

# *Republic of Liberia*

**Policy Directive on National Emergency Number**

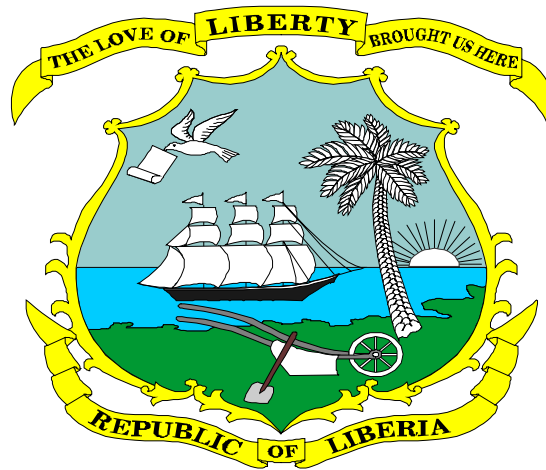
**for Child Protection:**

*a joint initiative of*

*the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications*

**&**

*the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection*



*“Using ICTs to Ensure Child Protection and Security in Liberia.”*



**December 2014**

# National Policy Directive on Child Emergency Number

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## **Acknowledgements**

The Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications (MPT) in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection recognizes the following individuals for their invaluable services for the formulation of this document:

- Honorable Zotawon D. Titus, Deputy Minister for Technical Services, Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications for both his supervisory role and expertise in policy formulation;
- Honorable Joe W. Bando, Assistant Minister for Telecommunications, Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications for producing the first draft as well as for coordinating with other stakeholders in harnessing their inputs;
- Mr. Darren Wilkins, the Consultant on ICT programs at the Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications for his invaluable input;
- Honorable Andrew Tehmeh, Deputy Minister, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection for his support;
- Alice M. Kubo, Program Manager for Africa Child Helpline International, for reinforcing the context of the policy directive;
- Also worth recognizing are the respective roles of the Liberia Telecommunications Authority (LTA), the Liberia Telecommunications Corporation (Libtelco), and the Mobile Network Operators. Their support was essential in the process
- Finally, the inputs of all stakeholders across government institutions, NGOs, community based organizations and development partners strengthened the policy in addressing other issues regarding child safety in sustainable ways;

## President's Message



*President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf*

Many children in Liberia have been vulnerable to various forms of abuses, such as child labor, child prostitution, child trafficking, rape and child molestation. These abuses cause children to be miserable and sometimes contribute to their long-term insecurity which undermines their growth and development. Essentially, children in Liberia like those in other civilized countries deserve decent life in a child friendly environment. A Child-friendly environment is critical to the comprehensive development of children and is void of vices that make their lives vulnerable. Children have basic human rights and are equally entitled to protection against abuses.

Liberia has commissioned Children Helpline Emergency Number (116) that seeks to protect and save children from all kinds of abuses. By commissioning this number, we once again take another practical step in mitigating abuses against children. As a national policy priority, all cellular phone operators are required to incorporate 116 as a toll free number within their respective systems that users can access to report issues of child abuse. The Liberia Telecommunication Authority, LTA shall work out the details with all operators. We will apply all resources applicable to protect every child from abuse

While we have specialized units at the Liberia National Police and also at the Ministry of Gender and Development, the institutionalization of 116 creates an effective platform for all law-abiding citizens to contribute to fighting child abuse. One can simply dial 116 to report any one engaged in child abuse. We are determined to keep all children in Liberia free from child abuse and we will succeed. We call on all well-meaning people including parents, guardians, religious people, community-based organizations, NGOs, opinion leaders and all good citizens to report abuses against children. We as Government have a duty to protect all our people including children. As a nation seeking equal opportunities for all its members, we all share the moral responsibility to ensure that every child is free from abuse.

Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
**President, Republic of Liberia**

## Ministers' Message

On 17, November 2005, in Tunis, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Child Helpline International (CHI) to build a global network of helplines for children and youth. As of January 2014, CHI is reported to have a global network of 178 members and each member is required to formulate appropriate policies on how to protect children from abuses. This policy to protect children against abuses such as rape, child trafficking and child molestation presents our national strategy towards the realization of this global objective.

