



PRESS RELEASE

The Republic of Madagascar Launches AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa

Antananarivo, 02 June 2015 – “It is important to respect human rights particularly the rights of the child as a main component in the efforts against this harmful practice and Madagascar cannot progress unless we seriously address child marriage which is an impediment to our development” says Her Excellency, Mrs. Vohangy Rajaonarimampianina, First Lady of the Republic of Madagascar.

In her remarks, the First Lady noted that Madagascar has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with devastating effects on the lives of the girls affected. There has been a downward trend in the rate of child marriage in Madagascar, following the law passed in 2007, setting the marriageable age at 18 for girls and boys alike. Previously, girls could be married at 14 and boys at 17. However, child marriage is still common, especially in rural areas where traditional marriage ceremonies are common; mostly backed by age long and strong affinity to social and cultural norms. Her Excellency stressed her full commitment that her office will continue to lead with stakeholders in ending child marriage in Madagascar by also strengthening the national policy to end child marriage.

Recent findings show that nearly half of all Malagasy women (48 per cent) aged 20-24 were married or cohabiting before the age of 18. One in nine girls are married by the age of 15 years. Child marriage has several harmful effects on the overall wellbeing of young girls who are not psychologically, emotionally and physically ready for conjugal life. It increases the probability of having children at a younger age, which increases the risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, maternal mortality and obstetric fistula. Complications of pregnancy and childbearing are the leading cause of death for girls 15-19 in Madagascar.

The launch of the campaign in Madagascar provides an opportunity to further the resolve of the government to continue working with partners, the police, policymakers, women’s associations, local communities and traditional leaders in order to raise awareness on and end gender-based violence, including child marriage. "We will encourage the need for providing girls the chance to be well educated and also the protection of girls who have already been married from abuse within the marriage", said the UNFPA resident representative- Mr Mamadou Dicko

The launch of the campaign which took place in Antananarivo with the official launch in the morning and panel discussion on ending child marriage in the afternoon, was also attended by Government representatives from different Ministries including the lead Ministry on the child marriage Campaign- Ministry of Population, Social Protection and Gender, members of communities affected by child marriage, representatives from the AU Commission, UNFPA, UNICEF and civil society partners. There were musical performances by the children and youth cultural groups, all focusing attention on the harmful tradition practice of children marriage. The closing remark was given by the Prime Minister- Mr Jean Ravelonarivo he reinforced the need for collective action and commitment by all attending

stakeholders to end child marriage in Madagascar and work towards provision of equal opportunities to both boys and girls as they are the backbone of the country's human capital. The Campaign was launched with a brief statement of commitment to ending child marriage in Madagascar by H.E. First Lady.

About the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa

The campaign was launched at the continental level in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 29 May, 2014, during the Conference of Ministers of Social Development. It aims at ending child marriage by: (i) supporting legal and policy actions in the protection and promotion of human rights, (ii) mobilizing continental awareness of the negative socio-economic impact of child marriage, (iii) building social movement and social mobilization at the grassroots and national levels; and (iv) increasing the capacity of non-state actors to undertake evidence based policy advocacy including the role of youth leadership through new media technology, monitoring and evaluation among others.

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