



**Submitted By:** Stacy Lara

**Date:** 6 March 2014

**Location:** Palais des Nations, Room XXIV

**Program:** HRC25 Side Event  
Children and Forced Marriages

**Format:** Panel

**Organizations:** World YWCA, Center For Reproductive Rights, Plan International, Confederation Suisse

**Speakers:** H.E. Ambassador Encyla Tina Chishiba Sinjela, Permanent Mission of Zambia; Ms. Valeria Arriaga Mejia, Consejera, Permanent Mission of Honduras; Ms. Adwoa Kufuor, Human Rights Officer, Women's Rights and Gender Division, OHCHR; Dr. V. Chandra-Mouli, Scientist, Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Department of Reproductive Health and Research, WHO; Mr. Stuart Halford, Center for Reproductive Rights, Sexual Rights; Ms. Ernestina Mirriam Michelo, survivor of child marriage and human rights activist, YWCA of Zambia

Moderator - Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, General Secretary World YWCA and NGO CSW Geneva President

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“Child marriage is a violation of children’s human rights. Despite being prohibited by international human rights law and many national laws, child marriage continues to rob millions of girls around the world of their childhood,” Plan International.

The overall message and call to action of the side event was for States to strive to end child marriage in one generation. Plan International called on the international community to work together to adopt, by 2015 at the latest, a UN General Assembly resolution to address child marriage as a violation of children’s rights. Among other recommendations for action suggested by Plan International are for national governments with the support of donors and civil society to ensure that national legislation prohibits child marriage and makes 18 the minimum age for both boys and girls to marry.

Child marriage is a global problem. If current child marriage trends continue, more than 140 million girls will be married as children by 2020. That is approximately 39,000 girls who, under the age of 18, will enter into forced marriage every day. These girls often drop out of school resulting in the lack of basic literacy and numerical skills. Child marriage has severe social and economic implications as well. Child brides are also endangered when

they become pregnant due to the increase risk of perinatal infant mortality and morbidity rates. What's more, stillbirths and newborn deaths are 50% more likely when the mother is less than twenty years old.

Other factors of child marriage discussed were:

**Economic factors:** Research indicates that parents believe that their dire economic situation will be alleviated if they marry off their child. The parents want and need the payment they will receive for the marrying child. While the fact that the parents will be paid is true, the improved economic situation is not very relevant and only temporary as payments from the buyer of the child are not long term sources of income for the family. "I did not go to school as my father saw it as no use...my father had taken dowry... forcing me to get married at the age of 12 years," Child bride, Tanzania. (Voices of Tarime Girls, London)

**Family size:** Many child brides come from parents who have multiple children. The parents do not have the ability or means to care for all of the children so they force marriage to rid themselves of a burden – a child. "If my daughter gets married to a rich man or even a craftsman, he will take care of her...and this will give me the time and opportunity to take care of the other siblings," Egypt Mother (source Plan Egypt.)

**Lack of alternatives:** In many cases the child lacks other life alternatives such as continued education and secure employment. The parents choose to marry off their daughter rather than keep her under their care. "In our community, we don't allow a girl to continue her education when she is married because of her responsibilities...she doesn't have any spare time to continue her education," Women's focus group, Pakistan.

A few side event comments to highlight include a statement by H.E. Ambassador Encyla Tina Chishiba Sinjela, who spoke about new legislation towards ending child marriage passed in Zambia. For example, Zambia has passed a Marriage Act that allows legal marriage only after the age of 18. Between ages 16-17 children must have parental consent to marry. It is prohibited to marry under the age of 16. She went on to explain that the entire country of Zambia has united to end child marriage.

Dr. V. Chandra-Mouli stressed that child marriage is not only a violation of human rights but also a dangerous public health issue. The point was made that a girl under 19 who gives birth is at higher risk of dying during child birth due to lack of development of her pelvic area and birth canal.

Survivor of child marriage, Ms. Ernestina Mirriam Michelo, spoke about the role of parents in child and forced marriage. She appealed to the audience to embrace the need for parental education saying it is essential to eliminating child marriage. She explained that many parents in her country believe that when a girl begins menstruation that the girl should, or can be married. She suggested increased education and counseling plans and service centers be put in place.

It was agreed by all panelists that there is a huge lack of positive role models for young girls. They agree that with education mothers can become role models for their children resulting in the empowerment of the children themselves to address child marriage with as knowledgeable participants.

Summary and relations to FAWCO:

Child and forced marriage is a serious violation of human and child rights. It infringes the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which is supported by FAWCO. Although it is a known problem, still every year nearly 14 million 15-19 year olds in the developing world alone, are forced to marry. These girls subsequently become pregnant and complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for

this age group in developing countries. “Girls 15-19 are twice as likely as those over 20 to die during childbirth, UNFPA. National and international action is needed to end child marriage. As supporters of human rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, FAWCO assumes the responsibility to increase awareness and improve efforts to end the tragedy of child and forced marriage.

This additional attention can be achieved through FAWCO’s continued support of the topic, in particular, through the dissemination of the information to civil society and public policy makers, and through engaging and supporting subject matter experts.

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