Liberia Child Helpline policy establishes 116 as a toll free number in fighting against child abuse. Those who abuse children are members of the society but whatever their motivations, they must not be supported. This policy encourages all well-meaning people to cooperate in fighting against child abuse. Every legal effort applied in saving a child from abuse is a part of implementing this policy. Eventually, the implementation of this policy will generate data for informed decision making regarding areas that might need serious attention in protecting children against abuse. It will enable us as policy makers to develop critical insights to identify areas that need safeguards and will also provide law enforcement agencies a tool to use in protecting children from those that abuse them.

We work with stakeholders from diverse background in our collective effort to provide a safe environment for our children. In this regard, it is noteworthy to recognize **the support of Madam Angelique Weeks, the Chairperson of the Liberia Telecommunications Authority (LTA) and the Board of Commissioners; the support from CEOs of all the cellular companies, including other stakeholders.** Without their support, this policy would have lost its essence. We also worked very closely the Child Helpline International, a development partner that provided us with enormous support. Primarily, our shared passion in seeing 116 as a toll free number in facilitating a child friendly environment in Liberia serves as a common motivation that helped us to achieve this milestone.

Dr. Fredrick B. Norkeh  
Minister of Posts and Telecommunications,  
**Republic of Liberia**

Madam Julie Duncan-Cassell, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection,  
**Republic of Liberia**

## Introduction

The Government of Liberia is obliged to protect all residents and citizens within its border from abuse and other forms of vices. People in need of such protection lack the ability to defend themselves and are therefore vulnerable. Children are known to be subjects of various types of abuses and are often voiceless about abuses they experience. The lack of communication facilities and reporting mechanisms to enable children to alert authorities when facing abuse and or violence makes those who infringe on their rights to go with impunity.

As with every internal crisis, the Liberian civil war (1989 to 2003) created a plethora of social and economic challenges including illiteracy, unemployment, food security and homelessness. While we tackle these challenges, the well-being of our children cannot be neglected or negated.

There have been discouraging reports that children under the age of 18 are being induced to trade sex for help; that unfavorable conditions have entrapped children into child labor and that children are being exploited as victims of child pornography. These reports require corrective



BECAUSE  
**EVERY CHILD**  
IN THE WORLD  
HAS ONE THING  
IN COMMON.  
**THEIR RIGHTS.**

measures that will not only punish the perpetrators, but provide a safe environment for the children. Our responsibility as stakeholders therefore, is to ensure that this safe environment is provided by helping better the lives of children who are potential victims of abuses.

No child deserves to experience child abuse or to live as a victim of sexual assault without the law punishing their transgressor(s). All children without exception have the right to protection from abuse regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or beliefs. In this light our aim is to create the enabling environment under which every child will grow with support from the communities, institutions and other support groups.

Today's children are tomorrow's leaders. The kind of leaders we produce for tomorrow need our support today. While creating equal opportunities for all remains a challenge, given the limited available resources, there are some opportunities that can be provided more quickly and successfully.

## National Policy Directive on Child Emergency Number

This policy directive seeks to encourage the creation of secured communication platform exclusively for use by children to enhance their safety. The platform will be critical to prevent abuse, report abuse and discuss remedies that could strengthen existing policy or lead to strategies that could make the difference in their lives. Essentially, the Children's Law of Liberia 2011 that outlines children's rights which is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) needs to be implemented.

Liberia is one of the first countries to adopt comprehensive legislation for children that incorporates the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter. It is therefore not surprising that the Government of Liberia is taking these initiatives.



The UNCRC is a human right treaty which sets out the rights of children. Rights of children including civil, political and social are addressed in the Convention. The Convention on the rights of the child consists of 54 articles entitled:

- The right to survival
- The right to develop to the fullest
- The right to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation
- The right to fully participate in family, culture and social life.

The UNCRC clearly brought to prominence the appalling situation of conscription, child labor and prostitution of children during and after crisis and sought to provide remedy to them. It is in support of the UNCRC and the Africa Charter, that the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and its Members States, of which Liberia is part of, felt that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) can play a big role in the protecting the well-being of children and young people and the Declaration of Principles of the WSIS, adopted in 2003, Article 11 recognizes commitment 'to ensuring that the development of ICT applications and operation of services respects the rights of children as well as their protection and wellbeing'. And Article 13 exhorts ITU Member States to 'to pay particular attention to the special needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups of society'. The WSIS Tunis Commitment that was adopted in 2005, Article 24 states that 'we recognize the role of ICTs in the protection of children and in enhancing the development of children.

