



September 14, 2016

Protecting Girls: Global Efforts to End Child Marriage

Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues,
Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Fourteenth Congress, Second Session

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STATEMENT OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE ANNE C. RICHARD
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE, TRANSNATIONAL
CRIME, CIVILIAN SECURITY, DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND
GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

Thank you Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer and other members of the committee, for convening this important hearing on the plight of millions of girls around the world who are subjected to early and forced marriage, and thank you for inviting me to testify.

Ambassador Russell has outlined the scope of the problem. I want to focus my remarks on early and forced marriage among people who are refugees, internally displaced or stateless.

My bureau aids refugees and others uprooted by conflicts and crises, and we see, time and time again, how these emergencies exacerbate the threat of early and forced marriage - not only in warzones but also in places where families seek safety and take refuge.

Early and Forced Marriage Among Uprooted People

Boko Haram and ISIL outrage the world by enslaving girls and forcing them into marriage. But these are not the only places where abuses are being perpetrated. Tragedies also unfold every day around the globe, as combatants in conflicts use attacks on women and girls to terrorize, subjugate, and scatter innocent civilians.

Families forced to flee may splinter. Some lose members through death or separation, including adult men who are traditional heads of the household. Families also lose their livelihoods, their dignity and their legal and social status. Instead of being able to work, they must rely on aid. Many find themselves living in poverty, in the close quarters of slums or tents, feeling adrift, uncertain about their fate and fearful for their future. Having escaped war, at this point they ought to be able to breathe a sigh of relief and resume normal life. But life in exile is not normal and, regrettably, is not always safe.

Ambassador Russell described the tangle of deeply rooted beliefs, traditions, and problems that can lead to early marriage. These include poverty, pervasive discrimination, the absence of opportunities and choices, and the misconception that early marriage will keep girls safe. Parents may feel they must do whatever it takes to safeguard their daughters' reputations and their family's honor.

Crises and conflicts can make these fears and dilemmas more urgent and make the lives of girls more precarious. Families may be afraid of what will happen to their young, unmarried daughters as they flee and find themselves in new, unfamiliar environments. Early and forced marriage becomes a so-called "negative coping strategy."

Syrian refugees in Jordan point to worries over safety and sexual harassment as reasons for arranging marriages for young daughters. Some parents also hope marrying a local man will help them stay in the host country legally.

Families marry off daughters because they are running out of money. In some cultures, families see their daughters as a burden, one that grows heavier when there are no opportunities for further education or work. That is especially true when the family is struggling to put food on the table.

And some families see early and forced marriage as preferable to other alternatives open to girls with no other source of income.

For all these reasons, more girls are forced into marriage. After two years in exile in Jordan, the rate of child marriages among Syrian girls there was twice the pre-war Syrian average. Before the war, about 13 percent of Syrian girls under 18 were married. But by 2013, the share of married girls among refugee families jumped to one in four. Nearly half of these girls married men at least a decade older than they are.

Even though parents may think they are shielding their daughters from abuse and sexual assault, early and forced marriage can have the opposite effect. Girls married young, especially those married to much older men, are more likely to suffer physical and emotional abuse and sexual violence than unmarried girls.

They are also far more likely to die in childbirth than older women, and to develop severe complications like obstetric fistula. I have seen how devastating this can be.

In Burkina Faso I visited a hospital supported by the United Nations Population Fund and spoke with women who had developed obstetric fistula because they gave birth before their bodies were ready. Some had suffered for decades, rejected by their families and ostracized by their communities, before learning that hospitals like this one can repair fistulas. They were there recovering from surgery.

The perils of early and forced marriage and child-bearing cross generations. Babies born of under-aged mothers suffer higher rates of infant mortality, prematurity, low birthweight and malnutrition.

Another risk is that these children will be born – and spend their entire lives – stateless, because underage marriages may not be legal, so children’s births cannot be registered. In 27 countries around the world, discriminatory laws prohibit women and girls from passing their citizenship to their children, and strip these children of legal rights and protections they will need in life, including the right to attend school, get medical care, work legally or own property. Stateless people are more vulnerable to trafficking, sexual and physical violence, exploitation, forced displacement, and other abuses-- such as early and forced marriage.

Remedies

Let’s now discuss possible remedies. Strengthening laws against early and forced marriage could help. Most nations prohibit marriage below a certain age. But awareness of these laws is limited and enforcement is spotty – especially when laws clash with prevailing customs. Violations against displaced girls can be especially hard to address through legal means.

One solution is to make it easier to document marriages and births. Universal birth registration can reveal a girls’ age and help enforce laws against underage marriage, and it can prevent statelessness among children. At the most recent session in June, the United States cosponsored a UN Human Rights Council resolution “The Right to a Nationality: Women’s Equal Nationality Rights in Law and in Practice” with more than 100 cosponsors including all African states.¹ This resolution galvanized international support for granting equal nationality rights to

¹ A/HRC/32/L.12

women and addressing the issue of statelessness. The United States is also supporting UNHCR's global campaign to end statelessness within the next decade.

We also need to change incentives, attitudes and the value placed on girls. Keeping girls in school is key. Girls with no education are up to six times more likely to marry as children than girls who have received secondary education. In sub-Saharan Africa, 66% of women with no education were married before age 18 compared to only 13% of those with secondary education.

The "U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls," launched by Secretary Kerry this past March, will strive to make education safe, free, and compulsory throughout the world, and keep girls enrolled in school, even if they are married and have children. It also aims to boost the numbers of adolescent girls who benefit from comprehensive health services and education.

Curbing gender-based violence in crises and conflicts can also discourage families from resorting to early and forced marriage. This is the focus of an initiative we launched in 2013 called Safe from the Start. Under it, we are channeling or have channeled approximately \$55 million to programs designed both to help survivors and to prevent attacks from happening in the first place.

We have provided new staff and training so that aid workers can identify risk factors and take countermeasures, make camps physically safer, provide medical treatment, legal counseling and psycho-social services, and help vulnerable women and girls earn money to support themselves. The initiative also supports education and awareness raising programs and wellness centers – safe spaces in refugee camps – for women and girls.

At Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp, where early and forced marriage is a stubborn problem, girls get counseling and support. Outreach workers go door to door and organize community gatherings to raise awareness about the rights of women and girls.

