

# OPEN LETTER ON CHILD MARRIAGE

Dear decision-makers and leaders

We, children and young people, want to bring to your attention child marriages and their negative impact on the lives of millions of girls and boys in the world.

## Why is child marriage such a horrendous problem?

Child marriage is defined as marriages where either one or both partners are younger than the age of 18. We believe that child marriage is an extreme violation of children's rights - it brings down the darkness in the life of a girl and destroys childhoods. As human beings, children have rights that must be taken into consideration and child marriage should be stopped.

We see in our countries that one of the leading root causes of child marriage is poverty. Many parents from poor families consider children a source of wealth and tend to give their girls for marriage in exchange for much-needed cattle or money.

Another cause of child marriage is to pay debts. In some African communities, when you owe someone a large debt and cannot pay, one of your children will be offered in exchange.

Social prejudices are another reason for child marriage. In some remote areas when girls become adolescents, their neighbours go to the girls' families and ask for the girl to be married.

Child marriage also happens due to some outdated cultures and traditions whereby when a girl reaches puberty, she is considered ready for marriage. Sometimes, despite there being laws imposed against child marriage, the laws are not enforced so people can carry out a wedding with a child, even though it is a crime.

For instance, a friend was married off because her parents were poor. They believed a girl child can't learn, so she was discouraged from going to school and instead helped her mother do housework. When she reached puberty, she was taken to a place where girls were taught how to keep their husbands and respect their in-laws. After that, she was married off to a much older man, age 29.

Every child in the community needs to know their rights in relation to child marriage laws and policies. Governments should make people in school and college aware of the bad effects of child marriage and popularize the national helpline number so people can report cases of child marriage. The government should also ensure people who are involved with child marriage face strict punishment and let people know about the punishment.

## Why are we worried?

We are worried because child marriage only offers deprivation, disempowerment, violence, and servitude. Affected girls usually drop out of school, depriving them of learning and economic opportunity later in life.

Increased hunger and poverty since the Covid-19 pandemic hit is causing an increase in child marriage. Lack of knowledge and illiteracy are also a major problem. If people are not educated to know what to do, they will marry off their daughters. Sometimes, they force girls to go to men and boys for money if there is no food at home. This form of sexual exploitation and abuse is devastating for children, causing life-long trauma.

We know that teenage pregnancy is one of the leading causes of child marriage in our communities. Thus, it is important to raise awareness so children can learn to cater for themselves during the transition into adulthood. Child wives and child mothers are vulnerable to mental health problems, and often have sexual and reproductive health complications due to having babies before their bodies are ready; some of them die during delivery. Tragically, sometimes the mother dies, sometimes the baby and sometimes both.

### So, what needs to be done?

As activists and members of Child Parliaments, we have learned about the damaging effects of child marriage on girls and, more importantly, how to advocate for its end. For instance, at our schools, we can form child-led advocacy groups for children to lead campaigns against all forms of violence against us, especially child marriage. In addition, we have learned to engage our parents and other adults responsible for ensuring our rights and discuss together how we can put an end to child marriage in our communities. For instance, inform the headmen of our community about the girl who was married off at a tender age, the headmen can follow the case and manage to retrieve the girl from marriage, take her back to school, and punish men who marry a young girl.

In order to protect our childhood, we should end child marriage. Because no one has the right to ruin our childhood. Since children are the present and future of the nation, how can you ensure the future in the middle of the four walls when a child gets married? We must fight to save children's future, not for the girls only, but for the country and the world.

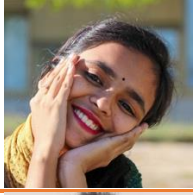
So, we ask:

- Ban any child marriage under the age of 18 in all the countries of the world.
- Prohibit the option of girls being married off with parental consent. This puts children at high risk as in many rural communities, people respect customary leadership more than national law, and continue to marry off their children.
- Empower girls and boys to be bold and courageous to report child marriages to the local authority. This will help so much because the children themselves are against this practice.
- Stop the view of girls as a burden and child marriage as a solution to end poverty. Both are not true.
- Provide more and better education for girls and keep everyone at school.

And we want our governments to monitor and enforce laws which protect children's rights. We need a social movement against child marriage with community, government and NGOs working together to make society violence free for every girl.

Ending child marriage is our bold commitment, and we must focus on how to get it done as soon as possible.

Please join with us in this goal and sign a commitment to end child marriage. Don't wait another day to take action with us.



**Dola**, aged 17, Bangladesh

[bio here](#)

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**Exildah**, aged 16, Zambia

[bio here](#)

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**Lamia**, aged 18, Bangladesh

[bio here](#)

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**Mary**, aged 17, Ghana

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**Tejan**, aged 17, Sierra Leone

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**Whytiny**, aged 16, Kenya

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