

Task Force "Child marriage"

Report 2023

Child marriage is a serious violation of human rights and we cannot allow it.

Statistics show that every three seconds a girl under the age of 18 is married - that means 10 million underage girls are married every year - mostly without their consent and most likely to an older man. Most of these marriages take place in Africa, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the UNICEF Research Digest, Africa has the highest incidence of child marriage. Demographic and health data for Africa show that in Niger, Chad and Mali, more than 70% of girls are married before the age of 18.

Recent research on child marriage in Africa shows that most national governments in the region are either unaware of the seriousness of the issue and/or have not prioritised child marriage as a serious problem that has far-reaching implications for health, education and economic development indices. Many girls around the world are forced into marriage without the opportunity to exercise their right to choose.

Child marriage undermines efforts to reduce gender-based violence, increase education, overcome poverty and improve health indicators for girls and women.

Child brides are often coerced into early sexual activity and soon become pregnant.

Most countries have adopted laws to control the spread of this phenomenon, but other customary and religious laws have a greater influence on family life or personal matters.

Greater efforts are needed to increase investment in girls' education, in economic empowerment programmes to educate girls, and in awareness campaigns to educate people about the negative economic and health consequences.

African societies in transition to urbanisation and modernisation, the gatekeepers of traditional beliefs and moral codes, vehemently defend child marriage as the "last holdout" of "culture" in the midst of profound development pressures and globalisation.

Consequently, traditional authority figures seek to consolidate their influence by focusing on the family, sexual relations and other "private" aspects of social relations. Thus the practice of early marriage in Africa and Asia is reinforced in the short term by the very process of 'development'. There is therefore an urgent need for self-efficacy training programmes to change mindsets that are bound by entrenched poverty, cultural norms/religious beliefs and deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions.

I believe it is our duty to help the many children around the world who are victims of this violence and are forced into early marriages.

All BPW members should give their support to BPW friends in Africa and Asia who are dealing with this terrible problem.

What can a BPW club do?

Undertake projects to promote education and raise awareness of the 'educational value' to the family and community :

Implement health education projects for girls and communities;

Implementing projects to promote the education and empowerment of women;

Undertake legal action to defend the rights of child brides;

Promote an information and awareness campaign on this sad phenomenon;

Carry out awareness-raising activities to overcome gender stereotypes and the culture of stereotypes;

Promote welfare social and gender policies;

Promote women's empowerment.

I and the member of the Taskforce have always cooperated with the BPW clubs and we want to continue this cooperation to fight this terrible phenomenon.

During CSW 67 in New York, I took part in a side event on this terrible phenomenon.

In various countries we have organised meetings with BPW members and political representatives to discuss this issue and to launch an information and awareness campaign.

Representatives of UNICEF and other international organisations took part in the meetings.

I think we need to create a network between our clubs and other organisations around the world to work together against this sad phenomenon.

Today the problem exists even in Italy, in fact we have many migrants from African countries and from countries at war, and unfortunately this practice has been implemented.

Many women and girls from African countries live in Italy, some of them came by boat and are accommodated in shelters.

We think it is necessary to raise awareness among governments and at the same time promote education and empowerment of young women to change this bad situation.

We think it is very important to realize a cultural change through education because it is the best strategy to fight the problem.

We are doing an information and awareness campaign about child marriage in the world.

Our campaign includes some meetings in the different regions of BPW with some testimonies.

I conclude this brief report with a thought: to be members of BPW International must lead us to work to build a stronger society, more meaningful and more prosperous: a society built on commitment, innovation, promotion of the economy and human rights.

A society that must take care of the less fortunate and promote justice with respect for diversity. We all have a strong desire to promote the empowerment of women to achieve equal opportunities in all spheres of society and their full affirmation in society.

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