



Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to speak.

I am Miriam Beike, a member of the Congregation of our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd speaking on behalf of 26 ECOSOC accredited organizations¹ representing the experiences of girls and women living in rural areas across the globe.

Girls and women in rural areas suffer multidimensional inequality, based on gender-specific discrimination and rural-specific disadvantages such as harmful social norms, extreme poverty, missing infrastructure and lack of basic services, which can lead to abuse and exploitation.

Child, early and forced marriage, including informal engagements that are equivalent to marriage, is a particular suffering for girls in rural areas. Such arrangements are a form of human trafficking, and leave girls at extreme risk for further trafficking.

A married girl has her childhood, wellbeing and children's rights taken from her. Early pregnancy causes acute and chronic health effects including sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, and unwanted pregnancies. According to UNICEF, complications during pregnancy or childbirth are the leading cause for the death of about 70,000 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 every year worldwide.

Other risks when a rural girl is married early include:

- Dropping out of school,
- Domestic violence,
- Becoming trapped in the cycle of poverty and patriarchal oppression.

¹ Carmelite NGO; Casa Generalizia Della Societa' Del Sacro Cuore; Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul; Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd; Congregations of St. Joseph; Dominican Leadership Conference; Edmund Rice International; Franciscans International; Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate; International Presentation Association; International Public Policy Institute; Loretto Community (Sisters of Loretto); Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Inc.; Passionists International; Partnership for Global Justice; Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary; Salvation Army; School Sisters of Notre Dame; Sisters of Charity Federation; Sisters of Mercy of the Americas; Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur; Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries; The Grail; UNANIMA International; Unchained at Last; VIVAT International

To ensure the full realization of SDG 5, and especially SDG targets 5.3, 3.1 and 16.2, we urge Member States to:

1. Enforce a universal minimum age of marriage of 18 years, in line with international human rights standards.
2. Introduce legislation at national level criminalizing the practice of child, early and forced marriage. Strengthen gender equality legislation ensuring accompanying social programs for girls' education and wellbeing.
3. Prioritize methodologies of empowerment and participation for all girls
4. Develop processes and referral mechanisms to identify cases of child, early and forced marriage, which include partnerships between government, local communities and NGOs.
5. Generate economic opportunities that increase participation in education and contribute to safe livelihoods including, cash transfers, school vouchers and payment of school related costs.
6. Engage in a whole-of-community approach to shift attitudes and behaviors toward child, early and forced marriage, incorporating men and boys.

Thank you !