In Nigeria and Uganda aid workers also distribute leaflets, put up billboards about the need to prevent forced marriages and let girls go to school. Aid workers say it is making a difference. Mothers and girls are coming forward to report that they,

their daughters, or friends are being pressured into early forced marriage and want help to stop it.

Preventing early and forced marriage and other forms of gender-based violence is a focus of our diplomacy as well as the humanitarian assistance we provide through UN agencies and other international and non-governmental organizations. We have worked hard to rally support for the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, a unique initiative to mobilize and coordinate efforts to strengthen protection for women and girls caught up in emergencies. As the Call to Action lead in 2015, the United States created a roadmap that outlined concrete and meaningful steps all concerned governments and humanitarians can take over the next five years to do a better job of keeping women and girls safe and holding one another accountable.

When more girls have the chance to make their own, informed choices and reach their full potential, the world will be a better place, not just for them but for all of us.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.

STATEMENT OF HON. CATHERINE M. RUSSELL
U.S. AMBASSADOR AT LARGE FOR GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES
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SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE,
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GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

September 14, 2016

Good morning Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer, Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify today on this critical issue of child, early and forced marriage. It is a pleasure to be here with you again after our last session in June on girls education globally, and it is an honor to be asked to speak on an issue that is central to our efforts to empower women globally.

Scale and scope of the problem

Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) is a widespread, global phenomenon, with one in three girls worldwide married before the age of 18, one in nine married before the age of 15, and some girls married as young as eight or nine years old. Child, early and forced marriage disproportionately affects girls: approximately 156 million men currently alive were married before the age of 18, as compared to approximately 720 million women—a figure equivalent to 10 percent of the world's population, with an additional 15 million married each year. Girls are also more likely than boys to be married to significantly older spouses—especially in marriages involving girls under 15 and in polygynous marriages where an adolescent girl may be a second or third wife.

The persistence and prevalence of this practice is one of the key human rights, security, and development crises of our time because the systemic impact of child, early and forced marriage is dramatic and far reaching. Through the Sustainable Development Goals, over 190 governments share the view that ending harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation and cutting, is essential for advancing gender equality globally.

Consequences

CEFM forces a girl into adulthood and motherhood before she is physically and mentally mature and before she completes her education, limiting her future options, depriving her of the chance to reach her full potential, and preventing her from contributing fully to her family and community.

Reduced Educational Attainment

In almost every context where it occurs, CEFM has a strong negative correlation with educational attainment and political participation. In line with social norms portraying marriage and school attendance as incompatible, parents may pressure girls to discontinue their educations. At the same time, pregnancy and expected domestic responsibilities also present formidable challenges to pursuing an education. Schools may have policies that dictate that pregnant girls or young mothers be expelled, and even absent such policies, pregnant girls and mothers may face stigma and bullying by peers and teachers that cause them to drop out. Child brides not only face difficulty completing secondary school—they may also have trouble making the transition to secondary school, particularly if they enrolled in primary education late. In some areas, girls reach the median age of marriage in their society before they have even finished primary school.

Risks to Health and Wellness

CEFM has devastating health consequences as married adolescents are more likely to experience psychological, physical and sexual violence and exposure to sexually transmitted illnesses. Approximately 16 million adolescent girls aged 15-19 years old give birth each year, comprising about 11 percent of births globally. Early pregnancy and childbirth have severe consequences for adolescent girls as compared to young women, including an increased risk of miscarriage and complications during labor, obstetric fistula, and death. Despite progress in overall rates around the world, maternal mortality remains a leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19, taking the lives of nearly 70,000 girls each year. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than adult women.

Research in sub-Saharan Africa has shown that married girls have a 50 percent higher rate of HIV infection as compared to their unmarried, sexually active peers. Overall, sub-Saharan adolescent girls are two to six times more likely than adolescent boys to be HIV positive, because they are so often married to older, more sexually experienced men. Additionally, adolescent girls often lack access to healthcare or health information when they are married at an early age and become socially isolated within their husbands' households.

All of these risks—abuse, HIV, early and frequent pregnancy, poverty, and isolation—may be intensified when there is a large age difference between a girl and her husband, a situation that is most common in countries with high rates of early marriage. Since older men are more likely to have had a number of sexual partners and to be HIV-positive, marrying a significantly older husband

dramatically increases a girls' risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Reduced Economic Potential

Early marriage locks a girl into traditional gender roles that limit development and access to a basic education, opportunity for employment in the formal economy, or other basic foundations for full citizenship. Child, early and forced marriage undermines economic productivity, perpetuate health risks for girls, and threaten sustainable growth and development. It hijacks a girl's agency to decide her future and hinder individual growth and development while systematically holding her children back as well. The children of young mothers have higher rates of infant mortality and malnutrition and are less likely to be educated than children born to mothers older than 18. This is a costly and tragic cycle.

Drivers of CEFM

While child, early and forced marriages can take place for a myriad of different reasons in different settings, the core drivers are usually economic and social, and often perpetuate, gender inequality. The practices can be rooted in systems that hold women and girls in subordinate roles and accord them less value than men and boys. Under these conditions, parents see limited roles for girls and little incentive to invest in their education.

Poverty

Child, early and forced marriage is rooted in poverty, displacement, or societal pressures. It is both a driver of and symptom of poverty and limited economic

opportunities for women and girls. More than half of girls from the poorest families in the developing world are married as children. Lack of economic opportunity for women, ownership over assets, and economic mobility makes marriage the perceived safest choice for girls and their families. In communities where a dowry or ‘bride price’ is paid, it is often welcome income for poor families; in those where the bride’s family pays the groom a dowry, they often have to pay less money if the bride is young and uneducated.

In Jordan, I met Syrian refugee women who simply could not pay their rent or feed their families. One woman told me that her 15 year-old daughter was receiving marriage proposals. She was refusing, but the pressure to relieve some of the family’s burden was palpable. But the girls are not the only victims. Entire countries lose out on the productive potential of girls who are subjected to early and forced marriage, which weakens their economic output, cultural creativity, and political stability. Across that region, we have heard countless stories of girls married to ease pressure on strained family finances.

State Fragility and Conflict

State fragility, conflict, and humanitarian emergencies exacerbate drivers of CEFM by aggravating economic insecurity, eroding social safety networks, and limiting girls’ freedom of movement and access to educational and economic opportunities. In such contexts, families may perceive marriage as a means to increase a daughter’s safety, particularly from violent extremist groups and other combatants who often force girls into marriage; however, girls married under these circumstances are more vulnerable to violence from husbands and families and are unlikely to remain in school. Forced marriages are a pervasive feature of armed conflicts around the world, perpetrated by violent actors, including rebel or

insurgent groups. Abduction and forcible marriage is a common tactic among non-state actors, often leading to sexual slavery and prolonged forced labor.

