

International Day of the Girl Child 2012
Joint Statement
Executive Directors of UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women

October 11 marks the inaugural International Day of the Girl Child. This day focuses attention on the need to address the challenges girls face, promote their empowerment and fulfill their human rights.

This year we have come together to focus on child marriage.

Child marriage is a violation of human rights and it is prevalent in several regions of the world, particularly in rural areas and among the most disadvantaged communities. Globally, around 1 in 3 (or approximately 70 million) young women aged 20-24 in developing countries (excluding China) were married before their 18th birthday.

The consequences of child marriage are as serious as they are wide-ranging. Girls are not only at risk of early and unwanted pregnancies, but the complications associated with pregnancy and child-birth are among the leading causes of death for girls aged 15-19 worldwide.

Child brides are also more likely to experience discrimination and violence. Too often, they have little or no ability to leave abusive partners and secure the social and legal support they need to improve their situation.

The collective burdens of housework, childcare and family pressure can often prevent or prematurely end the education of a child bride. While girls with low levels of education are more likely to be married early, those with secondary education are up to six times less likely to marry as children, and more likely to send their own children to school.

Education is one of the best strategies to protect girls against child marriage and provide them with the opportunity to build a better life for themselves, their families and their communities.

If we can end child marriage, we can change the lives of girls everywhere. We can help them enjoy their childhoods; enroll them in school; protect them from complicated pregnancies and births. We can keep girls safe. And as we do all of this, we help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

We call on governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, faith-based groups and the international community to accelerate efforts to:

- Enforce legislation to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18;
- Improve equal access to quality primary and secondary education;
- Mobilise girls, boys, parents and leaders to change discriminatory gender norms and create alternative social, economic and civic opportunities for girls;
- Support girls who are already married by providing them with options for schooling, sexual and reproductive health information and services, including HIV prevention, livelihoods skills and recourse from violence in the home;
- Address the root causes of child marriage, including violence against girls and women.

We must galvanize political commitment and dedicate resources for girls to realize their rights and fulfill their potential. Together we can end child marriage.

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