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## **Pregnancy is not a crime. ISER Condemns the Expulsion of Pregnant Students from learning institutions**

The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) is gravely concerned by the Medical Laboratory Training School - Jinja's recent decision to expel a 25-year old student on an account of pregnancy. While this case has sparked public attention, it is by no means an isolated incident. Across Uganda, pregnant students, continue to face expulsion, forced school dropout, and stigma in both public and private educational institutions. This widespread practice reflects deep-seated systemic discrimination and patriarchal control over young women's bodies and futures.

This expulsion is a blatant violation of the student's constitutional rights safeguarded under Article 8A (national interest), 21 (equality and freedom from non-discrimination), and 27 (right to privacy) of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda. The expulsion also mirrors systemic and institutional discrimination that international and regional human rights bodies have explicitly deemed unlawful and incompatible with human rights standards.

Pregnancy is not a crime. Expelling a student for being pregnant is neither a reflection of academic integrity nor moral leadership, it is an act of institutional violence against women and adolescent girls exercising their fundamental reproductive rights. Such practices entrench gender inequality, rob adolescent girls and mothers of their future, represent a structural failure by the State to ensure inclusive, enabling, and supportive school environments, and undermine Uganda's progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 3 (health), 4 (education), and 5 (gender equality).

We draw your attention to the landmark 2020 ruling by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) against the Republic of Tanzania. The Committee found that Tanzania's policy of expelling pregnant schoolgirls constituted a violation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, particularly the rights to education, health, dignity, and non-discrimination. This precedent compels all institutions across the continent to take stock of their practices and align them with both human rights obligations and human compassion.

ISER recommends the Medical Laboratory Training School – Jinja to; immediately reinstate the expelled student unconditionally; end mandatory pregnancy testing, which constitutes a violation of bodily autonomy and privacy rights unless informed consent is obtained and conducted by a licensed health professional in compliance with ethical and legal standards; review and revise institutional policies to align with National, Regional and International human rights obligations, including gender equity and the right to health and education; provide counselling and academic support to pregnant and parenting students to safeguard their right to health and education.

The ISER remains committed to challenging discriminatory expulsions and coercive practices that deny girls their rights to education and health.

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