It is important that we understand how conflict exacerbates forced marriages. Last year in Jordan, I met Huda, a Sunni Muslim woman from Mosul. As a widow, Huda felt she had increasingly fewer options to save her sons and daughter from Da'esh's clutches. She decided to flee her home, selling everything to fund the dangerous trip from Iraq to Amman, Jordan. Huda is one of the many Iraqi women who told me how Da'esh makes life unlivable for women and girls. The situation is especially grim for minorities. Reports indicate that Da'esh has abducted more than three thousand women and girls, including those from Iraq's religious community of Yezidis and other minority groups. Girls as young as 12 or 13 have been forced to marry violent extremists or sold to the highest bidder -- like cattle at an auction. These are young girls, mothers, and sisters facing imminent rape, trafficking, and forced marriage. Through emergency assistance programs, we have been able to help provide medical, psycho-social, and livelihood support for over 150 women and girls who survived Da'esh captivity. However, there are still thousands of girls that are held captive and will need assistance.

It is important that we speak about Huda, and her Iraqi sisters. We must not accept such stories as casualties of a war thousands of miles away and beyond our consciousness. In the situation I described, child, early and forced marriage is, plain and simple, an aspect of terror, a horrific violation of human rights with a lifetime of consequences. It is a tactic of terrorist groups like Da'esh and Boko Haram to control entire populations and to recruit new fighters. And it must be stopped. As Secretary of State John Kerry and others have said, preventing this kind of brutalization of women and girls in conflict zones preserves our common

humanity. It also protects the national security interests of the United States and our allies. We must come together to ensure we end it.

Addressing the Problem

Women and girls around the world are leading the charge in their communities to take a stand to change the harmful practice of child, early and forced marriage. Recently, I joined Secretary Kerry in Nigeria. We spent a morning with a group of adolescent girls benefiting from STEM programs and the efforts of organizations devoted to empowering adolescent girls and changing their families' perspectives about the value of girls' education. In Nigeria, I met Amina. She is one of those rare girls who completed 12 years of schooling. She told me that girls drop out of school "after a certain age to move to their husband's house." She told me that girls are generally married by the age of 13, and they usually immediately start having children. Amina's life has been different because her parents prioritized her education, rather than her marriage.

Fortunately, we are seeing effective efforts to confront and end this practice around the world in even the most remote villages where early and forced marriages are the norm. One such leader is Memory Banda, a young woman from Malawi. In Memory's community, it's not unusual for girls to get married and have children at very young ages. But Memory refused to get married. Instead, she organized literacy classes for other girls. She got involved in local advocacy. And she went to college. Her story is more than inspiring. It's also a reminder that girls around the world are not asking for our pity. They are asking for our partnership. And when we partner with them, we will be successful. Memory is proof of that: thanks to her efforts, and the work of other activists in Malawi, Malawi has adopted laws against early marriage.

That's not to say that our work in Malawi is done. While commendable, Malawi, like many other similarly-situated countries, has difficulty enforcing these laws. As of 2010, legal prohibitions against child, early and forced marriage were in effect in 158 countries, and 146 of those granted exemptions in the case of parental consent. In many countries, existing laws are weakly enforced, especially when they conflict with local customs. For this reason, I was impressed by the efforts of Malawi's "child marriage terminator" senior chief Theresa Kachindamoto. Chief Kachindamoto has banned CEFM and told the chiefs under her that they must also stop all sexual initiation rituals, like sexual cleansings, or she will dismiss them. During her tenure, she has annulled some 850 marriages. Her efforts are testament to the fact that ending CEFM requires a multi-faceted approach.

U.S. Government Efforts to Address CEFM

The United States is taking a whole-of-government approach to addressing CEFM and has undertaken several key actions to combat this practice. The United States has co-sponsored resolutions on ending CEFM at the UN Human Rights Council and in the UN General Assembly's Third Committee. In 2012, the State Department began including reporting on the minimum age of marriage and the rate of marriage under the age of 18 in its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and adopted new guidance and training for consular officers to assist U.S. citizens living abroad who are forced into marriages. That same year, USAID released Ending Child Marriage and Meeting the Needs of Married Children: The USAID Vision for Action, which set goals to mobilize communities to shift norms that perpetuate CEFM, address the unique needs of married children, and cultivate partnerships with host governments and the private sector.

The U.S. Government addresses child, early and forced marriage through three core interagency policies.

- **The U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security** (2011) commits the USG to strengthen efforts to prevent and protect women and children from harm, exploitation, discrimination, and abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking in persons. By ensuring that women's perspectives and considerations of gender dynamics are woven into the DNA of how the United States approaches peace processes, conflict prevention, the protection of civilians, and humanitarian assistance, the National Action Plan affirms that matters of gender equality are fundamental to our national security interests. Importantly, the Plan recognizes that the protection and empowerment of girls is part of a comprehensive approach to preventing and responding to conflict.
- **The U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Response to Gender-based Violence Globally** (2012) identifies CEFM as a form of gender-based violence and emphasizes the need for increased programming to address the practice in countries where it is most prevalent. The strategy also calls on U.S. agencies to address root causes of violence as a means to raising the value of girls while developing best practices, programs, and policies.
- To address the range of challenges facing adolescent girls, Secretary Kerry launched the interagency **U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls** in March 2014. Bringing together the efforts of the Department of State, USAID, the Peace Corps and The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MMC), the goal of the strategy is to ensure adolescent girls are educated, healthy, socially and economically

empowered, and free from violence and discrimination. The United States is the first country in the world to develop a strategy focused on the protection and advancement of adolescent girls globally, and addressing child, early, and forced marriage will be a central focus of U.S. government efforts to implement this strategy. The Department of State has prioritized addressing child, early and forced marriage as one of the three key objectives specified in its implementation plan.

Interagency Programs

These policies are being implemented through a range of initiatives and programs. In particular, Let Girls Learn—a presidential initiative championed by the First Lady—is a central part of the United States’ implementation of the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. In July 2015, President Obama announced the Let Girls Learn Challenge Fund to design new, holistic programs that address the range of challenges preventing adolescent girls from attaining a quality education that empowers them to reach their full potential.

