UNICEF representatives, and senior government officials from the Ministry of Social Welfare including the Minister, Deputy Minister, Chief Social Services Officer, Compliance, and Partnership Coordinator.

The main objective of this first National Social Work Conference and World Social Month 2023 celebration was to discuss the regularization and structuring of a Professional Association for

Social Workers in Sierra Leone with a national face. Also, to demonstrate the relevance and impact of the Social Work profession whilst engaging with Government for their commitments towards the policy and legislative actions of the Social Work Profession's regulation.



**Cross section of Conference participants**

The chairman of the conference was introduced by Madam Melvina M. Williams. Madam Williams briefly gave the background of the chairman 'Mr. Ansu Konneh who doubles as senior social work lecturer at the Social Work Department of Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, and Compliance and Partnership Coordinator at Ministry of Social Welfare. In his opening remarks, the chairman enquired from the audience about the purpose of the conference and elaborate briefly on this year's global social work theme.

The Vice Chancellor and Vice Principal of the Milton Margai Technical University, Dr. Mohamed Jalloh officially welcomed all attendees present, and thank them for leaving their busy schedules to attend the historic conference. He congratulated the Faculty of Social Sciences (MMTU) for

affiliating with Sierra Leone Social Workers Steering Committee for MMTU to host the conference.

As the policy structure for all Social Welfare issues in Sierra Leone, the Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Hon. Mohamed Haji-Kella, said the Ministry has the mandate to extend partnership and collaboration with Universities, Institutions, and Organizations to salvage the social issues in the country. He officially Opened the National Social Work Conference 2023 saying, “By the power vested in me, I hereby officially Open the National Social Work Conference”.

As a professional Social Worker himself, he further spoke about the importance of the Social Work Day celebration. He urged all social workers to be relevant in their communities, “let people know that you are a social worker by creating a positive change in your community,” said the deputy Minister



**Deputy Minister Social Welfare- Mr. Mohamed Haji Kella**

The former Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Milton Margai Technical University, Mr. Ishmael Kebbay in his statement; spoke on the thematic areas of the Social Work Practice and how Social Workers should prioritize the field practice. He disclosed that Milton Margai Technical

University was the first institution that introduced Social Work education shortly after the end of the Eleven years of the Civil War in Sierra Leone.

“We are here today to celebrate World Social Work Day 2023, a day that recognizes the contribution of Social Workers globally,” said Mr. Kebbay.

He further talked about the Social Work Bill titled: ‘The Professional Social Workers Regulatory Council, Act 2023 that is being steered to be laid in parliament. He said, “if that bill is enacted, Social Work Profession will be recognized in the country”. He urged his colleague Educators that they use the curriculum that has been harmonized and standardized for the practice of the Social Work Profession in Sierra Leone.

The architect and former Head of Department of the Social Work Programme at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Prof. Alfred A. Jarrett started his statement by referencing the story of Adam & Eve in the bible, and its connection to the Social Work profession. He established that Social Work Profession is as old as humanity. He emphasized social work ethics and conduct in executing different social work roles. He said, “Social Work is a profession of many faces”. He also said ‘the role of Social Work or Social Welfare is to rehabilitate and empower individuals, families, and communities’. He concluded by saying ‘Social Work is better than silver and gold’.



**The architect and former Head of Department of the Social Work Programme at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Prof. Alfred A. Jarrett**

The Head of the Department of Social Work Programme Ernest Bai Koroma University Dr. Kabia and Moses Fullah the Coordinator for the Social Work Programme Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone made resounding statements about the conference and reassured the audience about their commitments to ensuring that students graduating from their institutions as fit for purpose products.



**Head of Department of Social Work Programme Ernest Bai Koroma University Dr. Kabia in the middle**

A Member of the Sierra Leone Social Workers Steering Committee, Musa Maurice Momoh Kargbo, in his statement, complimented the efforts of the Ministry of Social Welfare & UNICEF in ensuring the standardization of social work practice in the country by reviewing and harmonizing the social work curriculum and also, pushing for a Social Work Bill. He further pleaded with the Ministry to continue its efforts in standardizing the Profession in Sierra Leone, where Social Workers and social work Profession would be prioritized. ‘The social work community would continue to collaborate and partner with the Ministry of Social Welfare as we cannot succeed without your cooperation. We need you and UNICEF to continue to provide the required support as a way to sustain the foundation we are building today. We have a huge task ahead of us’ he concluded.

