

TARGETING GIRLS IN THE NAME OF TRADITION: CHILD MARRIAGE

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BEFORE THE
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CONTENTS

WITNESSES

Ambassador Melanne Vermeer, United States Department of State, Office of Global Women’s Issues.....	8
Francesca Moneti, UNICEF, Senior Child Protection Specialist.....	15
Anju Malhotra, Vice President of Research, Innovation and Impact, International Center for Research on Women.....	28
Kakenya Ntaiya, Founder, Kakenya Center for Excellence.....	36
Stephanie Baric, CARE USA, Senior Technical Adviser.....	42

APPENDIX

Hearing Notice.....	60
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THURSDAY, JULY 15, 2010

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,
Washington, D.C.

The Commission met, pursuant to call, at 1:54 p.m., in Room 2226, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. James P. McGovern [cochairman of the Commission] presiding.

Mr. McGOVERN. Welcome everybody. Good afternoon. I am Congressman Jim McGovern. I am the co-chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission.

We are going to begin this hearing. Unfortunately, we are going through a series of votes, so it is going to be a little bit disjointed. So I hope everybody will bear with us, because this is an important hearing.

Hillary Clinton says it takes a village. I say it takes an air conditioning unit. It is hot in here.

But, anyway, good afternoon and welcome to this very important hearing on the practice of child marriage and how it affects the development of girls around the globe.

I would very much like to thank Allison McGuire, who serves as a fellow at the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, for her efforts in coordinating today's hearing, along with Hans Holgreffe and Elizabeth Hoffman. This is Allison's last week at the Human Rights Commission, and today's hearing is a testament to her fine work, and we are grateful for all of her dedication.

I don't want to take a lot of time with an opening statement because we have an absolutely stellar set of witnesses today, and I very much want our limited time to focus on hearing their testimony and insights. But I would like to share a personal story with all of you.

Child marriage, like so many issues, is so often abstract, something we hear about or read about, but it doesn't have any real, human form. As many of my colleagues are aware, I am a champion of the international school feeding programs, of making sure that

kids receive at least one nutritious meal a day each day in a school setting, and in particular our own George McGovern Robert Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, which I helped create and is administered by the USDA.

Study after study has shown that providing meals in school is the single most powerful incentive for poor families to send their kids and especially their daughters to school and to keep them in school. And once in school we know that young women who receive up to an 8th grade education marry later, have fewer children, have healthier children, are more economically productive, and they will send their own children to school.

In April of 2007, I traveled to Ethiopia, Kenya, and Eastern Chad looking at how our wide variety of food aid programs play a role in our regional health development food security and emergency operation projects and programs. It was an unforgettable experience.

In Kenya, I spent a day in part of Maasai country, a good 2 to 3 hours outside of Nairobi. I have great respect for the Maasai and the need to help them protect their ancestral lands and nature resources and preserve their language, heritage, and culture. But in the Maasai community there exists a belief that girls don't deserve an education and should remain at home doing chores. There is also a tradition of arranged marriages between girls as young as the age of 12 with men who are much older.

In the town of Kajiado there was a school run by the African Inland Church which I visited. It is an all-girls school that provides them with a quality education. There is a McGovern Dole program at the school administered by the World Food Program. It has boosted attendance and provides more than 600 girls with the nutrition they need to learn and be healthy.

The Kajiado school also serves as a rescue center for Maasai girls. Many actually board at the school out of fear that if they return home they will be forced into marriage. The girls put on a play for me and their parents and members of the surrounding community about the real challenges and terror they face with being forced into marriage. They sang about girls their own age trapped in marriages filled with violence, poverty, servitude, and even disease and death at a young age.

I was moved by a conversation I had with a girl named Grace who refused her father's demand that she marry an older man when she was only 13. In response, her father bought a sword with which to kill her; and he actually demanded she bring him the very weapon intended to end her life. She fled and on her own she walked many days to get to the Kajiado school where she is doing exceptionally well. She is safe, healthy, and with an education will have a bright future.

Based on my conversation with Grace, she is so exceptional she could end up being president of Kenya one day. So when we talk about child marriage I remember

Grace. I remember her courage, her fear, her determination, her incredible intelligence, and her brilliant smile.