Malawi and Tanzania were selected in 2015 as the first two focus countries under the Let Girls Learn Challenge Fund. In these countries, USAID and the Department of State are working with an array of USG agencies, multilateral and bilateral partners, and civil society and the private sector to co-create, co-fund, pilot, and implement innovative programs through a multi-sectoral approach. Nepal and Laos were also just recently announced as additional countries for the USG to engage with as well.

Department of State Programs

While the U.S. Government has many programs that address child, early and forced marriage through economic empowerment, access to health, educational programs and legal reform, the Department of State also has programs aimed at understanding and responding to child, early and forced marriage.

- In March 2016, Secretary Kerry announced \$7 million in programming to empower adolescent girls in Afghanistan, where the Department of State will fund efforts to change perceptions about child, early and forced marriage at the district and community level through grants for girls to go to school and support for counseling, networks for girls, and training on life and vocational skills.
- Through the Global Women Peace and Security Initiative, the Gender Based Violence Initiative, and the “Voices Against Violence” global program, the Department provides emergency assistance to support survivors of extreme forms of GBV and harmful traditional practices. We have been able to provide funds for girls who were threatened with forced marriage, through small, short-term emergency assistance funding for expenses including medical expenses, psychosocial support or counseling, emergency shelter or other safe accommodation, relocation expenses, livelihood and dependent support, and legal assistance. The program is meant to provide assistance to those in urgent situations with little to no alternatives for support.

Through our Voices Against Violence program, we will engage with actors who have influence over the community’s attitudes and behavior, this includes judges from civil and religious courts, and grassroots organizations

on the ground to educate families. By working with local experts, advocates, and stakeholders, we will create meaningful, long-term changes.

- The Department is also supporting a three-year, \$5 million collaborative effort with USAID and UNICEF aimed at reducing the prevalence of school-related gender-based violence and establishing child and adolescent-friendly procedures to respond to incidents of GBV when they occur. Through training, mapping of services for GBV victims, advocacy and awareness raising activities, school actors are gaining knowledge of the impact of GBV, including on early marriage and its legal and social consequences. This project is developing a systematic reporting and referral mechanism to monitor and respond to incidents of school-related GBV.

USAID Programs

USAID invests in both research to expand our knowledge on effective interventions to prevent CEFM and programs to address the needs of married adolescents in regions where the practice is most prevalent. Guided by rigorous project evaluations and the latest research findings, USAID's interventions include promoting girls' education, supporting married children, strengthening the enactment and enforcement of laws and policies that delay marriage, and building community outreach efforts to shift attitudes that perpetuate the practice. In FY 2015, USAID doubled its investment to prevent CEFM and support married children, building on decades of engagement on these issues, including addressing the needs of more than 50 million girls and boys who are already married but have limited access to education, health services and economic opportunities.

- The USAID Vision for Action to Ending Child Marriage & Meeting the Needs of Married Children provided health care and access to education to married children and adolescents and educated students, teachers, parents, and community leaders, through programs including the Safe Schools program in Nepal, focusing on the importance of delaying marriage and the harmful effects of CEFM.
- USAID also conducted research to study the effectiveness of programs to delay child, early, and forced marriage in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Burkina Faso. Based on the findings of this research, the programs were later expanded to additional high-prevalence regions. Data on the impact of programs in Tanzania and Ethiopia data was shared through a global dissemination of results (available here: <http://www.popcouncil.org/research/building-an-evidence-base-to-delay-marriage-in-sub-saharan-africa>) in the fall of 2015.
- In Bangladesh, the Protecting Human Rights program supports the development and momentum on amendments from the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (MOWCA). A divisional level workshop on child marriage was held and one immediate outcome was the announcement of an annual national day on prevention of child marriage, to be observed every 29th of September in Bangladesh.
- In addition, in September 2015 USAID released a resource guide on preventing and responding to CEFM. This resource guide provides information on how partners and USAID sectors, missions, and staff can integrate CEFM prevention and response into their programming.

USAID will continue to work in partnership with lawmakers, international organizations, the private sector, and change agents at the national, local, and community levels to address the practice of CEFM

Conclusion:

While the statistics can seem grim, in every country I travel to, I meet innovative, resilient women, men and youth who are working hard to lead their countries toward gender equality and away from harmful practices like child, early and forced marriage. They know that with their hard work and community building, change will come in their countries. It is the tenacity of these individuals that keep us going, and I see it as key part of my job to raise up these leaders. As a matter of fact, just yesterday, we learned that Nadia Murad, Iraq's Nobel Peace Prize Nominee who is an outspoken survivor of Dae'esh, has just been named as a 2016 UN Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking. Her appointment will take place on September 16th, the International Day of Peace, at UN Headquarters in NY. Nadia has bravely testified before the UN Security Council, U.S. Congress, UK Parliament, and other important international forums as a survivor of Da'esh violence and trafficking. She is just one example of the kind of grass-roots strength and will that inspires me to keep pressing forward every day.

On behalf of the State Department and the Office of Global Women's Issues, I'd like to thank the committee for their leadership in shedding light on this global economic, development, and human rights issue.



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage

**Testimony to Senate Foreign Relations Committee,
Subcommittee on
Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy,
Human Rights and Global Women's Issues
Hearing: Protecting Girls: Global Efforts to End Child Marriage**

**Lakshmi Sundaram, Executive Director
*Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage***

September 14, 2016

Chairman Rubio, Senator Boxer, and esteemed members of the committee,

Thank you for the invitation to provide testimony today. I am delighted that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has decided to hold a hearing on the important issue of child marriage. As the Chairman alluded, I am Lakshmi Sundaram and I am the Executive Director of *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*. We are a global civil society partnership bringing together over 600 organisations from 80 countries dedicated to ending child marriage in our lifetime. Our members range from tiny community groups to large international NGOs, and include amazing organisations you have heard from before, such as the Kakenya Center for Excellence or World Vision. We are represented in the United States by our US National Partnership, *Girls Not Brides USA* – who is here today and has been a tireless leader working with Congress and the Executive Branch to develop and cement US leadership to end child marriage. The efforts of Senator Durbin and other champions merit recognition in that regard. And so before I begin my testimony I would like to commend to you the testimony that was submitted for the record by our US National Partnership, which contains a comprehensive view of US efforts on this issue to date and recommendations for future action, many of which I will highlight for you today.

