

# Kigali Declaration

Moving from aspiration to action to prevent  
and eliminate child, early and forced marriage  
in the Commonwealth

May 2015



The Commonwealth

We, National Human Rights Institutions and members of the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI) attending a working session on the imperative to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage, on 5–6 May 2015 in Kigali, Rwanda:

**Affirm** the values and principles contained in the Commonwealth Charter.

**Cognisant** of the commitments made by Heads of Government at the 2011 and 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings; as well as the Human Rights Council Resolution 23/24 of September 2013 *Strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage: challenges, achievements, best practices and implementation gaps.*

**Note** that participants to the 2013 Commonwealth Roundtable on Early and Forced Marriage "recognised the unique added value of NHRIs in the promotion and protection of human rights in relation to EFM. This includes human rights education, conducting enquiries, receiving individual complaints and providing redress to victims (...) Participants recognised the educative role that civil society organisations (CSOs) and NHRIs can play in building the capacities of the judiciary, the police, parliamentarians and other actors. Participants also felt that NHRIs and CSOs could play a role in monitoring, data collection, research and analysis."

**Concerned** by estimates that over the next decade 140 million girls under the age of 18 years will be forced to marry and that half of these girls live in Commonwealth member states.

**Concerned** that child, early and forced marriage disproportionately affects girls as it is cause and consequence of entrenched gender inequality and unequal relations of power between men and women, boys and girls.

**Concerned** that child, early and forced marriage impedes girls and women's enjoyment of human rights, including the right to education, employment, participation, the right to health including sexual and reproductive health rights, and the right to freedom from violence and exploitation.

**Recognise** that child, early and forced marriage remains one of the most debilitating human rights violations facing women and girls.

**Recognise** that child, early and forced marriage results in lower education, personal agency, empowerment and economic productivity of girls and women and therefore also undermines overall family, community, national, regional and global development efforts.

**Reaffirming** the human right to full and free consent to marriage as established by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as the

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the need to protect children as established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Affirm** our commitment to respect and promote the core values and principles set out in the Commonwealth Charter, in particular the importance of access to health and education, gender equality, and the roles of young people and civil society.

**Inspired** by recommended actions in the 2014 Joint General Recommendation on harmful practices by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

**Having explored** the specific causes and consequences of child, early and forced marriage in our countries as well as the adequacy of national laws and enforcement mechanisms, awareness and training, support and services for victims.

**Having shared** best practices from NHRI interventions and collaboration with governments, civil society organisations, parliaments and national, regional and international organisations to address child, early and forced marriage through improved data collection, monitoring and reporting of prevalence; legal reform and enforcement; education and empowerment; awareness raising; service delivery; and monitoring and assessment of impact.

We declare and commit as follows:

1. To develop practical action plans for our institutions to support the prevention and elimination of child, early and forced marriage;
2. To advocate and support further sustained collaboration among stakeholders in regard to implementation of international and regional obligations relating to child, early and forced marriage;
3. To strengthen our institutional capacity to handle complaints and conduct investigations;
4. To strengthen our monitoring of the enforcement of laws;
5. To develop and/or strengthen effective referral to appropriate services;
6. To promote effective implementation and monitoring of the state's international and regional obligations through greater engagement with human rights mechanisms.
7. To support our governments by advocating for legal reform including bringing the age of marriage in line with international standards and strengthening systems for the registration of marriages and births;
8. To support and advocate for reliable data collection on prevalence of child, early and forced marriage as well as on the impact of strategies to prevent and end early and forced marriage;
9. To encourage dialogue and promote partnership collaboration with local,

- traditional and religious leaders to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage;
10. To encourage dialogue with men and boys to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage;
  11. To advocate and promote compulsory quality education for all children at primary and secondary education levels;
  12. To advocate for and support the inclusion of human rights education in the school and tertiary curricula;
  13. To collaborate with relevant stakeholders to develop the capacities of professionals working in health, education, law enforcement, justice, and child welfare;
  14. To work with relevant stakeholders to identify vulnerable communities, provide protection and promote empowerment within the identified communities;
  15. To advocate for and support national and regional policies and strategies for the prevention and elimination of child, early and forced marriage;
  16. To advocate for and support ongoing Commonwealth efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage;
  17. To seek technical assistance and cooperation from the Commonwealth Secretariat to operationalise this Declaration for the benefit of girls and women at risk of child, early and forced marriage in the Commonwealth.

**Adopted at Kigali, Rwanda  
6 May 2015**

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National Human Rights Commission  
of Bangladesh

Ombudsman of Botswana

National Commission on Human Rights and  
Freedoms, Cameroon

Commission on Human Rights and  
Administrative Justice of Ghana

National Human Rights Commission  
of India

Office of the Public Defender, Jamaica

Kenya National Commission  
on Human Rights

Malawi Human Rights Commission

Human Rights Commission of Malaysia

Human Rights Commission  
of the Maldives

National Commission for Human Rights  
of Mozambique

Office of the Ombudsman of Namibia

National Human Rights Commission  
of Nigeria

Rwanda National Commission for  
Human Rights

South African Human Rights Commission

Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

Commission for Human Rights and  
Good Governance Tanzania

Uganda Human Rights Commission

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Ombudsman of Samoa