**Submission from Challenging Heights to UN Special Rapporteur on Poverty and Human Rights regarding Ghana**

Poverty in Ghana is a cycle, one that is not easily broken. Poverty prevents parents from sending their children to school. Despite the fact that education itself is free in Ghana, there are still many prohibitive costs associated with school, such as school supplies, uniforms, transportation, and food. Lack of schooling hampers children’s chances at gaining the knowledge and skills they need to procure meaningful employment and build sustainable economic futures. These children will grow up with few career options beyond petty trading, further saturating the market in impoverished rural areas.

The most recent national documentation of poverty in Ghana comes from the Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6, covering 2005-2013, which compares a variety of indicators of poverty over time. This survey showed that about a quarter of Ghanaians are living in poverty and about a tenth of Ghanaians are living in extreme poverty.

It’s important to remember that poverty can be marked by a variety of things, not simply income and expenditures of a household. Malnutrition, illiteracy and insecurity are also markers of poverty, which have a rippling effect throughout a variety of communities and touching on other human rights.

The data shows that while poverty is most prevalent in the rural savannah areas of Ghana, typically the northern regions of the country, the incidence of poverty in the coastal areas (both urban and rural) have risen in the covered time period unlike the rest of the country.

* The poverty incidence in urban coastal areas increased from 6.4 percent in 2005 to 10.1 percent in 2013.
* The poverty incidence in rural coastal areas increased from 27.2 percent in 2005 to 30.3 percent in 2013.

In Ghana’s coastal fishing communities, the fish stock has been depleted to the point of threatening the livelihoods of career fishermen and fishmongers. Many fishermen have resorted to illegal fishing methods, but these methods are not sustainable. If they carry on, Ghana’s coastal stock will all but disappear, a key food source will become scarce and expensive, and uneducated fishermen and fishmongers will lose their only source of economic stability. The Ghanaian government has stepped in to address overfishing and illegal fishing, but education is also imperative in opening up a diversity of career options for children from families who have historically been involved exclusively in the fishing industry.

* Challenging Heights is working with youth in these coastal communities to provide job training for alternative vocations.

With this threat to the well-being and health of families and children, human rights abuses can proliferate. Vulnerable families do not have access to adequate standards of living including housing, food and economic security. Families at risk, which include very poor families as well as those that are unable to send their children to school, are susceptible to trafficking in Ghana.

* Challenging Heights works with schools to sensitise the children about their rights, such as Child Rights Camps and anti-corporal punishment campaigns.

Poverty also disadvantages women disproportionately. Because of cultural norms, women are encouraged to have large numbers of children. Because of poverty, women may not have access to modern contraceptives or adequate reproductive healthcare, and they may not have had any access education on sexual or reproductive health rights either. In case of family separation, Ghana does not have adequate legal mechanisms to ensure child support is paid, and women are often left to care for all of their children alone. Additionally, in the case of the father’s death, widows are saddled with the high cost associated with putting on an appropriate traditional funeral.

* Challenging Heights facilitates a Women’s Economic Empowerment Programme, which provides free fish-smoking facilities to local women and a local wholesale store for when the fish catches are low.
* Caregivers of reintegrated children who have been trafficked are provided with an in-kind micro-grant of goods to start or infuse a business with fresh capital. They are also assisted with enrolling all of their children in the National Health Insurance Scheme, protecting the children’s right to healthcare.
* Challenging Heights also hosts Alternative Dispute Resolution for community members to have a legal route to resolving disputes, like child support, without needing to go to court, an option that can be intimidating to people living in poverty or are illiterate.

Ghanaian communities in poverty and extreme poverty consistently have a high prevalence of child trafficking. Traffickers prey upon parental poverty, naivety, and desire for a better life for their children. Traffickers deceive parents, promising to educate and provide for the children, and offer the parents money. Migration of children within Ghana is common and sometimes happens for positive reasons, such relocating to live with relatives and attend a better school, but this cultural norm can be exploited by traffickers, who can thus transport children without raising community concern.

In reality, children as young as five years old from coastal fishing communities are trafficked to Lake Volta, where they work long hours in harsh conditions, contract waterborne illnesses, miss out on education, and experience malnourishment and abuse. They are required to do hazardous labour, such as diving down into the water to disentangle the fishing nets from the submerged timber that is characteristic of Lake Volta, and are often injured in the process. Barring escape or rescue, these children lose their entire childhoods on the Lake and miss out on the education that could have offered them a path out of poverty.

Naivety and family separation coincide with poverty as root causes of trafficking. However, poverty is the leading factor of trafficking. In fact, seventy-one percent (71.2%) of respondents to a survey conducted by Challenging Heights said extreme poverty can compel them to traffic children under their care.

Poverty alleviation and economic empowerment are two instrumental factors which must be tackled in order to end trafficking, realize the rights for all children, and guarantee all children are free from slavery in Ghana. Families trapped in poverty in Ghana are left without choices to freely exercise their rights and live securely; they are unable to provide basic necessities such as adequate food and housing. Families living in extreme poverty resort to trafficking, which leads to children forced into unjust working conditions with little to no pay, long working hours, no access to education or medical care, and threats of violence and brutality by slave masters.

* Challenging Heights has established a variety of working relationships throughout rural coastal communities, including government agencies, police stations and community members.
* One way that Challenging Heights works to address trafficking is through Community Child Protection Committees, which are made up of prominent community members who act as watchdogs for the community when it comes to trafficking.

Challenging Heights is an anti-trafficking organization working to end trafficking through poverty alleviation initiatives. Challenging Heights’ methods and ideas are based in the recognition that human rights violations and child trafficking are caused by greater societal hurdles, including poverty. Challenging Heights’ innovations strive to uplift communities through livelihood support and beneficiary-driven programming. It is from this approach Challenging Heights is touching the lives of Ghana’s most vulnerable communities and invoking hope across the country.

Rural coastal communities are frequently overlooked when it comes to the topic of poverty in Ghana. Visiting a district such as Winneba or Awutu Senya can give special insight and experience of the poverty affecting the people who live in coastal areas and its effects on human rights.

It may also be beneficial to visit some of the communities on Lake Volta to see the intersection of poverty and human rights there. In addition to children who have been trafficked to the Lake, many children of the families on Lake Volta are engaged in child labour as well, which interferes with their right to an education.

Challenging Heights is a leading organisation in the fight against child trafficking in Ghana’s fishing industry. Our approach is a holistic one that considers the root causes, including poverty, and works to address them in order to end child trafficking. Visiting with Challenging Heights will provide a unique perspective into coastal poverty and its intersections with human rights.