

Interview Four – David from Sierra Leone

I am in Geneva campaigning for juvenile and youth justice. I have met the Special Rapporteur on torture, the national delegates from Nigeria., the Austrian Ambassador and I also told my story at a side event. I met with Defence for Children International and thanked them for all the work they did for the YMCA in Sierra Leone.

I have been in conflict with the law and know how it feels. I want to help others. I have experienced what it is like being in prison below the age of 18. I want to now share my experiences and give my time morally, socially and physically to youth justice.

Youths are not being re-integrated on release from prison and end up re-offending, this makes me angry. Prison is always the first resort in my country, it should be the last. Police officers do not know how to deal with young people and youth justice in general. The police officers often bring in young women just for loitering and then ask them to sleep with them.

Families also are not fair to their children. They have no time or patience for their children and are often on low wages and very poor. Their children get taken to prison and families often prefer this as they can't afford to look after them.

I want governments firstly to ensure that juveniles are tried in juvenile courts. In our research we found that youths are being tried in adult courts and judges are passing sentences on them as adults. They do not consider them as juveniles. Secondly, I want prison to be used as a last resort, not a first. Thirdly, I want the government to build structures and schools for youth who have been in conflict with the law, to rehabilitate them.

Getting our voices heard and our issues across to those responsible for youth justice has been my main achievement. The Special Rapporteurs and staff working with treaty bodies need to send a report to our governments and pressure them to meet the requirements of Resolution (10/2).

It is very important we are here in Geneva, because we know what the real issues are. The variety of countries represented in our youth group provides a detailed insight into the issues young people face.

When I return home, I will immediately visit schools and inform youths of their rights. It is important I use my knowledge to educate people in the community about juvenile and youth justice issues. Informing people of their rights will help to reduce crimes committed against juveniles in the future.