UN-Women

Topic: Combat Forced Marriage

President: Daniela Naveda Mora

Moderator: Antonella Treviño San Martín

Secretariat: Ximena Mendieta Guadarrama
Welcome Letter

Dear Delegates, you have been invited to participate in this debate, in order to help the United Nations to come up with possible solutions with a pressing problem in our current society, that being: Combat Forced Marriage. It is asked that you take this matter with utmost seriousness, as this issue affects all of the currently present countries. No matter what economic or social conditions each of the present delegations face.

During the time of the Model, you will be tasked with finding the best possible solution, not only for your respective countries, but one that is in all of our best interests. To achieve this, you will have 2 days, and the chair’s full attention and disposition.

With that being said, no matter if you are a first time participant of the model or you are trained veteran, you will all have the same chances and possibilities to thrive during the debate, the chair, will make sure that the award of Best Delegate goes to the most prepared and best performing delegate.

The chair is looking forward to having you in our committee, and hearing what arguments you prepare to help all of your fellow delegates to find the best solution, it is hoped that you are able to get something out of this experience and that you are able to make the best of all of the time.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask any of the members of the chair for guidance.

Best regards, The Chair

Daniela Naveda Mora
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**Introduction**

“Child marriage violates girls’ rights and undermines girls’ and young women’s independence and autonomy, there is simply no way we can achieve development goals, or realize the human rights of women and girls—both of which are intricately linked—while this harmful and very discriminatory practice continues,” John Hendra, UN Women Deputy Executive Director of Policy and Programme, at an informal panel discussion on “Child, Early and Forced Marriage Worldwide, including the Elaboration of the Post-2015 Development Agenda”.

UN Women is the global champion for gender equality, working to develop and uphold standards and create an environment in which every woman and girl can exercise her human rights and live up to her full potential. This committee consists on trusted partners for advocates and decision-makers from all walks of life, and a leader in the effort to achieve gender equality.

Violence against women and girls, harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, is considered a serious impediment to achieve gender equality and ending such inhumanity is one of the core priorities of this committee.

Not only is it a grave human rights violation, but it is also an affront to human dignity and restraint to sustainable development. While it is a reality for both boys and girls, girls are the ones who are disproportionately affected. Approximately 700 million girls worldwide get married before their eighteenth birthday. One in every three girls in developing countries is married before reaching the age of 18 and one in nine is married under the age of 15.

Despite the slight decrease in prevalence over the past three decades, and an increase in the number of laws against child, early and forced marriage, practice remains widespread, in part due to inadequate enforcement of laws, and misconceptions about traditional and cultural practices reflecting gender inequality and gender-based discrimination as root causes.

**History**

Throughout history until the 20th century, child marriages were the norm in most parts of the world. With the average life expectancy during such times being only 40 to 45 years of age, child
marriages were the faster way to reproduce. Girls were usually married off as soon as they reached puberty or sometimes even prior to that.

In the 20th century, however, as countries began developing, women started receiving education, voting and entered the workforce, their economic conditions enhanced, and there were massive improvements in average life expectancy due to advanced medical practices, the application of child marriages began to be questioned. Soon, this practice nearly disappeared in the developed economies of the world. In many other countries of the world, however in many other child marriages continue to be practiced in spite of global protests and resistance against this act.

Factors involved in the practices of forced and servile marriage

A forced and servile marriage is often a result of compulsion by members of the victim’s family. A family member who forces or attempts to force their child into marriage often justifies their behavior as protecting their child, helping to build stronger families, and preserving cultural or religious traditions.¹ The major reasons as to why families are driven to make this decision are:

- Control unwanted behavior and sexuality, prevent unsuitable relationships e.g. outside the ethnic, cultural, religious or caste group,
- In 17% of cases the age of the victims was unknown.
- Protect ‘family honor’
- Respond to peer group or family pressure
- Attempt to strengthen family links
- Achieve financial gain
- Ensure that land, property and wealth remain within the family
- Protect cultural and religious ideals
- Insurance help for family with helping needs.
- Assist claims for residence and citizenship

• Fulfill long-standing family commitments.  