But first, for those of you who are married, I want you to think back to your wedding day. Hopefully, it was a day of joy and love and promise. Hopefully, it was a day that opened up new horizons and opportunities.

For millions of girls around the world, their wedding day is the opposite. Rather than a joyous event, marriage is linked to dropping out of school and focusing on children and household chores; it represents a closing down of horizons.

How many girls are affected?

- Approximately 15 million girls are married every year before they reach 18 years.¹ That is, approximately 41,000 every day, or one girl every two seconds.

¹ UNICEF, *Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects*, 2014

- In the developing world, 1 in 3 girls is married by age 18, and 1 in 9 is married by age 15, some as young as eight or nine.² And, while we lack reliable data for developed countries, we know that the practice happens there too, including in the US.
- If there is no reduction in the practice, 1.2 billion women will have married as children by 2050 – that’s the equivalent of the entire population of India. These girls and women face distinct challenges and need assistance so they, their children and communities can thrive.
- Child marriage affects boys too, but the overwhelming majority of those who marry as children are girls, reflecting the roots of gender inequality that drive the practice. It is therefore fitting that this hearing is convened in the subcommittee tasked with global women’s issues.

Where does it happen?

- Child marriage is not linked to any specific region, tradition, or religion. It happens all over the world. You might be surprised to hear that, of the top ten countries with the highest absolute number of girls married before 15, four are in Africa, three in South Asia, one in East Asia/Pacific and two in Latin America.
- 45% of girls under age 18 are married in South Asia; 40% in sub-Saharan Africa; 29% in Latin America and the Caribbean; 18% in the Middle East and North Africa; and in Europe and North America too.³

What is the impact, and why does it happen?

When a girl becomes a bride, the consequences are lifelong and devastating – for the girl, for her family and, indeed, for her nation. My colleague Dr. Suzanne Petroni will walk you through some of those macro-level impacts in her testimony. Child marriage is a gross human rights violation that deprives girls of their rights to health, education, freedom from violence and the right to choose if, when and whom to marry.

Child marriage traps girls, their families and societies in a cycle of poverty, limits millions of girls from fulfilling their potential and leading happy, safe and productive lives. Child marriage spells disastrous effects for our shared goals of prosperity, maternal and child health, education and democracy. It means the end of school for girls, a lifetime of domestic servitude, increased risk of violence and sexually-transmitted infections like HIV, increased complications and even death in pregnancy and childbirth.

Child marriage is linked to maternal and child mortality and morbidity

- Countries with high rates of child marriage typically have high rates of maternal mortality. Investing in child marriage could dramatically improve the health outcomes of both mothers and babies.
- Child brides are under intense social pressure to prove their fertility, which makes them more likely to experience early and frequent pregnancies.⁴
- Early pregnancy endangers child brides’ health because many become pregnant before their bodies can safely carry or deliver children.
- Complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the second leading cause of death in girls aged 15-19 globally.⁵

² UNICEF, *Progress for Children: A report card on adolescents*, 2012

³ UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children, Table 9: Child Protection*, 2015

⁴ Levine, R., Lloyd, C., Greene, M., & Grown, C., *Girls Count: A Global Investment and Action Agenda*, Center for Global Development, 2008

⁵ WHO, *Adolescent Pregnancy Fact Sheet*, No.364, September 2014

- Child marriage is a major driver of adolescent births: 95% of the world's births to adolescents occur in developing countries and 90% of these births are to girls who are already married.⁶
- Furthermore 65% of all cases of obstetric fistula occur in girls under the age of 18 resulting in long term physical, emotional and psychological consequences for girls who go untreated.⁷
- Early childbearing also increases the risks to newborns. In low and middle income countries, babies born to mothers under 20 years of age have a 50% higher risk of being stillborn or of dying within the first few weeks of life than those born to older women.

Child marriage undermines a child's right to education

- Child marriage often denies children of school age their right to the education they need for their personal development, their preparation for adulthood, and their ability to contribute to their family and community. Married girls who would like to continue schooling may be both practically and legally excluded from doing so.⁸
- There is a complicated causal relationship between child marriage and education, as child marriage is both a driver and consequence of poor educational attainment.
- Girls tend to drop out of school during the preparatory time before marriage, or shortly afterwards when their marital and domestic demands increase. For example, almost 30% of young women who left secondary school before completion in Chad and Nigeria cited early marriage as the main reason.⁹
- Girls with higher levels of schooling are less likely to marry as children. With half of the world's population under the age of 25, educating youth is crucial to ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future.

Child marriage is linked to poverty and impacts national productivity

- Child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries and is often concentrated among the poorest households. It is closely linked with low levels of economic development.
- Girls from poor families are nearly twice as likely to marry before 18 as girls from wealthier families, as marriage is often seen as a way to provide for a daughter's future.¹⁰ However, girls who marry young are more likely to be poor and remain poor.¹¹
- Girls who marry young do not receive the educational and economic opportunities that help lift them out of poverty and which are necessary to build a sustainable and prosperous future for their communities and countries.¹²

Child marriage is linked to violence and HIV infection

- Child brides have little say in whether, when or whom they will marry. In many cases their husbands are much older.
- Girls who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to experience violence within marriage than girls who marry later.¹³

⁶ UNFPA, *Motherhood in Childhood*, 2013

⁷ WHO, Fact Sheet, *Why is giving special attention to adolescents important in achieving the millennium development goals?* 2008 available at: http://www.wiredhealthresources.net/resources/NA/WHO-FS_PregnancyAdolescent.pdf

⁸ UNICEF, *Early Marriage: Child Spouses*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2001

⁹ Lloyd and Mensch, 'Marriage and childbirth as factors in school exit: an analysis of DHS data from sub-Saharan Africa', *Population Studies*, 62(1): 1-13, 2008

¹⁰ International Center for Research on Women, *How to End Child Marriage: Action Strategies for Prevention and Protection*, 2007

¹¹ International Center for Research on Women, *Child Marriage Factsheets: Child Marriage and Poverty*, 2007

¹² IPPF and the Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women and Girls, *Ending child marriage: a guide for global policy action*, 2006; International Center for Research on Women, *Too Young to Wed: Education & Action towards Ending Child Marriage: Seeking Policy Solutions*, 2005

¹³ Kishor, S. & Johnson, K., *Profiling Domestic Violence – A Multi-Country Study*, ORC Macro, Calverton, Maryland, 2004

- Child marriage exposes girls to a high risk of violence often from their partners or their partners' families. The greater the age difference between girls and their husbands, the more likely they are to experience intimate partner violence.¹⁴
- Women exposed to intimate partner violence are one and a half times more likely to acquire HIV in regions with high HIV prevalence.