So, having said that, I am thrilled that so many people are here, because this is an incredibly important issue.

Our first panelist is Ambassador Melanne Verveer, who is the Director of the Office of Global Women's Issues at the Department of State and an incredible champion of women of all ages around the world. I have gotten to know her over the years and have the utmost admiration for her and for all the causes she champions.

So, Ambassador, I welcome you to today's hearing; and we welcome your testimony.

STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR MELANNE VERVEER, UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF STATE, OFFICE OF GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ms. VERVEER. Thank you so much, Congressman McGovern; and thank you most especially for your leadership not just on this issue but the one that I worked closely with you over the years, as you said, food in the schools, which makes such an incredible difference, and for bringing us all together through the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission today to put a spotlight on this very serious issue of child marriage.

This is a harmful practice that robs children, primarily girls, of their childhood, imperils their health and their lives. We have an obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent such marriages, and states that fail to do so constitute a serious violation of human rights.

I also want to thank the coalition of NGOs who have worked tirelessly on behalf of girls who have been forced to marry at a very young age. Their advocacy in addressing this problem has made such an extraordinary difference. I want to thank the International Center for Research on Women, ICRW, CARE International, and UNICEF for their incredibly important work on this topic.

I also want to extend a word of thanks to Kakenya Ntaiya. She is a young woman I have come to know over the years. She has a very compelling personal story. Her commitment to the villagers where she comes from is one that inspires all of us, and I know that her testimony today will demonstrate that in spades.

In my travels, I have met with countless victims of child marriage who have suffered unspeakable abuses and whose stories underscore the dire need for action to combat this problem. I met a child named Nujood Ali from Yemen who was forced by her father at the age of nine to marry a man old enough to be her grandfather. He was violent and physically and sexually abused her. Desperate to gain her freedom, she found her way to a courthouse and to a female lawyer named Shada Nasser who came to her rescue. The lawyer bravely took her case when she heard why she was there and several other child brides who were also seeking divorces. Today, those girls are back in school where they belong, and they have their childhood back.

This issue is also a very serious problem in Afghanistan, where estimates indicate that as many as 70 percent of reported cases of domestic violence have roots in child marriage. In what appears to be a growing phenomena, some young brides are being sold by their husbands.

I recently visited a shelter there that housed several victims of child marriage. The girls told me about the horrors they had endured and why they had no choice but to run away and in so doing risk even greater punishment. The girls I met were fortunate to have been able to escape their circumstances and to find a very safe space. Far too often, this is not the case, and often these actions of self-preservation result in the individuals being severely punished.

Every day, approximately 25,000 girls become child brides. It is estimated that one in seven girls in the developing world marries before she turns 15. These young women are deprived of their childhoods, likely to be illiterate, and burdened with the responsibilities of marriage and family long before they are suited to take on such tasks.

It is unclear whether these statistics capture the totality of child marriages due to the lack of data and because traditional or religious marriages may not even be reported, but we know it is a huge problem for the estimated 40 million children or one third of the world total who are born unregistered each year.

Child marriage is a symptom of a greater epidemic. It is not enough to place a band aid on the problem by enacting or strengthening legal prohibitions on this practice, as important as that is. We must also address the virus causing the symptoms, the low status of women and girls.

Far too often as a female, a girl's only value is her ability to keep a house and produce children; and, as a result, parents see no reason to educate her or otherwise invest in her. Child marriage is inextricably linked to the cycle of poverty. Girls already in school are often forced to terminate their education when they marry, and married girls are prevented from taking advantage of education and work opportunities. And these are two of the most liberating aspects of investments that can make a difference for them.

Young brides often lack status and power within their marriages and households, making them more likely to experience domestic violence, marital rape, and other sexual abuse and be isolated from their family, friends, and communities. Studies show a strong association between child marriage and early childbirth. Girls below the age of 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than females in their 20s. Young mothers also have a high risk of suffering from obstetric fistula.

The children of teen mothers experience serious health consequences as well, and they are twice as likely to die than a child of a woman in her 20s. When they survive, the babies have higher rates of low birth rate, premature birth, and infant mortality than those born to older mothers.