An arranged marriage is distinct from a forced marriage. In an arranged marriage, the families of both spouses play a dominant role in arranging the marriage, but the spouses have the right to accept the marriage arrangement or not.

Consequences for victims of forced and servile marriage

Forced and servile marriage places children and adults at risk. There are many harmful consequences associated with forced and servile marriage, including:

• Human Trafficking and Exploitation
• The interruption or termination of education
• Damage to career opportunities and a loss of economic independence
• Emotional and physical abuse
• Theft (e.g. of passport, money and belongings)
• Unlawful imprisonment and restriction of freedom of movement and association
• Abduction and kidnapping
• Genital mutilation
• Rape
• Enforced pregnancy
• Abortion
• Murder and mutilation.  

Psychological damage and sexual and/or domestic violence are inherent in forced marriages. Forced marriage has many potential medical consequences. (Legislation.gov.uk, 2019)

In the case of child marriage, young girls enter into marriage without adequate information about sexual and reproductive health. They are often married to men who are older, more sexually

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2 HM Government, Multi-agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of Forced Marriage, p11.
experienced and they are not in a position to negotiate sexual relations. This often leads to sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, complications during pregnancy and birth, and resulting psychological problems.

Victims of forced marriage often become estranged from their families as their movement and behavior is controlled by their spouse. Further, victims who escape or threaten to escape a forced marriage often face isolation and estrangement from family.\textsuperscript{4}

**Countries involved**

Forced marriage is sometimes viewed as a religious custom, although no major religion condones this practice. For example, Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh marriages all require full and free consent.\textsuperscript{5}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{ Forced_marriage_countries.png}
\caption{A Global Problem: Origins of Forced Marriage Cases}
\textit{Most prominent countries involved in the cases handled by the Forced Marriage Unit in 2012.}
\end{figure}

**Niger**

- 76% of girls in Niger are married before their 18th birthday and 28%

\textsuperscript{5} Forced Marriage 2019, HOME OFFICE p.3
are married before the age of 15.

What drives child marriage in this country?

- Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world. Girls from the poorest households are more likely to marry young than those in the richest households.
- The practice of wahaya (custom) involves the purchase of one or more girls, usually of slave descent, under the guise of a fifth wife.
- In certain areas, including rural Marake, some people reportedly believe that girls should be married before their first period, as bloodstained clothing may be perceived as loss of virginity which brings shame to families.
- The primary role of girls in Niger is to become wives and mothers. They have little say in decisions that affect them, both on the lead up to and during marriages

Chad

- 44% of women aged 15-49 have experienced forced marriage.

What drives child marriage in this country?

- The practice is used as a way of controlling female sexuality and is sometimes regarded as a sign of readiness for marriage.
- Chadian girls with no education marry at the age of 16 on average, compared to 19 years for girls who have completed secondary education.
- Rape is widespread in refugee camps, and many girls are at heightened risk of sexual violence. Cultural norms often force girls to marry their attackers to preserve their honor.
Bangladesh

59% of girls in Bangladesh are married before their 18th birthday and 22% are married before the age of 15.

What drives child marriage in this country?

- The median age of marriage for girls living in the poorest households of Bangladesh is 15, compared to 18 for those living in the richest households.
- The median age of marriage for Bangladeshi girls who have no education is 15, compared to 20 for those who have completed secondary school or higher.
- Natural disasters also exacerbate child marriage in many regions of Bangladesh. Frequent flooding means many families live in insecure conditions and marry off daughters as a survival tactic.  

UN Actions

The Global Goals have set a target to end child marriage by 2030. International efforts have been supported by the national efforts of countries like Burkina Faso, Nepal, and Egypt that have all developed strategies and action plans to bolster their current efforts to end child marriage.