Child marriage increases during humanitarian crises and conflicts

- Growing evidence shows that in times of humanitarian crisis, child marriage rates increase, with a disproportionate impact on girls.¹⁵ Yet adolescent girls continue to be left behind in humanitarian response efforts.
- Seven out of the ten countries with the highest child marriage rates are considered fragile states. We cannot ignore child marriage in such contexts.¹⁶
- Child marriage rates have increased in some crisis situations. While gender inequality is a root cause of child marriage in both stable and fragile contexts, often in times of crisis, families see child marriage as a way to cope with economic hardship exacerbated by crisis and to protect girls from increased violence. But in reality, it results in a range of harmful consequences.
- For example, in Syrian refugee communities in Jordan, the proportion of registered marriages for girls under 18 years has rapidly increased. Between 2011 and 2014, the rates of registered child marriages almost tripled, from 12% to just under 32%.¹⁷ Protection of family honour and control of girls' sexuality were major drivers of child marriage in this context.¹⁸
- Child marriage is not being adequately addressed in situations of crisis. It is a cross-cutting issue which requires coordinated action across all sectors from the earliest stage of crises. More research is needed to understand how different types of crises affect child marriage, how programmes which tackle child marriage can be adapted for these settings, and how child marriage can be integrated into humanitarian response efforts. However, research must support interventions to address child marriage, and the need for more research should not be used as an excuse for inaction.

What you may not know is why. Why, in the year 2016, do 15 million girls marry as children each year? It is important to remember that the vast majority of parents want to do what is best for their children. They love their daughters. There are many drivers of child marriage that vary significantly from one context to another:

- **First and foremost, gender inequality:** child marriage happens to girls *because* they are girls. Girls are accorded little value in many societies. They are second-class citizens or perhaps commodities to be bought, sold or exchanged in marriage. It is because girls have less value than boys in society, and outsize value is placed on her virginity.
- **Poverty:** Where poverty is acute, parents may feel that giving a daughter in marriage will reduce family expenses by ensuring they have one less person to feed, clothe and educate. In communities where a dowry or 'bride price' is paid, it is often welcome income for poor families.

¹⁴ UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence against Children*, 2014

¹⁵ See *Girls Not Brides* [list of useful resources](#) on child marriage in humanitarian crises.

¹⁶ Niger, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, South Sudan, Guinea and Bangladesh are listed as fragile states as defined by OECD. See definition in *States of Fragility 2015: meeting post-2015 ambitions*. Revised edition, 2015.

¹⁷ UNICEF, *A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan*, 2014.

¹⁸ Op.cit. CARE UK, *To Protect Her Honour: child marriage in emergencies, the fatal confusion between protecting girls and sexual violence*, 2015.

- **Security:** Many parents marry off their daughters young because they feel it is in her best interest, often to ensure her safety in areas where girls are at high risk of physical or sexual assault. However, they do not realise the significant violence she will encounter within marriage.

Why should we tackle child marriage?

Ensuring girls have the right to choose, if, when and whom to marry can create long term change for girls themselves, their families and their countries—and I'd argue it's one of the best returns on investment that you can hope for in your foreign assistance efforts.

What's more, child marriage is at the heart of many of the challenges we want to overcome as an international community. It is a barrier to achieving many development goals, including those on poverty eradication, nutrition, health, education, gender equality, economic growth and reduction of inequality.

Our efforts to reduce child and maternal mortality will be hindered as long as girls are giving birth as children. Our efforts to ensure every child can finish school undermined when in some communities more than 75% of girls have to leave to get married. Our efforts to end violence against women are held back as long as so many girls are trapped in marriages where they have no voice.

- Investing in delayed marriage and childbearing is recommended as a smart investment by the High Level Task Force for the International Conference on Population and Development, which will have “high pay offs for improved wellbeing and quality of life, poverty eradication, economic growth and sustainable development, with multiplier and inter-generational effects that will yield benefits for decades to come.”¹⁹
- The World Bank has highlighted that “delays in marriage are strongly associated with greater education, higher earnings and health-seeking behaviour”.²⁰

And addressing child marriage can be an entry point. It's also a way to address the more aspirational goal of ensuring equality for girls and women. By tackling child marriage, we are necessarily addressing the way that girls and women are viewed in society.

We can break this cycle, because when a girl is able to avoid marriage as a child she is less likely to marry off her own daughters as children.

So, what will it take to end child marriage?

In 2014, over 150 experts, organisations and researchers came together to develop a global Theory of Change on child marriage, which identified four areas where we should focus our efforts to accelerate change:

- Empower girls, and make them aware of – and able to exercise – their rights and alternatives to marriage through programmes that invest in girls.

¹⁹ High Level Task Force for ICPD, *Smart Investments for Financing the Post 2015 Development Agenda*, January 2015, available at; <http://icpdtaskforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/FinancingBriefSmartInvestments2015.pdf>

²⁰ World Bank, *World Development Report, Gender Equality and Development*, 2012

- Work with traditional leaders, fathers, boys, communities to change the attitudes that devalue girls and hold them back. We have seen interesting programmes working with Christian priests, Muslim imams and Hindu clerics, as well as traditional leaders, where they are now champions for change.
- Provide services, like education, legal and health services, both through government and civil society.
- Enact and enforce effective laws and policies that put in place a minimum age of marriage at 18 and don't allow loopholes for traditional or customary laws, and make sure these laws are enforced.

Where are we today?

