



# Stepping Stones Nigeria

Press Release

## Stepping Stones Nigeria Commends Akwa Ibom State Governments Recent Enactment of Child Rights Act

The UK registered charity organisation, Stepping Stones Nigeria, along with her sister NGO, Stepping Stones Nigeria Child Empowerment Foundation, has quickly moved to congratulate the Governor of Akwa Ibom State on the recent enactment of the Child Rights Act by the State House of Assembly. The move has been heralded as a positive development for the children of Akwa Ibom state. Both organisations have long campaigned for the law to be enacted so that children may be protected for the ills of child abandonment, forced labour and trafficking.

Speaking from the Stepping Stones Nigeria office in Lancaster, UK, their programme director, Gary Foxcroft said "this is a truly wonderful day for Akwa Ibom's children. The Governor has shown great vision and determination in ensuring that the Child Rights Act is passed and should be commended for his wonderful efforts. Only three months ago he promised that the law would be enacted and today we can see that this is a man of integrity". According to Foxcroft "the challenge now is for the Akwa Ibom State government to ensure that all citizens of Akwa Ibom state are made aware of the importance of the Child Rights Act and that all stakeholders work together to ensure that it is successfully implemented. Our immediate aim now is to successfully prosecute parents and pastors that are found guilty of stigmatising children as "witches" and then abandoning, torturing, and killing them. We sincerely hope that the State Government will work with us to ensure that such children have access to justice."

The issue of so-called child witches has attracted increasing national and international to Akwa Ibom State in recent months. This unfortunate occurrence has been triggered by increasing numbers of children being abandoned by their parents after being stigmatised as 'witches' by their pastors and/or parents. These children then litter the streets of Akwa Ibom and are often targeted by traffickers. Indeed only last week a shadowy group know as the "Peace Sisters" from Aba were arrested by NAPTIP and the Civil Defence force on suspicion of trafficking the 36 children found in their church, all of whom were from Oron LGA.

SSNCEF's Director, Lucky Inyang, was the person that reported the activities of the "peace sisters" to NAPTIP and the police after SSNCEF investigations discovered that 200-300 abandoned children had been snatched by this group. Speaking in the SSNCEF Eket office, Lucky Imoh commended the efforts of NAPTIP in arresting the assailants and encouraged the police, NAPTIP and immigration service to redouble their efforts in fighting the dual menaces of child abandonment and trafficking.

He also used the opportunity to appeal to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Pentecostal fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) to ensure child's rights are protected in places of worship and that pastors are discouraged from preaching about so called child "witches" and demanding fees for "deliverance".