

## **\$45 Million Pledged to the Fight Against "Life Threatening" Child Marriage**

New York, USA: In a major new international initiative to protect girls, donors have pledged \$45 million to curb child marriage in developing countries and another \$10 million to improve girls' education.



**In praise of girls - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon and Archbishop Desmond Tutu at the UN**

Fund (UNFPA), Dr Babatunde Osotimehin. Guest Speaker Archbishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa, who won the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize, drew cheers when he compared child marriage to apartheid.

The plan was announced last Thursday (October 11) on the first-ever International Day of the Girl Child, and represents a major achievement at a time when funding for reproductive rights and health is under pressure. Several partners of The Advocacy Project (AP) work for girls' rights in Nepal and Kenya.

The highlight of last week's events was a high-level panel discussion at the United Nations in New York. Participants included UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and the Executive Director of the UN Population

Also on Thursday, US Secretary of State [Hillary Clinton announced](#) that the US government will treat child marriage as a human rights abuse and start monitoring the practice in its annual human rights report.

Of the \$45 million, [UNFPA will spend \\$20 million](#) over 5 years in 12 countries and [The Ford Foundation](#) will contribute another \$25 million to programs in Egypt, India, Africa and Central America. According to a new UNFPA report, [Marrying Too Young](#), one in every three young married women wed as a girl. If this trend continues, 37,000 girls under the age of 18 will marry each day by 2020.

Some girls are as young as 5 when they are married, says UNFPA. This marks "a violent and abrupt initiation into sexual relations" and can lead to "life-threatening health consequences." Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading killers of girls aged 15 to 19.

The new initiative was welcomed by Kakenya Ntaiya, the well-known Kenyan educationalist who has started a boarding school, the [Kakenya Center for Excellence](#) for underprivileged Maasai girls in western Kenya (photo). The school currently has 124 students, and their families agreed not to subject them to female genital cutting as a condition for enrollment.



Art workshop at Kakenya's school in Kenya

Dr Ntaiya said that education provides a strong protection against early marriage and cutting. "When we invest in girls' education, it creates profound positive outcomes that affect not only the girl herself, but her family and community as well," she said.



Surji Devi Ram of Kanakpur Village, Madhupatti VDC, Saptari District, Nepal

Another AP partner, the [Women's Reproductive Rights Program](#), has underscored the link between early marriage and uterine prolapse (fallen womb) in Nepal. Over 600,000 Nepali women suffer from prolapse and many are young: 41% of all young Nepali wives were married before the age of 18.

In a recent opinion piece for the [Kathmandu Post](#), Heather Webb, who is currently volunteering as an AP Peace Fellow at WRRP, pointed out that girls who marry young "are unable to take it easy from physically laborious fieldwork and housework during pregnancy, or to resist the sexual and childbearing demands of husbands."

Ms. Webb recalled meeting one young mother, Surji Devi Ram (left), who was married at 9, moved to her husband's home at 12, and suffered from prolapse (fallen womb) shortly after giving birth to her first child at the age of 16. Surji has now become an activist and heads the Women's Reproductive Rights Forum of Madhupatti.

- Read the 2012 UNFPA report, [Marrying Too Young](#)
- Watch video from the October 11 [High Level Discussion](#)
- Read [Heather Webb's Op-ed](#) in The Kathmandu Post
- Subscribe to [Heather Webb's blog](#)
- Read more about the inauguration of [International Day of the Girl Child](#).