



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

15 September, 2014

Excellency,

Pursuant to operative paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 68/148 titled, *Child, early and forced marriage*, I have the honour to transmit the Summary of Key Messages of the Panel Discussion on Child, Early and Forced Marriage Worldwide, including the Elaboration of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which was convened on 5 September 2014.

I thank you for your delegation's active participation in the panel discussion which provided an opportunity for an interactive exchange of views on the complex nature of child, early and forced marriage, including its widespread cultural and social acceptance. I believe that the panel has contributed to raising awareness of the harmful impact that child, early and forced marriage has on its victims, the development costs to society at large and the need for increased action at the national and international level to end the practice.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John W. Ashe".

John W. Ashe

All Permanent Representatives
And Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

**Summary of Key Messages of the Panel Discussion on Child, Early and Forced Marriage
Worldwide, including the Elaboration of the Post-2015 Development Agenda**

5 September, 2014

United Nations Headquarters, New York

The following is a summary of the key messages that emerged from the Panel Discussion on Child, Early and Forced Marriage Worldwide, including the Elaboration of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which was held pursuant to GA resolution 68/148. The Panel built on the report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Preventing and Eliminating Child, Early and Forced Marriage (A/HRC/26/22), prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 24/33, and the related summary report of the panel discussion convened by the Council on 23 June 2014 during its twenty-sixth session.

SECTION 1: The impact of child marriage on girls and development

Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) has a disproportionately negative impact on women and girls. Despite some progress in the past few years, the number of girls affected by CEFM remains very high. According to UNICEF estimates, 700 million women worldwide aged 18 and above who were married or in union by age 18 years are impacted. The region of South Asia constitutes half of this number. The high incidence of this practice reflects wide cultural and social acceptance in various regions of the world, particularly in rural areas and poorest communities. Global trends show that the total number of cases of CEFM could reach 1.2 billion by 2050 unless increased action is taken to combat this practice at national and international levels.

There is wide agreement among Member States that CEFM has a negative impact on the development agenda and cuts across a host of human rights, development, economic and social concerns. While the MDGs failed to explicitly address child marriage, there was general agreement among participants that this issue should be given consideration in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

CEFM is a violation of the rights of girls and young women with devastating consequences for the overall realization and full enjoyment of their rights, such as those related to free and informed consent, education, health and sexual reproduction, as well as access to information and resources. Moreover, given that such marriages are often not registered and births are not recorded, it is difficult to determine the extent of the practice of CEFM and to monitor and protect the human rights of the victims.

Another major challenge is that many countries do not adhere to the age of majority (18 years), as set out in the Convention of the Rights of the Child [Article 1]. The legal age of marriage in many countries is often less than 18 years and is often lower for girls than it is for boys. Some delegations expressed concern during the discussion on the lack of clarity regarding the issue of “early marriage”. The OHCHR report provides definitions of the term and the international standards related to it.

CEFM has a particularly adverse impact on the right to health and often results in maternal and infant mortality, as well as early and frequent pregnancies, psychosocial health risks and increased risk of contracting STDs.

The impact of CEFM on girls' education is of priority concern, particularly as it relates directly to women and girls' empowerment, employment and economic opportunities, and their ability to have an input on matters related to their own future. There are many challenges facing mothers and children, such as a mother's ability to provide adequate care for her children, and the strong likelihood that the children themselves will not have access to education. Thus, the effects and impact of CEFM are, in fact, intergenerational.

In this context, the practice of CEFM represents an extreme manifestation of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination which reinforces unequal power relations between men and women. It is perpetuated by stereotyped gender roles in society, as well as entrenched discriminatory customs and traditional attitudes that place women in subordinate roles to men. It is also exacerbated by poverty, conflict and insecurity, and other forms of inequality and discrimination. CEFM is a clear form of violence against women and girls, which may intersect with other forms of violence, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and sexual and psychological violence. During the discussion, a point was raised of whether CEFM should be considered a crime and not a marriage, particularly given the lack of consent and the numerous human rights violations that are associated with it. Therefore, accountability for such human rights violations remains a challenge.

The human rights issues raised here cannot be delinked from socio-economic and development concerns. CEFM has an economic cost. It undermines economic development, and leads to a loss of productivity and lack of positive contributions to the work force.

SECTION 2: What can be done to effectively address the practice? The way forward

Although there has been a general decline in the proportion of child marriages in the last 30 years, CEFM remains a common practice which Governments and the international community must actively continue to address. It is time to move away from pilot projects towards the development of a comprehensive approach to eliminate CEFM so as to ensure further reduction in the practice, as recommended in the Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Countries with a high prevalence of CEFM, such as Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Tanzania and Zambia have begun to develop national strategies and legislation. The African Union is leading a Campaign to End Child Marriage in its Member States. UN entities and civil society organisations, such as Girls Not Brides, have also played a major role in moving the debate forward. The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals has submitted its proposal to the General Assembly inclusive of target 5.3 which calls for the elimination of harmful practices "including child, early and forced marriage". While this call was welcomed by many States, there was an expressed concern that this issue may require a more targeted focus for implementation.

A number of positive actions and measures required to prevent CEFM were highlighted by participants and included the following points:

- i. empowerment of girls to ensure their access to education, participation and well-being;
- ii. family and community awareness and mobilisation, including among men and boys, as well as traditional and religious leaders, to effect much needed change in attitudes;
- iii. provision of safe spaces and services, including in the areas of education, health and livelihoods, for girls at risk of early marriage and also for those who have already been forcefully married; and
- iv. adoption and implementation of laws and policies in line with international standards.

Such actions and measures must also include increased political commitments, provision of appropriate and sustainable resource allocation, including gender-responsive budgeting, data collection and active engagement of informed media. It is also critical to frame responses thorough a human rights based approach while ensuring appropriate accountability measures.

The framing of the Post-2015 Development Agenda offers a unique opportunity in terms of accountability and concrete commitments in the areas of education, health and hygiene, non-discrimination, gender equality and a life free from violence.

Participants were informed that a second resolution on CEFM will be put to the upcoming session of the General Assembly.