



# World Day of Prayer and Action for Children

## **ABCs for Action and Advocacy**

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## **A Note On Child Marriage**

World Day of Prayer and Action for Children Secretariat New York  
Working Document July 2012



# Introduction

***“Child Marriage is a practice that robs millions of girls of their childhood, their rights and their dignity.” – Archbishop Desmond Tutu***

Nearly 80 per cent of the people in the world profess a religious belief and the vast majority of these faithful belong to an organized religion. This means that religious leaders are uniquely positioned as moral voices to lead a call to end violence against children<sup>1</sup>, the theme for the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children.

We are currently promoting universal birth registration, encouraging positive parenting and campaigning against violent child discipline. We also are calling for the end of child marriage, which often is associated with violence against girls. Religious communities<sup>2</sup> can play a central role in ensuring that children grow up in an environment free from violence, including child marriage, which undermines the human rights, health and well-being of young brides.

This note to religious communities outlines the scope and consequences of child marriage. It also provides examples of practical action, which religious communities can take all year long in their campaign to end child marriage.

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<sup>1</sup> Save the Children Sweden. Ending Corporal Punishment of Children: A handbook for working with and within religious communities. CNNV.

<sup>2</sup> “The term ‘religious communities’ refers to the faithful; female and male religious leaders; and local, national and international groups. It includes:

- Local worship communities (e.g., churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, etc.)
- Denominational leadership (e.g., bishops, clerics, imams, lamas, etc.)
- Scholars, theologians and religious educators
- Mission workers
- Youth faith or inter-faith groups
- Women of faith networks
- Faith-based or faith-inspired organizations
- Denominational, ecumenical and intra-religious institutions, umbrella organizations and networks
- Inter-faith institutions”

UNICEF, “Partnering with Religious Communities for Children,” New York, 2012, p. 7. Available from [http://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/Partnering\\_with\\_Religious\\_Communities\\_for\\_Children\\_\(UNICEF\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/Partnering_with_Religious_Communities_for_Children_(UNICEF).pdf).

# TOO YOUNG TO WED

## About Child Marriage

Every three seconds, somewhere in the world, a girl under the age of 18 is married. If the present trend continues, 100 million girls will marry over the next decade.<sup>3</sup> That means that every day 25,000 girls will become child brides.

Child marriage occurs in practically every region of the world,<sup>4</sup> but it is most common in South Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Africa. More than 70 per cent of girls under the age of 18 are married in Niger, Chad and Mali.<sup>5</sup> Nearly half of all Indian daughters become child brides.<sup>6</sup>

Three years ago, child marriage hit the front pages of all the major newspapers when Nujood Ali, a ten-year-old Yemeni girl, became famous for resisting her parents' attempts to marry her to a man three times her age.<sup>7</sup> Nujood escaped from her husband and returned home, where her father's second wife eventually gave her the money to file for divorce. Nujood went by herself by taxi to Sanaa to appear in court. The crowd in the courtroom erupted in thunderous applause when the judge granted her divorce after a trial that lasted days. Since then, multiple similar cases across the world have been documented and disseminated by national and international media.

The practice has existed for thousands of years, but a number of communities are abandoning child marriage and they are doing so in a way that respects and maintains traditional values. These communities manage to promote the fundamental values of human rights and the protection of children while promoting a national discussion about gender norms and the appropriate age of marriage.

Religious communities are encouraged to take the lead, or become integral partners, in these efforts to make people reassess their views on the rights of girls. Religious leaders have combined religious teachings with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and supported national laws and policies to protect children. But we need to strengthen and enlarge the engagement of religious communities as we press to end child marriage around the world.

Although boys are also subjected to early marriage in some parts of the world, girls are disproportionately affected and they make up the overwhelming majority of children who are married. In the developing world, one out of three women under the age of 50 were married

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations, "Secretary General's Report on the Girl Child" (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E)

<sup>4</sup> Girls Not Brides. "Child Marriage <http://girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage>.

