



THE PERMANENT MISSION  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
TO THE  
UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS  
IN GENEVA

January 28, 2016

**OHCHR REGISTRY**

Ms. Adwoa Kufuor  
Research and Right to Development Division  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Geneva, Switzerland

29 JAN. 2016

Recipients : *A. Kufuor*  
.....

Dear Ms. Kufuor:

Enclosure .....  
.....

Thank you for your inquiry. Child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) has devastating impacts on girls around the world. The United States takes a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to prevent and respond to CEFM both domestically and internationally. As President Obama recently stated during his trip to Africa, "There's no reason that young girls should suffer genital mutilation. There's no place in civilized society for the early or forced marriage of children. These traditions may date back centuries; they have no place in the 21st century." The United States is happy to provide the following information regarding ongoing activities promoting progress toward ending child, early, and forced marriage both domestically and abroad.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Department of State (DOS) work internationally to prevent and respond to CEFM. In FY 2015, USAID doubled its investment to prevent CEFM and support married children, building on decades of engagement on these issues. USAID provided health care and access to education to married children and adolescents and educated students, teachers, parents, and community leaders, through programs including the Safe Schools program in Nepal, focusing on the importance of delaying marriage and the harmful effects of CEFM. USAID also conducted research to study the effectiveness of programs to delay child, early, and forced marriage in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Burkina Faso. Based on the findings of this research, the programs were later expanded to additional high-prevalence regions. Data on the impact of programs in Tanzania and Ethiopia data was shared through a global dissemination of results (available here: <http://www.popcouncil.org/research/building-an-evidence-base-to-delay-marriage-in-sub-saharan-africa>) in the fall of 2015. End line surveys and final analysis of the findings concerning Burkina Faso will be completed in 2016. This data may be particularly useful as OHCHR completes its report on best practices to prevent and respond to CEFM. In Bangladesh, the Protecting Human Rights program supports the development and momentum on amendments from the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (MOWCA). A divisional level workshop on child marriage was held and one immediate outcome was the announcement of an annual national day on prevention of child marriage, to be observed every 29<sup>th</sup> of September in Bangladesh. In addition, in

September 2015 USAID released a resource guide, attached, on preventing and responding to CEFM. This resource guide provides information on how partners and USAID sectors, missions, and staff can integrate CEFM prevention and response into their programming.

The Department of State continues to strengthen reporting on CEFM in its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. In 2015, the Department of State launched a new program in Benin to raise community awareness of the harmful effects of early and forced marriage and the law prohibiting forced marriage. The program also established "one-stop" gender-based violence (GBV) care centers to provide medical, legal, psychosocial, and economic support to survivors of GBV, including married children. This year, the Department of State will undertake a new \$1,000,000 effort in one or more of Syria's neighboring countries impacted by the Syrian refugee crisis to help prevent and respond to early and forced marriage. Programmatic efforts will focus on mobilizing caregivers, religious leaders, and community stakeholders to increase understanding of the benefits of delaying marriage for both girls and communities and to address the perception that early and forced marriage protects girls. The initiative will also focus on supporting civil society organizations and others working on protecting at-risk girls and providing services to married girls, as well as implementing programs that underscore the value of continuing access to secondary education for girls.

The Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) continues its efforts to safely and effectively assist in a variety of ways U.S. citizen victims of early and forced marriage who are overseas, including enhancing its guidance related to early and forced marriage for consular officers at U.S. embassies and consulates. Additionally, CA continues to work with offices within the DOS and other federal agencies to raise the issue of CEFM through public messaging, education, and provision of resources.

In March 2015, the Obama Administration announced Let Girls Learn, a whole-of-government initiative to ensure adolescent girls get the education they deserve, which, in turn, can serve as a protective factor against child, early, and forced marriage. This initiative recognizes that too often a girl who could improve her world is prevented from doing so by the circumstances of her birth or the customs of her community. The United States has also cosponsored resolutions on eliminating child, early, and forced marriage at the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council and made statements in multilateral fora condemning CEFM.

The United States is also working to finalize its adolescent girls strategy, which will include a strong focus on addressing CEFM. The strategy will be released in early 2016.

The Department of Homeland Security, through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), continues to train asylum, refugee, and overseas adjudications officers on the adjudication of gender-related protection claims, including those involving forced marriage. USCIS is also exploring ways it can provide assistance to individuals forced or coerced to sponsor a marriage-based immigrant visa petition. It is working to increase its outreach and awareness-raising efforts aimed at preventing forced marriage and informing individuals in forced marriage situations of their rights and available resources.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) funds several grant programs that provide for health and supportive services to address forced marriage in communities throughout the United States. For instance, the HHS-funded Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (API-GBV) has worked with Hmong women advocates since 2007 to understand the trends and issues in international marriages and to explore possible actions to address abusive international marriages. These efforts culminated in a seminal report (available here: [http://www.api-gbv.org/files/Abusive.International.Marriages\\_APIIDV\\_4.2013.pdf](http://www.api-gbv.org/files/Abusive.International.Marriages_APIIDV_4.2013.pdf)) on a deeply entrenched practice that is common in the Hmong community, presenting analysis, survivor stories, and strategies to address the problem. Launched in 2013, API-GBV's Building Our Future campaign to end domestic violence and abusive international marriages/relationships in the Hmong community has continued to grow exponentially, reaching 60,000 people in 2014. Another HHS grantee, the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC), is working to prevent and respond to forced marriage in African immigrant and refugee communities. IDVAAC partners with other NGOs and government agencies to address forced marriage, domestic violence, and related challenges in these communities.

We thank you for preparing a report on the important subject of child, early, and forced marriage, and look forward to its release.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keith Harper', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Keith M. Harper  
Ambassador  
U.S. Representative to the Human Rights Council