

June 9, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House, Office of the President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Kamala Harris
Vice President of the United States
The White House, Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President and Madam Vice President,

As civil society organizations committed to ensuring adolescent girls around the world are able to grow up healthy, educated, and protected from all forms of violence, we write to you now **to urge you to publicly demonstrate the U.S. government's commitment to adolescent girls at the [Generation Equality Forum in Paris \(June 30 – July 2, 2021\)](#) by announcing your intention to launch a new initiative on ending child marriage and addressing its consequences for girls around the world.**

Child marriage refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. The practice is often the result of entrenched gender inequality, making girls disproportionately affected. Up to 10 million more girls over the next decade are at risk of child marriage as a result of the pandemic, according to a [new analysis from UNICEF](#). Notably, this is in addition to the already 100 million girls who were at risk of child marriage in the next decade prior to the pandemic. **For the first time in almost 30 years, adolescent girls are more, not less at risk of child marriage**, with those living in already fragile or crisis-affected settings facing significant vulnerabilities.

Child marriage is a violation of adolescent girls' rights on an enormous scale. The rights violation is closely linked to increased risks of adolescent pregnancy and preventable adolescent maternal mortality, increased food insecurity and malnutrition, psychological harm to adolescent girls, and disruption to their education, with lifelong impacts on their economic empowerment and likelihood of participating meaningfully in public life and public decision-making. These impacts for girls have compounding generational impacts on their families and communities, replicating and perpetuating cycles of discrimination and inequality.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals call for global action to end this human rights violation by 2030. Ending child marriage globally and addressing its consequences will contribute to the achievement of these goals as well as already articulated administration priorities, including addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic globally and driving progress on ending structural and systemic inequalities. Ending child marriage will also have a long-term impact on economic prosperity and sustainable development around the world. According to a [report by the World Bank and the International Center for Research on Women](#) (ICRW), the global gains from ending child marriage could reach more than \$500 billion per year.

Furthermore, emerging evidence across contexts has shown that climate change and climate-driven floods, droughts, and famines have increased girls' risks of child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence. Yet, rarely, if ever, is child marriage prevention and response captured in climate change-related strategies, policies, and plans, or are adolescent girls meaningfully engaged in the development and monitoring of such plans.

The U.S. government's decades of experience in empowering adolescent girls, addressing gender-based violence, and advancing gender equality across sectors has yielded significant gains in adolescent girls' health and education outcomes and has demonstrated the impact that focused government initiatives can have to drive urgently needed progress. We ask now for your commitment and leadership to ending child marriage globally to be prioritized.

We strongly urge this administration to publicly announce at the quickly approaching Generation Equality Forum in Paris its intention to spearhead a new initiative on ending child marriage and investing in adolescent girls globally.

We thank you for your leadership and actions in support of adolescent girls and global gender equality and look forward to working with you and colleagues across the U.S. government in furtherance of ending child marriage and addressing the needs of already married girls.

Signed,

4Girls GLocal Leadership (4GGL)
Advancing Girls' Education in Africa
AfricAid
CARE USA
ChildFund
Education Development Center (EDC)
Every Mother Counts
Food for the Hungry
Friends of UNFPA
Futures Without Violence
Girl Determined
Girl Rising
Girl Up, United Nations Foundation
Global Campaign for Education-US
GreeneWorks
Her Story Mentorship
Human Rights Watch
InterAction
International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law (IANGEL)
International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
International Justice Mission

Just Like My Child Foundation
Kakenya's Dream
KIOO Project
National Association of Social Workers
Oxfam America
Pathfinder International
PDRC International
People Serving Girls at Risk (PSGR)
Plan International USA
Population Institute
Population Media Center
Project Concern International
Save the Children
Seeds to Sew International
Shadhika
The Hunger Project
The Voices and Faces Project
The Women's Collective
Together for Girls
Too Young to Wed
UNICEF USA
Women's Learning Partnership
Women Pillar Alliance (WOPA)
Women's Refugee Commission
World Education, Inc.
World Vision US

CC:

Antony Blinken, Secretary of State
Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor
Linda Thomas Greenfield, US Ambassador to the United Nations
Samantha Power, Administrator, USAID
Jennifer Klein, Co-Chair, White House Gender Policy Council
Julissa Reynoso Pantaleón, Co-Chair, White House Gender Policy Council