<sup>5</sup> International Center for Research on Women Analysis of Demographic and Health Survey. Available from <http://www.icrw.org/child-marriage-facts-and-figures>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Nujood Ali with Delphine Minoui, *I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced* (New York, New York, Broadway Books, 2010).

before they turned 18. One in seven women under the age of 50 were married before they were 15.<sup>8</sup>

Exact data on child marriage is difficult to obtain, because of weak administrative systems and poor record keeping in countries where child marriage is widely practiced. Frequently, births are not recorded, so a bride's exact age is unknown. Marriage certificates are not systematically issued in many countries – particularly when the bride is under the age of 18.<sup>9</sup> But the statistics that are available indicate a slight decrease in the number of child brides. In the developing countries, 48 per cent of women between the ages of 45 and 49 married before they were 18. The percentage drops to 35 for women between the ages of 20 and 24.<sup>10</sup> Even though it is dropping, these are still very high numbers of girls affected by child marriage.

## **A Violation of Human Rights**

Whether it happens to a girl or a boy, child marriage is a violation of human rights. It eliminates the child's freedom to choose when and whom to marry.<sup>11</sup> Child marriage, which frequently inhibits a child's basic rights to health, education and security, is condemned in international conventions:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) recognizes the right to “free and full” consent to marry and says that a person must be mature enough to make an informed decision.<sup>12</sup>
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), ratified by 193 states, protects children from harmful and traditional practices like child marriage.<sup>13</sup> General Comment No.4 (2003) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on adolescent health and development urges countries to set the minimum age for marriage for both men and women (with or without parental consent) to 18 years.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> UNICEF, “State of the World’s Children 2012: Children in an Urban World,” 2012, statistical table 9, page 120, Available from: [http://www.unicef.org/sowc2012/pdfs/SOWC%202012-Main%20Report\\_EN\\_13Mar2012.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/sowc2012/pdfs/SOWC%202012-Main%20Report_EN_13Mar2012.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> IPPF, “Ending Child Marriage: A Guide for Global Policy Action”, pg. 9, Available from: [http://www.unfpa.org/upload/lib\\_pub\\_file/662\\_filename\\_endchildmarriage.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/upload/lib_pub_file/662_filename_endchildmarriage.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF, “Progress for Children: Achieving the MDGs with Equity,” 2010, page 46, Available from: [http://www.unicef.org/protection/Progress\\_for\\_Children-No.9\\_EN\\_081710.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/protection/Progress_for_Children-No.9_EN_081710.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> United Nations, “Secretary General’s Report on the Girl Child” (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E)

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.” Available from [www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/)

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, “The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990: [www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm)

<sup>14</sup> United Nations, “The Convention on the Rights of the Child GENERAL COMMENT NO. 4 (2003),” (CRC/GC/2003/4). Available from [www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/504f2a64b22940d4c1256e1c0042dd4a/\\$FILE/GO342724.pdf](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/504f2a64b22940d4c1256e1c0042dd4a/$FILE/GO342724.pdf)

- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) prohibits marriage under 18.<sup>15</sup>
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979) and General Recommendation No. 21 (1994) of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women prohibits child marriage. It sets 18 as the minimum age for marriage for both men and women.<sup>16</sup>

Greater numbers of countries are taking action to reform laws to end child marriage. But even though the international community urges them to reform their laws, many countries have not implemented the provisions in these treaties and conventions. This failure means that tens of millions of girls are at risk of becoming child brides.

## Causes and Consequences

Girls usually become child brides because their parents give them away for economic or social gain. Families are also motivated by the promise of social approval or increased social standing.<sup>17</sup> Parents think they are upholding tradition, safeguarding the chastity of their girls, and minimizing the risk that their daughters may bear children out of wedlock. In some cultures, child marriage is associated with a religious belief and the need to protect girls from engaging in “improper” or “immoral” behaviour.<sup>18</sup> But the religious justification often masks a family’s desire to protect its honour and reputation.<sup>19</sup> Often parents feel obligated to accept the social norm and they readily give up their daughters to older men. If they fail to give away their daughters, families can be excluded from the community or worse, their daughters or other family members may become the victims of violent attacks.<sup>20</sup>

There also are strong economic incentives to give away young children in marriage. The cost of marriage tends to be lower when a child is younger. A young bride leaves her parent’s home and stops using the family’s resources. Grooms and their families usually require a smaller-

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<sup>15</sup> African Union. African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child,” adopted 1999. Available from [http://www.african-union.org/official\\_documents/Treaties\\_%20Conventions\\_%20Protocols/a.%20C.%20ON%20THE%20RIGHT%20AND%20WELF%20OF%20CHILD.pdf](http://www.african-union.org/official_documents/Treaties_%20Conventions_%20Protocols/a.%20C.%20ON%20THE%20RIGHT%20AND%20WELF%20OF%20CHILD.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> United Nations, “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,” 1979. Available from [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw).