Child marriage is also linked to the feminization of HIV/AIDS. For example, in Kenya and Zambia, 15 to 19 year old married girls were found to be 75 percent more likely to have HIV than unmarried girls.

Moral, social justice, and human rights grounds compel the eradication of child marriage. Ending child marriage is also an important component of sustainable development. It undermines nearly every millennium development goal. It is an obstacle to eradicating poverty and hunger, to achieving universal primary education, to promoting gender equality, and improving child and maternal health; and this can be eradicated only by addressing many of those broader development issues.

Community sensitization, grass roots mobilization efforts, and engagement with religious leaders are some vehicles for raising awareness of the harmful consequences of child marriage; and they are especially needed in rural areas. Countries should implement and enforce laws establishing a minimum age for marriage, requiring the registration of marriages and prosecuting the violators. The development community must also address the conditions in which child marriage flourishes.

Beyond working on the development agenda already in place, there must be an effort to increase the value of the girl child in the eyes of her community. For example, the residents of one village in the Bihar state of India planted mango trees when a girl is born. The trees are dedicated to paying for the expenses of her marriage. This simple practice has helped to take away the perceived financial burden associated with a daughter. In a state that has some of the highest rates of dowry death, there has not been a single incident of female set aside or dowry death in this village since the trees were planted.

Following a 2005 State Department survey worldwide that found child marriage to be a problem in 64 of 182 countries, our embassies are now required to report on this practice as part of the congressionally mandated Human Rights Report.

In addition, our embassies are working on the front lines to help raise awareness in countries where child marriage is a serious problem. In recent years, the State Department and USAID have supported a number of activities at the local, country, and global level aiming to reduce child marriage. Building girls an agency through formal education and livelihood training is absolutely crucial to these efforts. The background paper we have provided outlines details on many of these programs.

With your continued support, I hope we and the United States Government, in partnership with NGOs working on the ground with educators, health care providers, and other members of civil society, can marshal our combined efforts, build on successful practices, replicate successful models and strategies, and put child marriage where it belongs, in the dustbin of history.

Thank you.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much, and I appreciate your testimony.

But the fact is that this administration is making this issue a priority; and I, too, want to thank all the NGOs that have been involved in this issue raising awareness and also providing suggestions to other countries and to our country on how we can best deal with this issue.

Let me ask you just a few questions so I am clear on a couple things.

Regarding our own domestic policy here in the United States, I am told that it is our current--it is my current understanding that if a couple that includes a child bride comes to the United States to visit or to live, the current law enforcement policy is to only pursue legal action if the marriage is illegal in the country of origin. So if child marriage is legal in that country, the U.S. will not pursue any charges, including possible investigations of statutory rape.

Is that your understanding of what our domestic law is here and how do you handle those situations where people come in here where a marriage is legal in their country of origin but then they move here to the United States?

Ms. VERVEER. I know, Congressman, that these have been issues not just with respect to child marriage but also with female genital cutting, with other kinds of practices that by any definition would be viewed as violations of human rights. And we are working towards addressing them as problems that need to be dealt with, as opposed to saying that they are practices that we don't have a role in interfering with.

What specifically our policy is on child marriage, under the circumstances that you described, that were forced, where there might be violence in that family, I can't imagine that there wouldn't be some sort of legal interference, if you will. But I can check on that and get back to the Commission.

Mr. McGOVERN. The reason I ask is whether or not there is any kind of legislative action that is required. I mean, I think we all want to be helpful to what you are trying to do here; and if we can effect a little bit of change here in the United States and if it requires legislative language, then I would love to work with you to make sure that we move in that direction.

Ms. VERVEER. Well, typically, we would not consider proper actions that would be violations under the circumstances of all the laws that prevail, so I will get back to you on that.

Mr. McGOVERN. I appreciate that.

You mentioned that our embassies are required to report the status of the child marriage issue in various countries. But what I am told is, currently, the annual State Department's Human Rights Report that comes out does not consistently report on child

marriage. And one of the things that I think would be--and I am sure that you are probably already working on this--that I think would be helpful is that if it were consistently required as one of the reporting requirements that was in that actual Human Rights Report.

Because I think if this was a consistent part of the Human Rights Report, I know a lot of countries read with great interest the State Department's Human Rights Reports. And I know because I have ambassadors for all the different countries come and argue with me over different things that sometimes are in there that they don't like that don't reflect well on their country.