A video recorded by the Secretary General of the International Federation of Social Workers Rory Truell sending a message on behalf of IFSW to the Social Work Community of Sierra Leone was

played. The IFSW Secretary-General commends the effort of social workers in contributing to community development in the country. He also compliments the effort towards standardizing the social work profession in the country in putting together a Social Work Bill, reviewing and harmonizing the Social Work Curriculum. He stated, ‘The social workers throughout Sierra Leone are community members that work alongside social workers’.



**A video recorded by the IFSW Secretary General Rory Truell sending a message on behalf of IFSW to the Social Work Community of Sierra Leone**

Madam Winifred Satta Kobba, a member of Sierra Leone UK Social Workers made a statement on behalf of their group. She thanked the Sierra Leone Steering Committee for organizing such an initiative as a National Social Work conference that has brought together Social Work Educators, Practitioners and Students to have a conversation on the future of the social work profession in the country.





**Madam Winifred Satta Kobba, a member of Sierra Leone UK Social Workers**

### **The first session of the conference**

The Chief Social Services Officer Ministry of Social Welfare, Madam Mariatu Bangura and Mr. David Lamin, Chief Protection Specialist from UNICEF Sierra Leone made a presentation on the proposed Social Work Bill. Madam Bangura gave a brief background on the joint efforts of the Social Welfare Ministry and UNICEF in ensuring social work practices standardize in the country. She stated that the Ministry's vision is to ensure that the Social Work profession is enviable and respected like the lawyers and engineers etc. She said to achieve that we need a law that will create the legal framework for the practice of social work. She further discussed in detail the composition of the Bill for present and future social work practitioners to understand the regulatory aspect of the profession.



**The Chief Social Services Officer Ministry of Social Welfare, Madam Mariatu Bangura in far left making a presentation on the Proposed Social Work Bill**

Mr. Lamin on other hand spoke extensively on the professional conduct of social work. He stated that social work values and ethics must reflect social workers' roles. He emphasized the need for a legal framework that will hold social workers accountable if they are found wanting to contravene the values and ethical principles of the social work profession. He further said that we need a law that will help to organize the practice so that our practice becomes respected and responsible. "If we want to be respected in the country and outside the country, we need to align the practice with international best practices, we need to ensure the social work education right so that it builds the capacities and provides skills and competencies that are required to practice social work", he said. He concluded by calling on all different groups within the social work community to come together and support the process of building a structure to stand out in the country.



**Mr. David Lamin, Chief Protection Specialist UNICEF Sierra Leone**

### **Second session**

This session was dedicated to reviewing the Proposed Association's Constitution in a form of a focus group discussions. Conference participants were divided into groups and each group was given certain sections of the constitution to review and come out with a report. At the end of the session, group heads made presentations on what they agreed and later submitted a report to the Technical Committee on the Constitutional Development. The first day of the conference ended with an icebreaker and networking session.



**Madam Umu Jalloh Senior social work Lecturer from Fourah Bah College facilitating one of the Focus Group Discussions**

## **DAY TWO OF THE CONFERENCE**

The second day of the conference was chaired by Mr. Sulaiman Rogers, a Sierra Leonean social worker based in the UK and also a member of Sierra Leone UK Social Workers. In his remarks, he called the conference to order and made a recap of discussions in the first day of the conference.

A video recorded by Madam Tanya Moore, a social worker and social work academic in London was played. She sent an inspiring message to all social workers in Sierra Leone by highlighting the relevance of social work in ensuring people can take control of their lives which cut across borders. She further said practice in Sierra Leone and practice in London may seem a little different but essentially it is all social work and we doing the same thing. She ended by saying “I’m proud to share Social Work Profession with you.”



**Madam Tanya Moore, a social worker and social work academic in London sending inspiring message to all social workers in Sierra Leone**

Mr. Jason Barnes, Founder of Social Work Action Group, an Irish social worker, working and practicing in England made a presentation on Cultural Diversity in Social Work Practice: The UK Perspective.



**Mr. Jason Barnes, Founder of Social Work Action Group, an Irish social worker making a presentation on Cultural Diversity in Social Work Practice UK Perspective.**

Sierra Leone Social Work Steering Committee Report by Hassan Koroma, founder and National Coordinator of Social Workers Sierra Leone, gave a background on how the committee came about and its composition and its conference partners. He ended by introducing Mr. Michael Mitchell Conteh, Esq the Coordinator of the Sierra Leone Social Workers Steering Committee.