<sup>17</sup> United Nations, “Secretary General’s Report on the Girl Child” (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E).

<sup>18</sup> Plan, Breaking the Vows: Early and Forced Marriage and Girls’ Education (2011). Available from <http://www.plan-uk.org/resources/documents/Breaking-Vows-Early-and-Forced-Marriage-and-Girls-Education>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> United Nations, “Secretary General’s Report on the Girl Child” (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E)

than-normal dowry for young girls. In cultures where grooms pay for brides, young girls command a higher price than adults.<sup>21</sup>

Girls living in poor households in the developing world are almost twice as likely to marry before 18 than girls from high-income families.<sup>22</sup> Child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries and largest numbers of child brides can be found in the most impoverished regions of these countries. Economic inequity is a major cause of child marriage, but child brides do not escape poverty once they marry.<sup>23</sup>

Families in poverty usually feel they have no alternative to child marriage. They may lack the resources to educate their daughters and their society may not offer incentives to protect girls from child marriage.<sup>24</sup>

A lack of education (among parents and child brides) is a major risk factor for child marriage.<sup>25</sup> Girls with a higher level of schooling are less likely to marry as children. In Mozambique, 57 per cent of women 15-49 with no education were married by the age of 18, but only 20 per cent of those with secondary education or higher had married before age 18.<sup>26</sup>

In many parts of the world, girls traditionally did not have access to an education. However, this has started to change with modest progress made toward the realization of Millennium Development Goal 2 on Achieving Universal Primary Education.<sup>27</sup> But girls often lose the opportunity to continue schooling once they become eligible for marriage. Indeed, if girls marry while in school, they tend to drop out.<sup>28</sup> Keeping girls in school is the most significant thing families can do to delay a girl's age at marriage.<sup>29</sup> Once they leave, they rarely return to school, and are deprived of the enriching opportunities education can provide, including skills that will ensure the girl can take full advantage of future economic opportunities to support her family and lift her own children out of the cycle of poverty.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF, "Progress for Children: Achieving the MDGs with Equity," Pg 47. Available from [http://www.unicef.org/protection/Progress\\_for\\_Children-No.9\\_EN\\_081710.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/protection/Progress_for_Children-No.9_EN_081710.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF, "Progress for Children: Achieving the MDGs with Equity," Pg 46. Available from [http://www.unicef.org/protection/Progress\\_for\\_Children-No.9\\_EN\\_081710.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/protection/Progress_for_Children-No.9_EN_081710.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Mathur, Greene and Malhotra, New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage: A Global Analysis of Factors and Programs (ICRW, USAID, PACT IGWG April 2007). Available from <http://www.icrw.org/publications/new-insights-preventing-child-marriage>.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations, "Secretary General's Report on the Girl Child" (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E).

<sup>26</sup> Mozambique Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2008

<sup>27</sup> We Can End Poverty, UN MDG Summit, "Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education", Available from: [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG\\_FS\\_2\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG_FS_2_EN.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Source: "Girls Not Brides – The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage." <http://girlsnotbrides.org>

<sup>29</sup> Mathur, Greene and Malhotra, New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage: A Global Analysis of Factors and Programs (ICRW, USAID, PACT IGWG April 2007). Available from <http://www.icrw.org/publications/new-insights-preventing-child-marriage>. <http://girlsnotbrides.org>

<sup>30</sup> Source: "Girls Not Brides – The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage." <http://girlsnotbrides.org>

Child marriage has been linked to a number of negative health consequences for the child bride and for the bride's children:

- Child brides face a higher rate of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections because of their biological vulnerability and social inequality;<sup>31</sup>
- Child marriage increases the likelihood that a girl will give birth at a young age<sup>32</sup> and that childbearing will continue uninterrupted throughout reproductive age;
- Girls under the age of 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s,<sup>33</sup>
- Girls aged 15-19 are twice as likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s;<sup>34</sup>
- Girls under 18 face a higher risk of pregnancy-related injuries such as fistula;<sup>35</sup>
- A child born to an adolescent mother is twice as likely to die before the age of one, compared to the child of a woman in her 20s.<sup>36</sup>

Research studies also have examined the link between child marriage and the relationship between husband and wife. Girls, who are younger than their husbands, and have little education and life experience, usually are in a subordinate role. They have little control over their lives and well-being. This unequal relationship increases the risk that the child bride will be subjected to verbal or physical abuse by her husband, or by her husband's family. Child brides are more likely to be victims of domestic violence than their peers who marry later.<sup>37</sup> Child brides are less likely to participate in politics and community affairs, leaving them disenfranchised from their society.

But girls don't have to be disenfranchised. They don't have to be child brides. Fortunately, there are communities around the world, where religious leaders say that this practice does not align with traditional and moral values. They say it must stop.

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<sup>31</sup> United Nations, "Secretary General's Report on the Girl Child" (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E)

<sup>32</sup> Save the Children, "State of the World's Mothers: Nutrition in the First 1000 Days," May 2012. Available from: [www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/STATEOFTHEWORLDSMOTHERSREPORT2012.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/STATEOFTHEWORLDSMOTHERSREPORT2012.PDF)

<sup>33</sup> United Nations, "Secretary General's Report on the Girl Child" (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E) "Giving Girls Today and Tomorrow: Breaking the Cycle of Adolescent Pregnancy", United Nations Population Fund, 2007 (see <http://www.unfpa.org>)

<sup>34</sup> United Nations, "Secretary General's Report on the Girl Child" (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E) Miriam Temin and Ruth Levine, Start with a Girl: A New Agenda for Global Health, Center for Global Development, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> United Nations, "Secretary General's Report on the Girl Child" (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E)

<sup>36</sup> Phipps MG et al. Young maternal age associated with increased risk of neonatal death. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 2002; 100:481-486.

<sup>37</sup> International Center for Research on Women, "Child Marriage and Domestic Violence," 2006. Available from <http://www.icrw.org/files/images/Child-Marriage-Fact-Sheet-Domestic-Violence.pdf>.

## TAKE ACTION

Child marriage can be found in every region of the world, regardless of culture or ethnicity, and the practice persists even though no religion formally endorses it.<sup>38</sup> This persistence is striking given that child marriage is inconsistent with the fundamental values of religious communities: enhancing the moral, physical and psychological development of children as they transition to adulthood.<sup>39</sup>

Religious communities have deep roots in society and they have a long history of supporting the most vulnerable. Their members provide social services, such as running schools and health care centres. Religious communities often extend beyond the socio-economic barriers of society.<sup>40</sup> This means that religious communities are uniquely placed to advocate for the end of violence against children, including the end of child marriage. They can use their extensive networks to lobby for legal reform in their countries. But more important, they can use their spiritual influence to encourage their faithful to reassess and modify their moral attitudes toward human rights violations and violence against children.<sup>41</sup>

The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children provides religious communities with an opportunity to raise awareness and press for the elimination of child marriage. Religious leaders can provide their mosques, churches, synagogues and temples as safe forums for dialogue. They can lead their faithful in discussions on stopping all forms of violence against children, including the end of child marriage. Religious leaders can examine the scriptures and teachings of their faith for guidance on child development and then explain to their communities why child marriage should be viewed as unacceptable.