But I think it would have a great impact and maybe could be used as a tool to help some of the countries that we are talking about here change their laws. So if we could work with you on that or if I mean, I think you probably could do that anyway, is that right?

Ms. VERVEER. Absolutely. And it is a responsibility of the embassies.

And, obviously, what comes into the Human Rights Report is what we garner from what is happening on the ground. So it is possible that there is not always consistency in the reporting, but it is one of those areas. In fact, over the years, it has been an issue that has garnered political headlines in the country for precisely the reasons that you mentioned. And it is in many of those countries where we have programs that we are supporting to try to make a difference.

Mr. McGOVERN. But I think if we can make it kind of a consistent part of the human rights reporting in all the countries I think it would be helpful. Because sometimes it doesn't get reported on unless like a tragedy happens and then it becomes news in a particular country and becomes news here in the United States, you know, a public tragedy of some sort.

But, as you testified, so many young girls are kind of forced into situations where they are powerless and they don't have any advocates. And so a lot of what goes on is not necessarily publicly known. But I think that would be because I am trying to figure out how we here in the United States can influence other countries. And I think one of the ways and that is why I think this hearing is so important, that is why I think your role is so important is by raising awareness, by shining some light on this, I think it sometimes helps in a constructive way to put some pressure on people in these various countries to kind of do the right thing. And so that is why I kind of raise that.

You talked about the relationship between child marriage and public health concerns which are inextricably linked. And I am wondering whether or not we could have some impact by kind of raising this issue in the context of the positive impact that the prevention of child marriage could have on global health initiatives, and that would be something I would be interested in hearing.

Ms. VERVEER. Congressman, I think that is an excellent idea. In fact, it often comes up when one talks about the overall manifestation of violence against women and girls. And, for example, in discussions of HIV/AIDS and the alarming increase that still exists among adolescents, for example, we don't hear enough about how violence and child marriage, particularly the kind of experiences that more often than not are occurring in those relationships, factor in.

I think that is a very good idea, that we consistently in talking not just about the violence side but the health side talk about the consequences. And I think the legislation, the sense of Congress that you and Congresswoman McCollum have introduced, talks about the toll of this issue on so many of the things that our country cares about in terms of development across the board. And this is certainly one of those areas that extracts a tremendous toll both in maternal mortality, obstetrical fistula, HIV/AIDS, and all the other components. And you are right. We ought to be making that relationship more strong.

Mr. McGOVERN. I just have one other question. I have to go run and vote, and I promise to be right back, but I don't want to have to keep you here longer than necessary. But while there is not an authoritative definition of the term "child marriage", the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women set applicable standards. In general, those countries determine minimum age requirements in domestic legislation. Do you believe that a binding international definition would make a positive difference in the combat against child marriage? And, if so, what can we do to help make that happen?

Ms. VERVEER. Well, I think it is really important to stress what those key ingredients would be: consent, no coercion, the forced nature of what we see and know, and to ensure that the girl, the woman, is physically and psychologically mature to take on the responsibilities and that she can cope with these situations. So I think we know what the component elements are, even though there is differences in terms of the age.

The Convention for the Elimination of Violence Against Women sets 18 years as the optimal. So I think the more we can talk about this, bring this into the fora where it needs to be discussed and underscore the consequences for not doing anything, that would all make a difference.

Mr. McGOVERN. Let me just close by saying I am really happy that you are taking this on. Because I have known you for many years and I know that because you are leading this effort here that this is a very serious effort by this administration. I appreciate your testimony. I appreciate you highlighting this issue, which is obviously of great interest to so many people. This hearing room is packed because people are concerned about this issue, and young kids and not so young kids are here today.

But I am really grateful to you and to this administration, to the Secretary of State, for championing this issue; and we want to work with you. We have a bipartisan commission here.

Unfortunately, we are in the middle of votes. And the other bad news is that this is the last vote of the week, so everybody jets off to their planes. I am coming back, though.

But there is great interest and there is a great desire by people here to want to help you in any way you think is appropriate. So I just want to end by saying, if you need us for anything, call us.

Ms. VERVEER. I think we have been doing that for a long time, Congressman.