## National Policy Directive on Child Emergency Number

We will strengthen action to protect children from abuse and defend their rights in the context of ICTS. In that context, we emphasize that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration'. Also, adopted in 2005, the WSIS Tunis Agenda, Article 92: states that 'we encourage countries, and all other interested parties, to make available child helplines, taking into account the need for mobilization of appropriate resources.

For this purpose, easy-to-remember numbers, accessible from all phones and free-of-charge, should be made available'. In support of the ITU WSIS Tunis Agenda, Article 92, on September 17th 2012, the African Union's ACERWC issued a statement signed by its chairperson Mrs. Agnes Kaboré, in which it recognizes child helplines as important tools for reporting and protecting children from abuse and violence. The AU Committee called on all African countries to promote the establishment of child helplines *using the emergency number "116"*, in compliance with the recommendations of WSIS 2005, the UN study on VAC 2006 and the Rio declaration 2008 on sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. In 2006, The UN study on Violence against Children (UN VAC), Recommendation 8 states that: 'Mechanisms such as telephone helplines, through which children can report abuse, speak to a trained counsellor in confidence and ask for support and advice, should be established and the creation of other ways of reporting violence through new technologies should be considered'. In recognition of this, the plight of children in post-war Liberia was captured in the National ICT & Telecommunications Policy adopted by Cabinet in June 2011.



Part III Section 3.5b of the policy on Public Safety, requires telecommunications carriers and operators to avail their facilities for emergency calls to child abuse centers.

As a signatory to the Convention on the Right of the Child, the document that highlights the need to protect the rights and well-being of the child and having raised the issue of child well-being in a number of different national documents, including the Telecommunications/ICT Policy, the Government is collaborating with other stakeholders to promote child safety and well-being.



## **Vision**

The vision of the National Policy Directive on the establishment of a children emergency number is to ensure all children without exception, have the right to protection from abuse regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or beliefs.

## **Objectives**

- I. To establish appropriate facilities across the country dedicated to providing access and feedback in support of children under threat or deemed to be in harm's way.
- II. To establish a Children Emergency Number (CEN) as a vital instrument in responding and preventing abuses and violence against children and young people in Liberia.
- III. To provide point of contact for children and young people suffering from violence and abuse to express themselves confidentially and link them to people who may help.
- IV. To reduce harmful influences that corrupt Liberian children.
- V. To ensure the safety of children considered a vulnerable group in the Liberian society
- VI. To ensure that all stakeholders including development partners, corporate business entities and government institutions invest in children safety.
- VII. To avail communication facilities to children in time of trouble.
- VIII. To expand the safety net and information base of children and young people.
- IX. To create a friendly environment that supports the productive life of children.

## **Situation Analysis**

In Liberia about 64% of the population of 3.4 million, falls within the youth and young people category. About 30 percent of people in this category are below 18 years old. This category of our population experience varied conditions ranging from abuses, violence, molestation, trafficking, prostitution, rape, among others, on a daily basis. For the most part, these vices against children in Liberia go unreported despite inherent desire on the part of the child to report. While there are other cultural issues (respect for parents, traditional beliefs, punishment for telling), that are responsible for this children's failure to report abuses and violence against them to authorities, unreported cases of abuse remain a problem because of the unavailability of a secure, dedicated emergency and toll free number to confidentially contact help-providing institutions.

## **Efforts in protecting children**

The Government of Liberia has exerted tremendous efforts in ensuring that the situations of abuse and violence against children are pursued vigorously and perpetrators brought to justice. To this extent, the government established Child Protection Unit across the public sector including those at the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Liberia National Police (LNP), the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labor, amongst others, to exclusively handle cases relating to child safety.

Thus far, it has proved challenging due to the lack of dedicated children emergency number which offers toll free services to enable children report their concerns and problems to counsellors and authorities for appropriate action.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection is working closely with Child Helpline International (CHI) for the establishment of a chapter in Liberia. On 17, November 2005, in Tunis, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Child Helpline International to build a global network of helpline for children and youth.



## National Policy Directive on Child Emergency Number

According to Child Helpline International, as of January 2014, a total of one hundred twenty four (124) full members was recorded. In total, Child Helpline boasts of a global network of 178 members from 143 countries.

