Town Hall Meeting on Campaign to End Child Marriage
A. BACKGROUND

Every year, about 14 million adolescent and teenage girls are married\(^1\), in most cases without their consent. Although boys are affected by this practice, child marriage disproportionately affects girls. In developing countries, one in three girls is married by age of 18 years; and one in nine by the age of 15. Research shows that if the present trends continue, by 2030, the number of child brides marrying each year will grow at more than 14% from 14.2 in 2010 to 15.1 million.\(^2\) Although the largest numbers of child brides are in South Asian countries, the countries with the highest rates of child marriage are in Africa. Of the 41 countries world-wide with prevalence rates of 30% or more, 30 are from Africa\(^3\).

Despite the prohibition of harmful practices in numerous international and regional human rights instruments, child marriage remains a widely ignored violation of the health and development rights of girls and young women. Child marriage infringes upon most of the rights of the affected children. Child brides are burdened with the responsibilities of becoming wives and mothers with little support, resources or life experiences to meet these challenges. Compared to their unmarried peers or to older women, girls who marry before the age of 18 years are likely to have lower educational attainment, greater chances of having unwanted pregnancies, and are at a greater risk of sexual and reproductive health morbidities and maternal mortality. Other consequences include greater exposure to HIV infection, violence in the home and limited freedom to actively interact with peers or participate in activities at community level. Child marriage is therefore a uniquely challenging impediment to the attainment of social and human development outcomes.

There urgent need to do things differently, if the international development agenda agreed by governments within the last decade, particularly the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and more the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are to become a reality.

It is upon this background that the African Union will be launching a two year campaign against child marriage, to accelerate the end of child marriage in Africa by enhancing continental awareness of the effects of the practice. On the eve of the continent wide launch of this Campaign, the African Union Commission will organize a Town Hall meeting of all relevant stakeholders whose work relates to the issue of child marriage. The town hall meeting will also serve as a precursor to the subsequent and similar activities that will precede launches of this campaign at national level.

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\(^1\) Estimates by UN Population Fund (UNFPA) from Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage, 2012

\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) The countries are: Zimbabwe 31%; Senegal 33%; Congo 33%; Gabon 33%; Sudan 34%; Sao Tome & Principe 34%; Benin 34%; Cote d’Ivoire 34%; Mauritania 35%; Gambia 36%; Cameroun 36%; Tanzania 37%; Liberia 38%; Nigeria 39%; DRC 39%; Ethiopia 41%; Zambia 42%; Somalia 45%; Uganda 46%; Eritrea 47%; Burkina Faso 48%; Sierra Leone 48%; Madagascar 48%; Malawi 50%; Mozambique 52%; Mali 55%; Central African Republic 61%; Guinea 63%; Chad 72%; and Niger 75%. Source: UNFPA database using household surveys (DHS and MICS) completed during the period 2000-2011
B. RATIONALE

More than ever before, there is now global and continental awareness of the prevalence and impact of child marriage on both human rights and a range of development outcomes. There is also gradual political will in a number of the regional economic communities (RECs), governments, research institutions, international organizations, civil society organizations, and the private sector to establish and increase targeted laws, policies, financial and technical resources towards prevention and mitigation of child marriage in the region. In order to accelerate the end of child marriage in Africa, a coordinated and focused effort is needed to build girls' health, social and economic resilience and to promote gender equitable legal and policy frameworks that are effectively implemented.

Recognizing that efforts to end child marriage require a collaborative approach, the African Union Commission will use the Town Hall meeting as a starting point to catalyze commitment, involvement and collaboration of a diverse network of stakeholders that bring unique perspectives, experiences and resources to ensure the effective implementation of the AU’s campaign. The deliberations during the Town Hall Meeting will provide guidance that will assist the AU during its two year campaign in ensuring that young girls in Africa can reach their full potential, through; enactment of adequate legal and policy frameworks, promotion of gender equality and girls’ empowerment, and calling for the abandonment of harmful social and cultural practices such as child marriage.

C. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the town hall meeting will be to:

i. Create a platform for dialogue on the issue of child marriage across a spectrum of stakeholders thus enhancing the understanding of the basic tenets of child marriage;

ii. Set the ground for the formal launch of the campaign by highlighting the factors that promote and reinforce child marriage;

iii. Highlight the consequences of child marriage with a bid to get the commitment and consensus of all stakeholders’ in eradicating this harmful practice; and

iv. Promote multi-sectoral coordination among key stakeholders for the effective implementation of the launch.

D. METHODOLOGY

The town hall meeting will be interactive and less formal. It will feature experience sharing from individuals who have been affected by the issue of child marriage, and consider comments and recommendations for eradicating this practice on the African continent.
To ensure that the message trends across the Africa, the meeting will be streamed online, the media will be invited to cover the entire event, and other social media tools such as Google Hangout will be employed in order to keep the public engaged in the discussion.

**E. DATE AND VENUE**

The town hall meeting will take place on the 28th of May at the headquarters of the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia prior to the formal and official launch of the Campaign on Child Marriage in Africa, scheduled for the 29th of May, 2014,

**F. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

Additional information could be obtained from:

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