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<sup>38</sup> The Elders. "Child Marriage: the Facts." Available from <http://www.theelders.org/docs/child-marriage-factsheet.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children (the Kyoto Declaration), which was endorsed by almost 1,000 religious leaders from all over the world, outlining ways religious communities can work to eliminate violence against children in line with the recommendations from the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, see UNICEF and Religions for Peace. "From Commitment to Action - What Religious Communities Can Do To Eliminate Violence Against Children," 2010, p.7. available from [www.unicef.org/media/files/What\\_Religious\\_Communities\\_can\\_do\\_to\\_Eliminate\\_Violence\\_against\\_Children\\_\(UNICEF\\_Religions\\_for\\_Peace\\_Guide\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/files/What_Religious_Communities_can_do_to_Eliminate_Violence_against_Children_(UNICEF_Religions_for_Peace_Guide).pdf)

<sup>40</sup> UNICEF, "Partnering with Religious Communities for Children," 2011, p. 18. Available from [http://www.unicef.org/eapro/Partnering\\_with\\_Religious\\_Communities\\_for\\_Children.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/eapro/Partnering_with_Religious_Communities_for_Children.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> UNICEF, "From Commitment to Action- What Religious Communities Can Do To Eliminate Violence Against Children," 2010, p. 26. Available from [http://www.unicef.org/eapro/UNICEF\\_Religions\\_for\\_Peace\\_Feb2010.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/eapro/UNICEF_Religions_for_Peace_Feb2010.pdf).



## CONCRETE ACTIONS

### What Religious Communities Can Do to Promote Abandonment of Child Marriage as part of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children<sup>42</sup>

#### Worship and Religious Events

- Talk about protecting children and delaying marriage in a language that is meaningful and appropriate to your community.
- Cite examples from religious texts that show your religion's commitment to the right of children to develop to their full potential. Talk about these examples in worship services and in religious education classes. Refer to them during special religious events, particularly during ceremonies celebrating rites of passage.
- Invite relevant professionals (e.g. teachers, doctors, social workers) from the religious community to talk about children's rights, child development and the importance of letting girls complete their development before being married or having children.
- Compose prayers that promote the respect for children and the end to child marriage. These can be handed out as prayer cards or as gifts to families.
- Discuss the meaning of marriage in your society and use worship services and religious classes to talk about how the institution of marriage can fulfil its societal role without violating the rights of children.

#### Community Work

- Organize public vigils to end child marriage.
- Use religious media, such as radio and television, to disseminate the message that child marriage is a violation of human rights and it needs to end.

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<sup>42</sup> This section is excerpted/adapted from UNICEF and Religions for Peace, 'From Commitment to Action: What religious communities can do to eliminate violence against children', New York, 2010, p.5. ; UNICEF, 'Partnering with Religious Communities for Children', New York, 2011, p. 19; Churches Network for Non-Violence, Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment of Children and Save the Children Sweden, Ending Corporal Punishment of Children: A handbook for working with and within religious communities, London, 2011. Available from [www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/pdfs/reports/FaithHandbook.pdf](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/pdfs/reports/FaithHandbook.pdf)

- Work with leaders and advocates from other religious communities, government and civil society to issue joint statements and commitments on ending child marriage.
- Organize workshops (alone or with other relevant groups) to develop projects to promote the abandonment of child marriage. (Don't forget to identify resources and programs that may already exist in your region.)
- Lead discussions with children and adolescents about their hopes and aspirations, and ask them to consider how they may jeopardize these aspirations if they marry before 18.
- Promote the discussion of delaying marriage to 18 (or older). Get parents, and your community, to consider delaying marriage to adulthood.
- Commit to the development and implementation of a code of conduct for interacting with children in places of worship, organizations institutions (including schools and orphanages) and community associations. This code should include a way for members of your community to report child marriages because the reporting and tracking of child marriage can help make it less socially acceptable.
- Lend moral authority to campaigns to end child marriage. Advocate for changes in public policy and legislation to better protect children from child marriage.
- Provide material, spiritual and emotional support to families who are struggling in the face of adversity.
- Advocate for improved access and better support services for women who have been married as children.
- Facilitate childcare for child mothers seeking support.

## **World Day of Prayer and Action for Children**

We urge you to share the information in this note with others. Encourage all religious communities to take action. Use the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children (Universal Children's Day, November 20) as a day to bring attention to your efforts to end child marriage. Work with volunteer groups in your community, or overseas, to protect children. Raise awareness and provide leadership wherever and whenever you can. Your advocacy can save lives and promote the well-being of children, parents and families!

See [www.dayofprayerandaction.org](http://www.dayofprayerandaction.org) for more information, including a planning guide that will help you create and manage a World Day activity, which addresses the problem of child marriage. Remember, World Day is not meant to be an excuse for one-time events. Rather, it should be viewed as an opportunity to strengthen on-going work or as a catalyst to create new projects and activities to mobilize your community's opposition to violence against children, especially child marriage.