Mr. M. Mitchell Conteh, Esq started by giving a run-down of what was discussed in the first day of the conference. He further did a presentation on the reviewed constitution for participants to validate their inputs in the Association's Constitution. At the end of his presentation, he asked participants if they have any objection to what he has presented and fortunately, no objection was made. All participants unanimously agreed that the Constitution is fit for purpose.

The Coordinator of, the Sierra Leone Social Workers Steering Committee, Michael Mitchell Conteh Esq. led the process for the validation of the Constitution and members present unanimously officially adopted the legal document (Constitution) of the Association, which amongst other thing, Foday Turay from the membership proposed that, under the Transitional Clause authorized the Coordinator, Michael Mitchell Conteh be authorized to form a 12-Man Interim Transitional Executive to take the Association to its first Annual General Meeting for a regular structure to be decided on, to which was unanimously agreed.

He asked a volunteer to put it into a motion to propose that the constitution be adopted. Alhaji Formba, a second-year social student from MMTU proposed the motion that the constitution be adopted and Mariama Lansana, a graduate social work practitioner seconded the motion.

Mr. Wilberforce Tengey, OIC, Office of the Representative UNICEF - Sierra Leone, in his statement recognized the essential role of Social Work in the daily lives of children, families, and communities. "Today we say thank you to all Social Workers for their remarkable work. Without your hard work, commitment, and dedication, our efforts toward attaining sustainable development goals would be in vain," he asserted.

He also said, as UNICEF we wish to use this moment to recommit to working closely with the Ministry of Social Welfare through three dimensions - improving social work education, regulating the practice of social work, and developing, operating procedures and systems to help front lines staffs to better serve children, women, and other vulnerable populations.

He further said, UNICEF also will continue to collaborate with and support the Ministry of Social Welfare and other line ministries such as the Ministry of Gender and Children, to develop and roll-out case management systems and information management systems and guidelines that will improve the efficacy and practice of social work.

He stated, “It is an opportunity for UNICEF to hand over 84 motorbikes and 64 computer tablets to the Ministry of Social Welfare, which they believe will go a long way in improving the capacity of Social Work staff to carry out their work in different communities”. He concluded by imploring that the consignment of the motorbikes be distributed to the 16 Districts of Sierra Leone for the use of social workers who are on the ground.



**Mr. Wilberforce Tengey, OIC, Office of the Representative UNICEF - Sierra Leone in the left handing over motor bikes and tablets to the Minister of Social Welfare for social workers working for the ministry**

In her address, the Keynote Speaker, who doubles as the Honourable Minister of Social Welfare, Madam Baidu Dassama Kamara thanked the Sierra Leone Social Workers Steering Committee for collaborating with the Ministry to organize the National Social Work Conference & World Social Work Day. She said that Social Work Profession is very important as it touches the lives of every individual. “My ministry is responsible for the seven (7) plus million people in Sierra Leone and my job entails handling issues that other ministries cannot handle,” the Minister said.



She referenced the roles social workers played during the Ebola Outbreak, Covid19, and other disasters that cannot be over-emphasized. “My ministry is presently working on the Social Work Bill which on implementation, will organize and change our work as social work practitioners. This Bill will also regulate and formalize social work wherein a National Council for Social Workers will be enacted and Social Workers will be licensed to be able to practice Social Work in Sierra Leone. It will also enable Social Workers to work in all sectors by providing a wide range of technologies. Psychosocial, service delivery response and support services that are critical to their clients and the general social wellbeing.” stated the Minister.

**The Minister launched the Sierra Leone Association of Social Workers (SLASW): “It is with great pleasure that I now launch the Sierra Leone Association of Social Workers.”**

She concluded by extending her wishes to all participants a happy Social Work Month. “Let us continue to serve humanity to the best of our ability.”



**Honourable Minister of Social Welfare, Madam Baindu Dassama Kamara in the middle officially lunching the Association**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There was a strong request for advancement of social work education to enhance practice in the country
2. SLASW should create opportunities for educators and practitioners with professional training workshops, symposium, seminars, scholarships and exchange visits with members of IFSW countries.
3. SLASW should promote indigenous social work practices in the country.