In 2018, the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) gave advice or support related to a possible forced marriage in 1,764 cases. These figures include contact that has been made to the FMU in relation to a new case through the public helpline or by email and include general enquiries. Including Somaliland

Since 2012, the FMU has provided support to between approximately 1,200 and approximately 1,400 cases per year. The number of cases in 2018 represents a 47% increase compared with 2017 and is the highest number since these statistics were first in the current format in 2011. This does

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not necessarily represent an increase in the prevalence of forced marriage in the UK. (Gov. UK, 2018)

These programs has been useful to perpetuate child marriage form and also validate what is happening in the field. Programs like this help to understand better causes of child marriage and preventing it like for example:

**Tostan Taps Tradition to Prevent Child Marriage:**

Tostan is an international non-governmental program, which started in Senegal, helps empowering communities and the reduction of child marriage and the genital cuttings. They have education sessions passing from villages to inter villages that help to acknowledge this topics. The program was able to bring about change in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. “90 intervention villages, and these were reinforced by a public declaration by approximately 300 villages against child marriage and FGC”( Jain, 2007)

**Community Mobilization Key to Preventing Child Marriage:**

The Institute for Health Management locatedin India, Pachod (IHMP) started a girls’ empowerment program, helping under age woman trying to take action into the issue and giving them maternal health, and ultimately family health and well-being.

**Booking’ Practice Substitutes School for Prospective Grooms:**

The Naninig program as it is called, try to substitutes the under age marriage by instead of giving them for marriage, they take this girls to schools and help programs.

**Local Governance Efforts Prevent Child Marriage:**
“In the Amhara region of Ethiopia, Berhane Hewan, a Population Council project, helps girls avoid early marriage by promoting functional literacy, life skills, reproductive health education and opportunities for saving money” (Jain 2007)

The best program approach would be to promote all levels of education to ensure both younger and older girls reach 18 before they marry. Also improving family economic status would help to decrease this main problem by giving them a better living. Meaning reducing poverty.

**Current Problem Situation**

Most of the forced child marriages comes between places with low economic, educational and social statistics. But since this has been occurring through the years, a number of different organizations and non-governmental communities have been committed to decrease the issue from around the world.

- 1 of 5 girls are said to be married before 18
- Over 650 million women alive today were married as children
- 12 million girls are married before 18.

Niger has committed to eliminate child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. In its 2018 National Voluntary Review at the High Level Political Forum (the mechanism through which countries report progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals), Niger reported on some of the changes in rates of child marriage and legislative reforms related to the legal age of marriage.

Chad has committed to eliminate child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, it has also co-sponsored the 2015 Human Rights Council resolution to end child, early and forced marriage, recognizing that it is a violation of human rights.
Bangladesh has committed to eliminate child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. During its Voluntary National Review at the 2017 High Level Political Forum, the government noted that women’s empowerment plays a prominent role in the Constitution of Bangladesh, the National Women Development Policy and the Child Marriage Restraint Act.

Bangladesh is a member of the South Asian Initiative to End Violence against Children which adopted a regional action plan to end child marriage from 2015-2018.  

**Conclusion**

Through the years there has been an issue that affects many countries but we are mainly concerned of the well-being of girls around the African continent, since rates of child marriage are over 50% of the population. Although there have been measures to stop this world wide problem, there haven’t been enough and girls aren’t capable of exercising their free will to remain unmarried.

Therefore the committee of UN-Women wants to achieve that young women over the world have their basics rights respected and call upon all States to cooperate in those efforts. Furthermore, the UN-Woman should develop programs and contribute into the existence that institutions are providing.

**Main points to debate**

- How can countries establish a law for girls to be married above the legal required constitution?

- What role should the countries take to prevent these types of injustices, mostly were this type of activity is performed?

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• Should the UN-Women encourage mostly countries with high prevalence rates to stop using children as an object of exchange and mistreatment, trying to motivate programs that allowed girls to learn a new daily life style?

• Which proposals do countries suggest in order to stop these actions from happening worldwide?

• How could the uncontrollable growth of forced marriages be stopped in countries with higher rates?

• What kind of laws should be required and enhanced in each country so that forced marriage is eradicated?
• How can world powers intervene in long-term detention of underage marriage

• Which type of monitoring should be implemented in all of the affected countries?

• In the case that a country opposes to the solution, which stand would each delegation take?

REFERENCES