World Day of Prayer and Action for Children would like to hear from you about your experiences, so that we may share them with others.

**Help the World Day Tell Your Stories:** As prominent leaders in your religious communities, your actions to uphold the rights of children contribute greatly to the well-being of your entire community. More important, your actions in support of children often inspire other leaders around the world. By answering these three simple questions, The World Day will be able to share your stories with global audiences and multiply the impact of your work.

1. What was your specific contribution to upholding children's rights, in particular on preventing child marriage? Was it on your own initiative or through an organized programme?
2. Why did you feel it was important to bring a religious perspective to this issue in your community?
3. What did you learn from this action that would be important for other leaders to know if they want to do this in their community?
4. Were there any barriers in your way to addressing child marriage, either through your own religious community or members of the local community you live in?

Please send your responses to [mail@dayofprayerandaction.org](mailto:mail@dayofprayerandaction.org). We thank you in advance for your contribution.

# Annex I

## PROGRESS & EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING

### Legal and Social Reforms

The international community has long urged local and national governments to implement laws and policies to end child marriage and the practice is now illegal in the majority of countries where it occurs. In recent years, several countries have set 18 as the legal minimum age to marry (in accordance with General Comment No. 4 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child), and they have eliminated differences in the minimum legal age between boys and girls.<sup>43</sup> Eritrea in 2009 increased the minimum age of marriage to 18 for both boys and girls in an effort to ensure that marriage is consensual and to limit the amount brides' parents are paid for their daughters. Malawi has a draft law that increases the age of marriage from 16 to 18 for both boys and girls. The political leaders in many other countries, including Mali and Yemen, are debating the topic and they soon may increase the legal age to wed.<sup>44</sup>

But even as countries change the laws on their books, national governments are learning that child marriage will not end by decree. Child marriage is deeply rooted in society, and economic circumstances, which makes it very difficult for individuals, or families, to end the practice on their own. Unless there is a change in societal values, opponents of child marriage will always fear physical or social retribution. This is why some national governments are beginning to tackle the problem by working with local and international non-government organizations, which are trying to change the discriminatory social norms that give preference to boys in education, nutrition, and health. Some of the most successful projects provide parents economic incentives to keep their daughters enrolled in school. Other projects provide families with alternative ways to earn money rather than receiving economic benefits from giving their daughters in marriage.<sup>45</sup>

### Partnership

The countries that make the most progress in ending child marriage have governments that work with members of local or regional civil society to implement programs<sup>46</sup>. They usually do so by coordinating with organizations in the United Nations system or international NGOs, especially human rights groups such as Girls Not Brides, a global partnership of over 100 organizations working to end child marriage, which was created by The Elders in 2010. (The Elders are a group of independent global leaders – including Jimmy Carter, Mary Robinson and Kofi Annan – who were brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007 to work for peace and human rights.)

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<sup>43</sup> UNICEF, "Child Marriage and the Law: Legislative Reform Series" (2008). Available from [http://www.unicef.org/policyanalysis/files/Child\\_Marriage\\_and\\_the\\_Law%281%29.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/policyanalysis/files/Child_Marriage_and_the_Law%281%29.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> United Nations, "Secretary General's Report on the Girl Child," pg. 11 (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E).

<sup>45</sup> ICRW, "Solutions to End Child Marriage" (2010). Available from <http://www.icrw.org/publications/solutions-end-child-marriage>.

<sup>46</sup> ICRW, "Solutions to End Child Marriage" (2010). Available from <http://www.icrw.org/publications/solutions-end-child-marriage>.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa is the Elder leading the effort to raise awareness about child marriage. He advocates for an end to the practice during visits to many countries, including India and Ethiopia. Religious communities can learn from Girls Not Brides and they can join the NGO's expanding list of partner organizations.<sup>47</sup>

## What Works and What Needs to Be Done

During the past 10 years the international community has documented and evaluated a number of programs that were created to end child marriage. The assessments all say the same thing: Ending child marriage requires governmental commitment and societal commitment<sup>48</sup>. In 2011 the International Center for Research on Women conducted a meta-evaluation of child marriage prevention programs and it found that "a set of strategies focusing on girls' empowerment, community mobilization, enhanced schooling, economic incentives and policy changes have improved knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour related to child marriage prevention."<sup>49</sup> The analysis of successful child marriage prevention programs show that they frequently are holistic and focus both on child marriage and the need to develop the potential of girls and women.