The role of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications is to leverage ICT as a major tool in the fight against abuses and violence against children in Liberia. These efforts include ensuring that:

- a. Telecommunications service providers consolidate and provide slots on their networks for toll free emergency calls for children and young people.
- b. That the Liberia Telecommunications Authority assigns the emergency and toll-free number “116” to be used exclusively by children in placing emergency calls

## **National Strategy on Emergency Number for Children**

Consistent with the Telecommunications Act of 2007 which states: “The LTA shall prepare, publish and manage a National Numbering Plan and shall assign numbers and number ranges to service providers and customers in accordance with the National Numbering Plan.” In line with this provision, stakeholders seeking the creation of emergency number for children in Liberia are required to follow procedures laid down by the LTA.

The National Telecommunications/ICT Policy also designates the Liberia Telecommunications Corporation (LIBTELCO), to be the “*National Operator*” and tasked it with the responsibility to: “provide networks to support universal access when called upon by the LTA.” Issues of providing networks and services to children in time of distressed borders on universal access, as such the “*National Operator*” shall ensure that the provision of an emergency helpline for children is consummated. This can be achieved by working collaboratively with other operators in ensuring that “116”, once authorized by LTA, become activated for children emergency calls in Liberia.

## **Stakeholders Analysis**

Stakeholders to the establishment of children emergency toll free number in Liberia are same as those involved with the telecommunications sector in Liberia, namely: the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, the “*Policy Maker*”; the Liberia Telecommunications Authority, the “*Regulator*” and LIBTELCO, the “*National Operator*”; and other private telecommunications operators. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Justice and the Liberia National Police are some key stakeholders with responsibilities to address children safety issues. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, in collaboration with all other stakeholders, seeks to curtail violence and abuses against children. The Ministry will, among other things, partnering with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to establish a network of active listeners to receive calls from distressed children and young people in Liberia. The Liberia National Police will ensure that perpetrators are apprehended and promptly brought to justice. Other institutions and ordinary citizens as well as family members have the responsibility to report cases of abuse also.

## **Regulatory Responsibilities**

The Liberia Telecommunications Authority is primarily the body responsible for issuing regulatory framework for the smooth governance of the Telecommunications and ICT sectors in the country. The LTA is also responsible for standardizing the nation’s frequencies and spectrum bands and ensure that our national spectrum usage is in harmony with neighboring countries and in keeping with ITU regulations, including the ITU WSIS Declaration of Principles, the WSIS Tunis Agenda and the WSIS Tunis Commitment.

Additionally, according to (Part III SECTION 3.5 b) of the National Telecommunications and ICT Policy “the LTA shall develop regulations for operators to provide services that address medical emergency and public security in all communities and localities. “ In pursuance of the forgoing, parties to matters relating to assignment of “116” as emergency number for children in Liberia are required to seek legal regulatory instrument from LTA.

## **Private Telecommunications Operators**

The liberalization of the telecommunications sector of Liberia has induced significant foreign direct investment. Currently, there are three active GSM companies operating in an open and competitive telecom market providing various categories of voice and data services. Realizing that the issue of children goes beyond individual interest, the private sector investors are encouraged to actively partake by opening up slot within their networks to provide toll free “116” emergency line service to children in Liberia once assigned by the LTA. The Ministry of Gender and Development through the Child-line Steering Committee will select a local NGO to operationalize the “116” emergency number for children in Liberia.



## **Benefits of Emergency Number to Children**

Children of Liberia stand to benefit immensely when the “116” emergency toll free number is established. The emergency number shall provide children in distress an outlet to voice their problems and concerns; improve children protection systems in the country; and shall provide a secured platform for confidentiality in cases of abuses and violence. Furthermore, cases reported through “116” child helpline shall inform policy and attract the attention of decision makers. It will serve the best interest of children, because it will help in upholding their rights to life, development and respect for their views. The “116” emergency toll free number will improve the survivability of children and young people in Liberia; and be a proof of Liberia’s efforts in implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), especially Article 12 of the UNCRC.

## **Call to Action**

The National Policy Directive on “116” Emergency Toll Free Number for Children is geared towards soliciting the full participation of stakeholders in the telecommunications and ICT sector, health and social welfare sector, security as well as from the Children and Social Protection institutions, to combine efforts in providing a friendly and secure space for the children and young people of Liberia.