Mr. McGOVERN. Absolutely. Whether it is legislative or whether or not we can help kind of support some of your statements. But I am grateful, and I thank you for being here.

Ms. VERVEER. Well, I think for the children here it is a classic example of why we need to be civically engaged, and it is a lesson that one can't learn too young in life.

Mr. McGOVERN. We are going to make a difference on this issue.

I am going to recess the hearing briefly so I can vote, and I will run back, and we will do the second panel. Thank you.

[Recess.]

Mr. McGOVERN. Our next panelist will be Francesca Moneti from UNICEF, a Senior Child Protection Specialist. We are honored to have you here. Thank you so much for waiting while we are having votes. I appreciate that, and we look forward to your testimony.

STATEMENT OF FRANCESCA MONETI, UNICEF SENIOR CHILD PROTECTION SPECIALIST

Ms. MONETI. Chairman McGovern, it is actually very much my honor to be here and an honor for UNICEF to be part of this group of people who are all in support of the end of child marriage in the entire world. We, of course, like to play our part, and we are very happy to see everyone here who is playing an important role.

We, of course, know that child marriage affects millions of girls in all regions of the world and especially in South Asia and in Africa. In Bangladesh and in five western central African countries, six of every ten girls are married before the age of 18.

As noted by Ambassador Verveer and the supporters of H.R. 2103, child marriage is a violation of human rights, and it has very negative consequences for children. Child marriage is a social norm. It is part of a set of social norms that are fundamentally rooted in gender discrimination. And one of the norms that is closely associated with child marriage is early and continuous child bearing.

So what does that mean? That means that girls are not only expected to marry early but they are also expected to give birth early; and indeed they bear children at a very young age, as early as 12 or 13 years of age. And at times they become pregnant even younger.

We have children with us here today, and I am very happy to see that. I imagine some of you must be about 8 or 9 years old, 10, 11, 12? 10. As young as the girls with us today could be married and within 2 years they would be pregnant.

Now, as their bodies are not fully developed for giving birth at that age, their pregnancy obviously has complications for the child mother and for the baby. We have tens of thousands of girls who die every year as a result of premature pregnancy. And, as Ambassador Verveer also pointed out, even if the child mother survives, there are other consequences for her and for her baby.

But there is something that is less commonly known. When a child becomes pregnant, her growth hormone stops working for her. It works uniquely for the fetus. So what happens? She stops growing. And what does that mean? It means she becomes stunted. And a stunted mother, or in this case child, a stunted child will give birth to a stunted child typically. So it is intergenerational.

It goes on and gets worse. Our nutritionist colleagues are telling us now based on new data that the single most important problem in nutrition and in stunting is adolescent pregnancy. So this is a huge problem.

The child, of course, that is born to a child mother also has a very high risk of death. A child born to a girl less than 19 years of age has a 60 percent greater chance of dying than if it was born from an older person.

How can we possibly succeed in our shared goals of reducing maternal mortality and child mortality if child marriage persists? It will be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Now, do we know how to address child marriage? Do we have positive experience based on which we can design policies and programs? The answer is yes to both of those questions.

UNICEF has been working very closely with both development partners, some of whom are here, and academic partners, including some of the top social science academics in the United States. We have been applying the understanding gained, and the results are extremely encouraging. We know from experience that when provided with the "appropriate" support and I have put into quotes appropriate support and resources, communities are able to abandon child marriage and other harmful practices on a large scale.

Now, I have used the word "abandon" child marriage, and I use the word abandon not in a negative sense. We think abandon like abandon your child. That is a terrible thing to do. But why do we use the word abandonment? Because it is people that have themselves to choose to abandon the practice that it be sustained forever. So it is their choice. It is their decision.

You see, because child marriage persists, there are interconnected social and economic factors that lead to its continuation. Parents marry their girls early because they believe they are expected to do so. Everybody does it. Everybody has always done it. If they don't do it, they believe they will be accused of being bad parents.

You are supposed to marry your girl early so she won't get sexually assaulted. You are supposed to marry your girl early so that she will have a husband. If you wait, she might never get a husband. You are a bad parent if you don't do it.