Successful UNICEF-sponsored child marriage prevention programs share many of the same elements, which increasingly are being adopted by NGO programs, according to the 2011 study by the International Center for Research on Women<sup>50</sup>. These elements include:

- Community discussion sessions, which lasted at least two years. These discussions enabled groups to explore alternatives to the practice and coordinate a collective decision to abandon it. Religious and traditional leaders endorsed and participated in the discussions.

### A HOLISTIC APPROACH

The international NGO **Tostan** fights child marriage by offering a 30-month Community Empowerment Program to thousands of communities in eight African countries. Tostan has worked in partnership with thousands of religious leaders.

*e.g.* Fatou Diakhate of Keur Issa, Senegal, was in her 40s when she learned to read and write in the Tostan program. Married at age 15, she went on to be a mother of 12 children by age 55. Now as a community leader, she rallies other women in her village to end child marriage. The village chief, local imam and municipal councilor accused her of corruption and threatened her with death. However, she persisted and in 1998, Keur Issa banned child marriages. Several other communities in Senegal followed suit. The latest is a cluster of 159 communities in the Fouta and Kolda regions.

<sup>47</sup> Girls Not Brides, Members of the Global Partnership. Available from <http://girlsnotbrides.org/members>.

<sup>48</sup> United Nations, "Secretary General's Report on the Girl Child," pg. 11 (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E).

<sup>49</sup> ICRW, Solutions to End Child Marriage (2010). Available from <http://www.icrw.org/publications/solutions-end-child-marriage>.

<sup>50</sup> ICRW, Solutions to End Child Marriage (2010). Available from <http://www.icrw.org/publications/solutions-end-child-marriage>.

- Strengthened social and educational policies and services, providing viable alternatives to marriage for girls. Services were also provided to girls and women who were already married or pregnant.
- Enhanced economic opportunities for girls, including cash transfers tied to other social services such as health, nutrition, education and protection.
- Large-scale communication campaigns that promote ending child marriage. These campaigns should be at both the local and national level.
- Enacting national and regional legislation that helps girls to delay marriage. These laws should be coupled with communication strategies and discussions at national and local level to help diminish social support for the practice. As the social support for the practice of child marriage wanes, the laws will become more and more enforceable<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> United Nations, "Secretary General's Report on the Girl Child," pg. 11 (A/66/257, 2011). Available from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F66%2F257&Submit=Search&Lang=E)

## **ANNEX II**

### **Key Resources**

The following organizations work to end child marriage:

The Girls Not Brides Partnership  
<http://girlsnotbrides.org>

Girl Up  
<http://www.girlup.org>

Pathfinder International  
<http://www.pathfind.org/site/PageServer>

Plan International  
<http://plan-international.org>

Save the Children  
[www.savethechildren.org](http://www.savethechildren.org)

Tostan  
[www.tostan.org](http://www.tostan.org)

United Nations Secretary-General's Report on the Girl Child  
<http://reliefweb.int/node/246292>

United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary- General on Violence Against Children  
<http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org>

United Nations Fund for Population Activities  
<http://www.unfpa.org>

United Nations Children's Fund  
<http://www.unicef.org>  
[http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929\\_58008.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html)  
[http://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/index\\_60057.html](http://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/index_60057.html)

United States Agency for International Development  
<http://www.usaid.gov>

### **Resources**

UNICEF. (2005). *Early marriage: A harmful traditional practice - A statistical exploration*, Available from [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Early\\_Marriage\\_12.lo.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Early_Marriage_12.lo.pdf)

UNICEF. (2012). *Partnering with Religious Communities for Children*. Available from [http://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/Partnering\\_with\\_Religious\\_Communities\\_for\\_Children\\_\(UNICEF\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/Partnering_with_Religious_Communities_for_Children_(UNICEF).pdf).

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