## National Policy Directive on Child Emergency Number

This policy directive seeks to elevate the interest of our children and provide means by which they can confidentially communicate their situation, to people that will give advice and also help them find solutions to their problems. It is therefore imperative that parties with interest in issues relating to children safety combine resources to eradicate abuses and violence against children. Under the call to action, the following activities shall be implemented:

1. Adopt the national children emergency helpline as a strategic national objective.
2. Encourage and institutionalize a cross-sector cooperation to support systems and services that protect children's safety.
3. Deploy and leverage the necessary infrastructure and technology in support of children.
4. Establish coordinating groups to follow up on all programs in support of children.
5. Establish criteria and conduct a rigorous vetting process to select the entity to implement the objective of this program. The selection process shall be climaxed with a memorandum of understanding that clearly stipulates the scope of activities, conditions and other tasks that the entity must fulfil.

### **Establishing Performance Matrix**



Performance matrix that all stakeholders shall adopt in implementing child helpline program is imperative. This matrix shall include the particulars of the child; the kind of abuse or threat the child is encountering; location of the child; response time; status of the child in the context of the problem; complimentary actions; and party or parties responsible to make the necessary intervention(s). This matrix shall be reviewed regularly and amended where applicable. Factors that may hinder performance shall be identified and concrete measures taken to address them.

### **Rehabilitation Platform**

The condition of a child that has been abused shall be reviewed on a case by case basis. A child that suffers from abuse leading to trauma and other forms of damages shall need intervention from government and or from its partners under the following condition

1. That the parents lack the capacity to provide the support needed.

2. That the parents or guardians were responsible for the damage. In such a case, the child shall be treated and turned over to institution such as an orphanage home for proper care and protection.
3. That those found guilty for abusing the child be provided counselling in cases leading to minor injuries such as from beating on the child, while harsh punishment, including prison sentences be introduced in cases involving major injuries such as rape, bodily injury, and so forth.

### **Types of Abuse and Violence to be reported via Helpline**

The abuse that children experience includes but not limited to the following:

***Physical Abuse*** – Incident and any resultant bodily injuries.

***Sexual Abuse*** – Child is sexually molested or abuse

***Emotional Abuse*** – The child is emotional abused or molested. I.e.: bullying, use of profanity by elders against child, etc.

***Neglect*** – Persistent and/or severe neglect or absence from the child’s life resulting in a significant impairment of the young person’s health or development

### **Location of Call Centers**

Call Centers that will manage the Child Emergency Helpline shall be placed at the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the Liberian National Police Head Office or designated area. An alternative to this shall be the designated Non-Government Organization.

### **Call Centers Representatives**

Call Center Representatives or CCRs will be individuals trained in the areas of Child Protection. They will be able to identify cases of child abuse and violence against children cases and route them to the respective professionals or agencies that can provide a rapid and prompt response. All members of Helpline staff shall be responsible for implementing the Liberia’s child protection policies in responding handling the duties of the helpline.

## Conclusion

Children of Liberia deserve the right to life, health, security protection and development. The United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child sets out the civil, political, economic, social health and cultural rights of a child. Like children elsewhere in the world, a means by which children in Liberia can safely communicate their complaint must be established in order to curtail violence and abuses meted out against them.

The creation of a toll free and emergency number “116” for children is one of the surest ways the telecommunications and ICT sector of Liberia can contribute toward ensuring that children and young people in Liberia develop to their fullest capacities.

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## Glossary

Term	Definition
<b>Abuse</b>	To injure; to maltreat; to hurt; to treat with cruelty especially repeatedly. Improper treatment, perversion.
<b>Conflict</b>	A clash, or disagreement, often violent, between two opposing groups or individuals.
<b>Data</b>	a collection of facts or ideas in a formalized manner capable of being communicated or manipulated by some process
<b>Emergency</b>	A situation such as a natural or man-made disaster requiring urgent assistance.
<b>Family relationship</b>	A group of people related by blood, marriage, law or custom.
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>Help</b>	Action given to provide assistance to aid someone in need
<b>Human Trafficking</b>	A criminal activity in which people are recruited, harbored, transported, bought or kidnapped to serve as exploitative purpose, such a sexual slavery, forced labor or child soldier.
<b>Molest</b>	To sexually abuse, especially regarding a minor.
<b>Neglect</b>	To fail to care for or attend to someone or something due to carelessness.
<b>Problems:</b>	A difficulty that has to be resolved or dealt with.
<b>Prostitute:</b>	A person who performs sexual activity for payment
<b>Prostitution:</b>	Engaging in sexual activity with another person in exchange for compensation, such as money or other valuable goods.
<b>Rape</b>	To force sexual intercourse or other sexual activity upon someone without their consent.
<b>Toll- free</b>	Free to use, not requiring payment to use.
<b>Violence</b>	Action intended to cause destruction, pain or suffering.