In the past few years, there has been unprecedented global action to end child marriage, notably:

- **New global and regional commitments:** Child marriage was included as a global development priority in target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Resolutions at the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council have mobilised political support and strengthened the global normative framework. Other regional and intergovernmental bodies, including the African Union and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, have set out plans of action to end child marriage.
- **Strengthened legal and policy frameworks:** National strategies have been developed or are being developed in at least 14 countries. Many countries have also taken steps to strengthen their laws to address child marriage and put in place a minimum age of 18. I would encourage the US to follow suit. Currently, in every American state, children under the age of 18 can marry.
- **But we cannot legislate our way out of this practice. Urgent and sustained investment is needed to support new programmes:** the number of programmes addressing child marriage has grown dramatically, with increased action from international NGOs, community based organisations and many others. UNICEF and UNFPA have launched a new Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage in 12 countries. Yet this represents just a fraction of what is needed. The US has been a leader in many regards, although it is unclear how much money you have actually invested to end the practice and meet the needs of married girls.
- **Earlier this year Secretary of State John Kerry released the US Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls,** the first foreign policy in the world geared toward protecting the rights of, and providing pathways of opportunity for, adolescent girls. This strategy enshrines a commitment to girls' rights in US foreign policy and assistance, bringing much-needed attention – and I hope, resources – to the diverse and urgent needs of adolescent girls, including the right to choose if, when and whom to marry. The release of this strategy marked the culmination of years of intense work by those in government and civil society, including *Girls Not Brides USA*, to shape foreign policy and foreign assistance around the needs of girls. This is a great accomplishment.

But releasing a strategy and living the spirit of it are two different things. As much as we want to point to the strategy as an triumph in and of itself, the real, critical issue is how robustly it is institutionalized and implemented – and that is where Congress can help. I urge you to use your powers – of the purse, and of oversight – to ensure this important piece of foreign policy is not just words on paper, but truly directs the diplomatic and development might of the US to transform

girls' lives. I hope you will work with whoever comes into office next year to ensure that child brides and those at risk of marriage will not be left behind.

The US is poised to be a leader in the fight to end child marriage and has already done so much toward this end, but I urge you to escalate this work to improve the lives of adolescent girls globally. Through US foreign assistance, your leadership and influence both bilaterally and in multilateral arenas, and through the strength of Congressional action, I respectfully recommend the US take three initial measures to end child marriage:

1. Ensure US commitments to end child marriage are honoured by giving those efforts the full force of the US government, in terms of policies, programmes and, of course, funding;
2. Don't let child marriage get lost in larger efforts to promote girls' health and education. Mandate regular progress reporting so that Congress and civil society know exactly what is being done to end child marriage and meet the needs of married girls, how successful those efforts have been, and where more investment is needed; and,
3. Show your full support for this issue on the international stage by investing fully in achieving the target to end child marriage under the Sustainable Development Goals.

Conclusion

Chairman Rubio, Senator Boxer and members of the committee, I thought I would end with a more personal story. It is the story of Laxmi Sargara, an 18 year-old girl from Rajasthan, India. Laxmi was married when she was just one year old, to a boy named Rakesh who himself was only three. She knew nothing of this betrothal until the moment, 17 years later, when her parents announced that the time had come to leave home and live with her husband. Laxmi was upset because this was not the future she wanted.

Laxmi's story stands out for me, not only because she has the same name as me, but because she did something remarkable. In what is thought to be the first case of its kind in India, Laxmi turned to the courts and had her marriage annulled. Laxmi is a disruptive woman who was brave enough to stand up against a centuries-old tradition, determined to build a brighter future for herself.

If I had been born in a different context, Laxmi's fate may have been mine. Indeed, child marriage may have been the future facing my own rambunctious two year old daughter. In the work that I do, I am grateful every day that I was spared the experiences of girls like Laxmi. And I hope we can work together to ensure that we end this practice for girls everywhere.

Thank you.

What the Evidence Shows: Protecting Girls: Global Efforts to End Child Marriage

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to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,
Subcommittee on
Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security and Global Women's Issues

September 14, 2016

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer, and esteemed members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on the important issue of protecting girls around the world from the pernicious—yet not insurmountable—human rights abuse of child marriage.

Our colleagues from the State Department provided an excellent summary of U.S. efforts to empower girls around the world and to protect them from numerous rights abuses, including child marriage. My organization, the International Center for Research on Women - ICRW - has been building the evidence base regarding child marriage for the better part of two decades. During that time, we have worked to raise awareness of this important issue across the globe, and we have worked with so many in the U.S. government - including Ambassador Russell, Assistant Secretary Richard, Senator Collins, Senator Durbin and Senator Boxer - among others, to expand evidence-based policies and programs to prevent this harmful practice. So I testify before you today with no small amount of pride that our government has is now leading the world in prioritizing girls in its foreign policy and development assistance. For that I commend you and your colleagues like Senator Durbin, who have been tireless advocates for girls around the world.

You have also just received an excellent overview of the practice of child marriage from our good colleague Lakshmi Sundaram, who sits at the secretariat of the Girls Not Brides global partnership, of which ICRW co-chairs the U.S. National Partnership, Girls Not Brides USA. I could not agree more with her recommendations as to what should be next for U.S. leadership on this issue.

I'll focus my brief remarks today on some of the emerging evidence ICRW is generating that we hope will shed more light on not just the drivers and consequences of child marriage, but also on solutions that can unlock real and sustainable progress, so that we can end this practice within a generation. As harmful as this challenge is, it is not without solutions.

Understanding Structural Drivers and Root Causes

While there are some common underlying factors, the drivers of child marriage are different from region to region, country to country, and even girl to girl. Indeed, as we learn more about the practice, we learn more about the diverse, and often complex, drivers of it, both across and within countries. And understanding these drivers is critical if we are to develop solutions to end the practice.

In nearly all contexts where child marriage is prevalent, social and community norms around sexuality and gender play a tremendous role. Where girls are valued only for their roles as wives and mothers; where viable economic opportunities are available only to men, but not women; where having sex outside of marriage – or even talking to men other than your brother or father - is forbidden; where girls, but not boys, are taken out of school to help with household chores because girls' education is seen as having no value; child marriage *will* continue. Gender inequality is, in itself, a significant driver of child marriage, no matter where it happens.

Much of the early evidence we had on child marriage came from India, Bangladesh and Ethiopia, where parents or community leaders were – and still are, in many cases – the main decision-makers around girls' marriage. Girls here are often taken out of school and married off *by* an adult, often *to* an adult, often an adult they may not even know. In contexts like these, targeting these decision-makers and shifting social norms regarding the value of the girl – solutions that you've heard already today – are of utmost importance.

But we now have more evidence from contexts where girls are forced to drop out of school, not because of marriage, but because the practical costs of attending school outweigh the bleak economic opportunities that girls and young women have in their communities. And once out of school, girls may be forced to marry, either because it is socially unacceptable to be an out-of-school, unmarried adolescent, or because marriage may be their only means of financial support.

