

***Girls Not Brides* – a new global partnership to end child marriage**

Announced at 2011 Clinton Global Initiative Annual Meeting

New CGI Commitments turn spotlight on a neglected issue that affects hundreds of millions of girls and women

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A new global effort to end child marriage was announced today at the 2011 Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) Annual Meeting, turning the international spotlight on a harmful traditional practice that affects the lives of 10 million girls in dozens of countries around the world every year.

Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage was announced at CGI by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Mary Robinson of The Elders; Ford Foundation President Luis Ubiñas; and NoVo Foundation President and Co-Chair Jennifer Buffett.

Archbishop Tutu described child marriage as “a practice that robs millions of girls of their childhood, their rights and their dignity. I find it astounding that this issue does not receive far greater attention. Together, we and our partners commit to working together to end it.”

Child marriage affects millions of children, predominantly girls, every year. In the developing world, one in three girls is married before the age of 18, one in seven before she is 15.

“This harmful practice contributes significantly to core development challenges – poverty, education, maternal and child health, HIV and gender equality,” said Mary Robinson. “Yet, disturbingly, it has remained on the sidelines of mainstream development debate. That can’t be allowed to continue, because, beyond the numbers, this is about the human rights and squandered potential of hundreds of millions of girls and the women they become.”

The *Girls Not Brides* partnership will bring together a wide range of players, from community organisations on the front lines of the issue to international agencies, governments and all those who have an interest in ending child marriage.

While there are a number of projects addressing child marriage already – many of them by courageous leaders in communities where the practice occurs most frequently – they tend to be small and have lacked the critical mass needed to achieve significant change nationally or globally. This effort will change that, making it possible to vastly reduce child marriage around the world.

In their announcement today, as CGI members, The Elders, the Ford Foundation, the Nike Foundation and the NoVo Foundation committed to:

- Building *Girls Not Brides* into a fully-fledged partnership organisation, with at least 150 members running programmes in at least 20 countries by December 2012.
- Raising US\$3 million to ensure the functioning of the partnership, the creation of a secretariat, and to seed activities to end child marriage in priority countries.
- Establishing a network of donors to support programmes to end child marriage worldwide.

Several other donors have already joined the effort, including The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Open Society Foundations.

“Women's rights start with protecting girls,” Luis Ubiñas said. “It’s a very human issue, one at the center of a wide range of challenges girls and women still face. We don’t think we can work on reproductive health, women’s rights, girls’ education, or women’s economic empowerment without addressing a widespread and fundamental issue like this one.”

Child marriage usually marks the end of a girl’s schooling, limiting her opportunity to develop skills that can help her to earn an income and lift herself and her children out of poverty.

It also puts girls at greater risk of disease, injury and death due to early sexual activity and childbearing. According to UNICEF, a girl under the age of 15 is five times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than a woman in her 20s. As a consequence of their physical immaturity, an additional 100,000 girls each year live with the disability of fistula resulting from obstructed labor.

Young wives’ low status in their marital households condemns them to long hours of drudgery, social isolation, greater risks of physical or sexual violence, and very little say over anything that affects them. And disadvantages among girls who marry young are frequently transmitted to the next generation – their babies are much more likely to die in their first year than infants born to women over 20.

“Investing in girls is the single most important action we can take to improve their lives and our world,” said Jennifer Buffett, President and Co-Chair of the NoVo Foundation. “When a girl is in school instead of in a marriage, the positive results ripple out not just in her own life, but into

her family, community, and nation, and down to future generations. Girls can be central to solving our world's problems, but for that to happen we must end child marriage."

While a number of organisations and donors have been investing in programmes to address girls' reproductive health and rights, schooling and life skills, relatively little attention has been paid to child marriage, despite the scale and dramatic impact of this practice. Child marriage lies at the intersection of all of these issues, and requires specific attention and resources to confront this devastating practice.

What's new is that The Elders, long committed to addressing gender inequality, have decided to put their weight behind efforts to end child marriage. With core funding and technical input from the Ford Foundation, as well as early support from the NoVo Foundation and the Nike Foundation, The Elders are spearheading efforts to address both the lack of international visibility and leadership on the issue of child marriage, and to support greater coordination and collective action, especially among those working at the community and national levels.

"I am confident that change can happen very quickly," said Desmond Tutu. "No woman who has had the benefit of staying at school and marrying later in life can inflict child marriage on her daughters. We can end child marriage in a generation."

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About the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI)

Established in 2005 by President Bill Clinton, the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) convenes global leaders to devise and implement innovative solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges. Since 2005, CGI Annual Meetings have brought together nearly 150 current and former heads of state, 18 Nobel Prize laureates, hundreds of leading CEOs, heads of foundations, major philanthropists, directors of the most effective nongovernmental organizations, and prominent members of the media. These CGI members have made more than 2,000 commitments, which have already improved the lives of 300 million people in more than 180 countries. When fully funded and implemented, these commitments will be valued in excess of \$63 billion. The 2011 Annual Meeting will take place Sept. 20-22 in New York City.

This year, CGI also convened CGI America, a meeting focused on developing ideas for driving economic growth in the United States. The CGI community also includes CGI U, which hosts an annual meeting for undergraduate and graduate students, and CGI Lead, which engages a select group of young CGI members for leadership development and collective commitment-making.

More information

- The Elders: www.theelders.org
- Ford Foundation: www.fordfoundation.org
- NoVo Foundation: www.novofoundation.org
- Clinton Global Initiative: www.clintonglobalinitiative.org