

## **Press Release**

**By a Group of Nigeria NGOs and Human Rights Organizations on the expulsion and ejection of Master X from Command Secondary School, Suleja, on account of His HIV Status**

**Institutionalizing Stigma and Discrimination owing to HIV status in Army Command Secondary School Abuja**

### **Need for Justice and Compliance with the Law**

#### ***Background***

- A 12-year-old male student of the Command Secondary School, Suleja, Niger State has been expelled by the school authorities on account of his HIV status. The boy (name withheld) was born HIV positive but has been on the necessary treatment and care from birth.
- Master X (Not Real Name) who lives with his single mother and a sister in Abuja was offered provisional admission into the Command Secondary School in Kaduna in 2019 where he completed J.S.S. 1 and the 1<sup>st</sup> Term of his J.S.S. 2. Owing to the insecurity and other risks associated with the Abuja-Kaduna Road, Master X's mother decided to seek a transfer for him from Kaduna to the Command Secondary School in Suleja.
- The transfer was approved, and Master X was supposed to resume in Suleja for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Term of his J.S.S. 2. On Monday, the 10<sup>th</sup> day of January 2022, Master X's mother accompanied him to the school in Suleja to help the boy complete all registration formalities and resume school.
- After completing the registration processes and making all necessary purchases and payments, Master X was assigned to a hostel and from there he continued his usual school activities for the day.
- During the registration process, and while the mother was still in the school; the in-house doctor requested anyone that required special medical attention and care for his ward to come forward and let the school's clinic be aware so the clinic could make special arrangements to attend to such special needs of the child.
- This was what prompted Master X's mother to approach the doctor to show him the Anti-Retroviral (ARV) drugs that Master X has been on. On sighting the said drugs, the doctor flared up and angrily questioned the decision of the mother to bring such a child into the school.
- The doctor then immediately rushed into another office where he apparently narrated the whole story to the officer there. After a while, Master X's mother was summoned to the same office where she was told by both men that a child of his HIV status could not be allowed in the school. The men later escalated the issue to the office of the

Commandant for what Master X's mother perceived as a necessary action.

- Later, Master X's mother retired to her home that day believing the matter had been put to rest as she was no longer summoned to any other office for further concerns. She was to be proved wrong!
- In the evening of the Monday under reference, Master X's mother received a call from an Administrative Officer in the school inviting her to report at his office the following day. On getting there, Master X's mother was simply accompanied to the Bursary office where all the money she had already paid was enveloped and returned to her with the announcement that her child cannot be allowed to continue in the school and that the Commandant had instructed them to return her money and expel Master X from the school.
- All pleas from Master X's mother to be allowed to explain certain things to them were turned down completely. A military officer attached to the school was instead brought into the matter and made to escort Master X to his hostel where they removed everything that belonged to Master X and Master X and his mother were escorted out of the school's gate.
- This had meant an embarrassing end to Master X's academic career at a school he, according to the mother, loves so much. Indeed, it will amount to stating the obvious to announce that Master X has been so much traumatized by this experience to the point of nurturing suicidal thoughts.
- To forestall the unexpected, Master X's mother has been around him thereby giving the single mother additional tasks of watching over this child all day. Besides, Master X is out of school now with all the attendant risks and dangers.
- Even though it is not out of the ordinary for Master X to be taken in by another school, the questions still remain: how many of Master X's are suffering this kind of treatment silently around us today that have not spoken out?

### ***The Law/Issues***

The treatment meted to Master X and his mother are in gross violations of Sections 3, 4, 9, 13 and other relevant sections of the **HIV and AIDS (Anti-Discrimination) Act, 2014**. Besides, the actions also offend Sections 34, 38, 40, and 42 of the **Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999** and other extant laws. The cumulative reading of these sections seeks to protect stigmatization and discrimination on account of HIV status, and indeed unsignifying treatment of a person as done by the Command Secondary School, Suleja, Niger State.

That this treatment would emanate from the Nigeria Army Command Secondary School is more disheartening. An Army institution cannot be championing acts that strip a young boy of personal dignity and self-worth, stigmatize, and discriminate against him.

That the officials of the school who should know the science of HIV infection could act in the manner and way they did calls for reaction from the Army in terms of sanctions.

**Action**

Wherein we the below listed civil society groups hereby make the following demands:

- A. Immediate identification and removal of the officers who carried out these acts on Master X from the school as persons unfit to remain and teach children the values of dignity, tolerance and respect for laws and persons.
- B. A formal letter of apology to Master X from the school and the Nigeria Army for the way and manner he was treated.
- C. Compensation of not less than N20m to Master X for the psychological and mental trauma, now bordering on suicidal thoughts.
- D. Sensitization and awareness sessions for officers in Army Secondary Schools in Nigeria on the content of the HIV and AIDS (Anti-Discrimination) Act, 2014.

We so demand.

Lawyers Alert .....



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