We also know – from our recent research in Senegal, Uganda, Kenya and Zambia, and that of groups like Promundo in Latin America, and Tahirih Justice Center in the United States - that many girls are dropping out of school and becoming child brides because they become pregnant, something that is seen as incompatible with formal education in many contexts.

So, while it may add a great deal of complexity to the issue, it is vital that we understand the different circumstances that contribute to child marriage, so that we may implement the most appropriate solutions to it. That said, there are some broad solutions that can be implemented across contexts.

One of the most important pieces of research ICRW has produced on this issue is our *Solutions to End Child Marriage* paper. This was a systematic review, in which we reviewed more than 150 programs to determine what works best to end child marriage. We identified five commonly employed solutions, which are also reflected in the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* that you heard about earlier today. These are:

- I. **First, empower girls with information, skills and support networks.** Having girls learn basic skills like literacy and numeracy, how to communicate and negotiate, to stay healthy, to solve problems, and to earn and manage money, can help girls can become

more knowledgeable and self-confident. Engaging with peers and mentors can also help alleviate the social and economic isolation many girls experience.

- II. **Second, educate and rally parents and community members.** As you've heard, these adults are often the ones responsible for deciding when and whom a girl marries. We have seen powerful examples of how educating these key stakeholders about how child marriage impacts a girl's health and future can spark significant change.
- III. **Third, enhance girls' access to quality formal education.** Girls with no education are three times as likely to marry before 18 as those with secondary or higher education. Providing incentives – such as uniforms or scholarships – or the necessary skills and support for girls to enroll and remain in school can help delay marriage. Programs aimed at improving the safety and girl-friendliness of schools, strengthening school curricula and making school lessons relevant to girls' lives also are effective. When girls are in school, they are also less likely to be seen as ready for marriage, and they can develop social networks and skills that allow them to advocate for themselves and their futures.
- IV. **Fourth, provide economic support and incentives to girls and their families.** Some parents may see a short term financial benefit from marrying their daughter early, by gaining a bride price, lowering the price of dowry or simply having one less mouth to feed. And some girls may find themselves without any financial support from their families, and thus turn to boyfriends and potential husbands. Providing a girl or her family with a loan or an opportunity to learn an income-generating skill, can provide economic relief for struggling families. And daughters who learn skills that enable them to earn an income in the future may be seen as adding more value to the family.
- V. **Lastly, encourage supportive laws and policies – and, importantly, their implementation.** Many countries with high rates of child marriage have legislation on the books to prohibit the practice. Advocating for the implementation of such laws, and raising awareness about them among government officials and community leaders and members, can help strengthen and/or better enforce existing initiatives around girls' rights. Where such legislation is not on the books, advocating for legal and policy reform is a critical first step. We know that while laws themselves can't solve the problem, they are a necessary part of the solution.

I should note that the most effective approaches are those that employ several of these strategies, often in combination with others. And we also know that siloed interventions do not always work. Recent research conducted by ICRW, and funded by USAID, for example, demonstrates this very point. In a rigorous evaluation, we found that a large-scale conditional cash transfer program that was intended to delay marriage in India did *not* work, largely because there was no corresponding effort to educate families, communities or girls on the value of girls as their own, independent beings, endowed with rights to choose if, when and whom to marry. The intervention was thus perceived by many as the government defraying the economic burden that having girls placed on poor families. In many cases, that money was even used for the girl's dowry as soon as she turned 18.

New research we recently conducted in Zambia and Kenya – the findings of which we are actually publishing today, and which reflect some of our other recent research in sub-Saharan Africa – indicates that the main drivers of marriage in these contexts are school dropout and early pregnancy. So here, interventions to delay marriage would need to target both of these drivers. In particular, providing adolescents with sexuality education – starting with basic

information about fertility and pregnancy, as well as youth-friendly reproductive health services, can also be important solutions to curtailing both adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.

Recommendations

I would like to close with a word about the importance of U.S. leadership in ending child marriage.

While we all recognize the harms that child marriage does to girls, we should also understand that child marriage is also actively undermining American investments in broader goals of global health, education, democracy and governance, and so much more.

ICRW is currently engaged in a multi-year, global research project, in partnership with the World Bank, in which we are calculating the economic impacts of child marriage. While the research is ongoing, our initial findings show that, in addition to the harmful effects on girls' health, education, rights, and wellbeing that we've heard about today, the economic costs of child marriage, from the individual to the national levels are very significant. In Niger, which has the highest child marriage rates in the world, for example, eliminating child marriage today would translate into savings of \$25 billion by the year 2030 for the education sector alone. The cumulative savings to governments and societies will likely be in the *trillions* of dollars. There's much more to this study, and if you invite me back in about six months, I'll be able to tell you much more.

For now, however, we have sufficient evidence to confidently recommend the following:

1. It cannot be assumed that child marriage will be adequately addressed as part of the increasing and very worthy efforts to advance the broader health, education and welfare of adolescent girls. To ensure that child marriage prevention receives the dedicated attention it deserves, I recommend the Senate commission a report that details where, how, and how much the Administration is currently investing in ending child marriage. Once we have that information, let's double these efforts. Even then, I suspect the U.S. may still find itself well behind many other countries in addressing this issue. But it would be a good start.
2. Don't let married girls get lost in the shuffle. We critically need robust investments to delay the age of marriage. But at the same time, those 15 million girls who still marry each year are among the neediest and hardest to reach individuals in the world. Even as we work to more fully understand their needs, we know that they should be provided with educational opportunities and with critical health care services, including youth-friendly family planning, maternal health, HIV screening and treatment, and mental health care.
3. Continue to invest in research to better understand what will work to prevent child marriage in regions where we don't know as much—starting with the Western Hemisphere and the Middle East and North Africa, where child marriage rates are high, but attention to and funding to combat the challenge are low. Let us also implement and evaluate new interventions, so that we can develop scalable models that are most effective across different contexts.

4. Finally, continue and expand the growing emphasis on girls' rights and empowerment. As the research demonstrates, we cannot end this problem without ensuring that girls have viable alternatives to marriage, know their rights and are equipped to negotiate them with the gatekeepers of their lives: parents, teachers, community and religious elders.

I know of no government in the world that has articulated as solid a commitment to girls in their foreign policy as the United States has this year. There is no stronger foundation on which to build truly transformative change.

As we move toward a new Administration, it will be incumbent upon Congress to ensure that we build on this foundation and continue to advance opportunities for adolescent girls around the globe. Thank you for your leadership in this regard.