



Press Release

Date: June 26, 2013

United call to end child marriage

GLOBAL figures united today (26th) in a call to help end child marriage across the Commonwealth.

They were speaking at a central London event co-hosted by the Royal Commonwealth Society and global children's charity Plan UK.

The two organisations have been working closely in partnership since 2010 on the issues of girls' education and child marriage in the Commonwealth.

H.E. Gordon Campbell, High Commissioner for Canada in the UK, told the audience: "Few issues are as central to the human rights of young girls as early and forced marriage.

"Our collective voices and actions can create a start to put this practice behind us. It's time for the Commonwealth to take up this issue and demonstrate leadership."

Princess Mabel van Oranje-Nassau of the Netherlands emphasised the need to create and enact legislation on child marriage, as well as the importance of empowering girls through education.

She urged leaders to incorporate early and forced marriage issues into existing development goals and community based projects.

Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Mmasekgoa Masire-Mwamba said it was time to "break the silence" on early and forced marriage, as a "key challenge to development."

And the audience heard from 12-year-old Malawian girl, Alinane, who told them: "Governments should help enforce laws and girls should be protected.

"I urge the Commonwealth, UN, civil society to work hand-in-hand to make sure the next generation has a better future with more education."

The Royal Commonwealth Society and Plan UK have worked on a joint campaign to secure Commonwealth commitments to ending early and forced marriage.

Their partnership was successful in moving the issue forward at the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) with steps to mitigate child marriage in the Commonwealth included in the final communiqué.

Mike Lake, Director of The Royal Commonwealth Society, said of today's event: "It is important that civil society works with governments and other players on this issue and together we can see movement towards ending early forced marriage in the Commonwealth."

Plan UK's Director of Programmes, Nazma Kabir, said: "The Commonwealth community can be the agents of change for children around the world - for them to have a brighter future. The time is now ripe for the Commonwealth to lead the fight to end child marriage."

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. The RCS/Plan Partnership

Since 2010, the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) and Plan UK have been working closely in partnership on the issues of girls' education and child marriage in the Commonwealth. The two organisations have collaborated closely, with a joint campaign to secure Commonwealth commitments to ending early and forced marriage. Following a series of partnered events and two co-authored papers (*Because You're a Girl: Growing Up in the Commonwealth* and *Empowering Girls: What the Commonwealth can do to end early and forced marriage*), the RCS/Plan partnership was successful in moving the issue forward at the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Indeed, one of the major outcomes was the 2011 CHOGM Communiqué's mention of taking steps to mitigate child marriage in the Commonwealth. Today's event is a further phase in our work on this important Commonwealth issue.

2. Commonwealth Commitments on Early and Forced Marriage

Around the world at least fourteen million girls marry under the age of eighteen every year; it is a brutal transition from childhood to adulthood that harms the health, educational, economic and social potential of millions of girls across the Commonwealth. Out of the 14 million girls under 18 married each year 7 million reside in the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth has a strong foundation of commitments, conventions and treaties upon which steps can be taken to address gender equality issues and the ending of early and forced marriage. The 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) Communiqué provided historic first steps in the Commonwealth to end early and forced marriage. Similar steps were outlined in the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting.

The 2011 CHOGM Communiqué asserted that "... the Commonwealth will address the issue of early and forced marriage, and consider actions to support the rights of women and children and to share its best practices to promote the implementation of measures to tackle early and forced marriage".¹

Similarly, the Law Ministers Meeting Communiqué indicated that early and forced marriage "constituted a human rights violation that impeded individuals' most basic and fundamental rights", and importantly that "many forced marriages had a transnational quality and their prevention could require active co-operation between the states concerned".²

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¹ Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, *Perth Communiqué* Perth 2011, p.15-16

<http://www.thecommonwealth.org/files/249248/FileName/CHOGM2011OutcomeDocuments.pdf>

² Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting, *Communiqué* 2011, Sections 12 and 13.

http://www.thecommonwealth.org/document/181889/34293/35232/152087/238332/clmm_2011.htm