

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

27 June 2018

At biggest ever global meeting on ending child marriage, civil society calls for renewed action to end the practice by 2030



Photo: Girls Not Brides / Graham Crouch

KUALA LUMPUR – Progress to end child marriage must be accelerated, urged civil society organisations from around the world gathered in Malaysia this week for the world’s biggest ever [global meeting on ending child marriage](#), hosted by *Girls Not Brides*,

The three-day meeting was attended by almost 500 activists from more than 70 countries, including civil society and youth, along with representatives from governments, donors, religious networks, the UN and the African Union. Collectively, they called for renewed action to end child marriage, which affects 12 million girls globally every year.

Pakistani youth activist and International Children’s Peace Prize 2017 nominee Hadiqa Bashir, 17, started her organisation Girls United for Human Rights after her family tried to force her into marriage aged 11. She said involving young people in efforts to address child marriage was “essential”.

“It’s young people who are affected by child marriage so if we’re going to change anything we need them to be part of the solution,” she said. “I’m here because I want change. Girls



everywhere are suffering from so many kinds of violence, and I want to give them a voice so they can speak out for their rights. I've been so inspired by all the people I've met here. It gives me strength to know there are so many people working to end child marriage around the world."

Over 650 million women alive today were married as children. Child marriage violates girls' rights to health, education and opportunity and exposes them to violence throughout their lives. Evidence shows that ending child marriage will catalyse global efforts to improve health, education and address poverty.

Girls Not Brides, a global partnership of civil society organisations working to end child marriage, announced at the meeting on Monday that they have reached the 1000-member mark, and now have members in 97 countries around the world.

"A decade ago hardly anyone was talking about child marriage. We now have over 1000 members across the globe, which shows just how far the global movement to end child marriage has come," said Lakshmi Sundaram, Executive Director of *Girls Not Brides*, but warned that there was still "a long way to go" before child marriage becomes a thing of the past.

"Globally, the rates of child marriage are slowly declining, but progress isn't happening fast enough," she said. "The world has pledged to end child marriage for good by 2030 but we need to see much more funding and action if we want to achieve that target. We won't make the progress we need unless those working in health, education and other related sectors make it their own business to end child marriage.

Participants at the meeting included African Union Goodwill Ambassador Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Pakistani womens' rights activist and winner of the US State Department's International Women of Courage Award 2015 Tabassum Adnan, and delegates from as far afield as Afghanistan, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Zimbabwe.

Mabel van Oranje, chair of *Girls Not Brides*, said: "Civil society organisations are crucial to ending child marriage, especially those working directly with girls and communities. At a time when space for civil society is shrinking in too many places, this meeting allowed those working ceaselessly on this issue to learn from each other, discuss successes and challenges, and plan next steps in our efforts to create a world in which every girl can decide whether, when and whom to marry."

"I have met people here from all over the world who are working on this issue. It has shown me that child marriage isn't just a problem in my own country – it's a global problem. That's why we need a global solution," said Nixon Ochatre, founder of the Amani Initiative in Uganda. "Now we need to go back to our communities and share what we've learned, and go back to our governments to make sure they take action."

ENDS



For more information or to arrange interviews with Lakshmi Sundaram or Mabel van Oranje, please contact: Charlotte Rose, Media Officer: charlotte.rose@girlsnotbrides.org / +44 (0)7436095435

To download photos from the *Girls Not Brides* Global Meeting 2018 please visit our Flickr page: www.flickr.com/photos/girlsnotbrides

Notes to editors

About *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*

[*Girls Not Brides*](#) is a global partnership of more than 1000 civil society organisations from over 97 countries committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their potential.

Members are based throughout Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas. We share the conviction that every girl has the right to lead the life that she chooses and that, by ending child marriage, we can achieve a safer, healthier and more prosperous future for all.

Follow us on Twitter [@GirlsNotBrides](#) or Facebook [/GirlsNotBrides](#)