Indeed, it is not at all uncommon in practicing communities where some have tried to defy the practice to see the negative reactions. And, chairman, you yourself have given us a story in the beginning of a girl who is afraid to go back because the social norm is so strong.

In reality, it is extremely difficult for any one girl or any one family to abandon the practice on their own. Enough people need to discuss and initially conditionally decide to abandon, conditionally meaning I will abandon if you will abandon and if she abandons and if at least four of you abandon then we can abandon together and we can intermarry. But, by myself, it would be very difficult.

So programs that are bringing positive results are those that don't criticize the parents for marrying their girls, they don't accuse them of being bad parents, they are doing it because they are trying to do the best for their girls. So programs don't criticize

but rather they provide correct information from trusted sources and enable the communities to discuss together and to themselves make the decision to abandon the practice.

Now, perhaps there is time during the question and answer I can illustrate the importance of this from a recent personal experience in Burkina Faso, but I don't want to take the time right now.

We do have an increasing number of examples of successful programs; and from them we know that change may take 2 to 3 years, which is not a very long time in development terms, to get going. And it is the time necessary for communities to consider the information that comes in, to discuss with one another and to begin to commit to abandon the practice.

But, importantly, we also know that once the change process is set in motion it accelerates. As more and more communities start to abandon and more and more respected national leaders, local leaders take a stand in favor of abandonment, it becomes much and much easier for additional communities to also abandon.

We have the knowledge. We have the positive experiences. What is really needed is more support, both to further spread the knowledge and to accelerate these positive results. So we would very much like to thank the Commission for the opportunity to be here today and to share this perspective with you.

[The statement of Ms. Moneti follows:]

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, thank you very much. We are very honored to have you here, and we appreciate your testimony.

I have a few questions, but before I do I want to yield to Congresswoman Betty McCollum of Minnesota who we have talked about here today is the author of H.R. 2103 who has been a champion on this issue and on so many other important human rights issues. So I would like to give her an opportunity to say a few words before we go to questions.

Ms. McCOLLUM. Thank you very much. And I want to thank everybody in the room for being here to show the support that we collectively have for young girls and women all across this world. I would like to thank Jim McGovern who--I know I don't say this very often I consider a friend, not just a colleague but a friend.

Mr. McGOVERN. Vice versa.

Ms. McCOLLUM. And for holding this important hearing on child marriage. Congressman McGovern and co commission chair Frank Wolf are both tireless champions for the rights and dignity of all people.

And, of course, this commitment and determination to fight for human rights was a tradition of Tom Lantos, a dear friend who all of us miss. I had the privilege of knowing Tom and working with him a number of years on the International Relations Committee.

But, today, because of Congressman McGovern, we are here talking about child marriage or forced marriage in countries where it is all too commonly characterized, as we just heard from the testifier, as a traditional practice, just part of the culture. But we know that child marriage is a harmful traditional practice that violates human rights; and it is not a marriage at all but an act of coercion that subjects children and almost always young girls to physical, sexual, social, and psychological trauma and abuse. This is a culturally sanctioned exploitation, not marriage.

The practice of child marriage must end. Girls the age of 10 and for those of you who haven't read this book, it is pretty compelling. Girls the age of 10, 11, 12, or 13, they are children; and, regardless of their culture or their country, they are not capable of voluntarily entering, freely entering into a marriage with an adult man.

These young girls are not only forced to become wives. They are more likely to become indentured servants, sex slaves, with little hope of escaping the fate of poverty and abuse. And there are countries often, regions within countries, where child marriage is epidemic and even when there are laws in place to protect girls. Culture and religious traditions at the community level are very strong, and enforcement laws are very weak. Every year in countries like Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Nigeria, India, Bangladesh, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia young girls often get traded like livestock for a bribe price or to settle a

family debt, or sometimes because there is just too many hungry mouths to feed in a family, as is the case with this young woman from Yemen.

The photo that we have up here, I am going to give credit to a brilliant photojournalist, Stephanie Sinclair, who traveled to Ethiopia, Nepal, and Afghanistan. She chronicled the lives of young girls in child marriage.

This particular photo is of an Afghanistan 11 year old girl, Golam, and her 40 she is 11 her 40 year old husband to be. When asked by Stephanie how she felt about her upcoming marriage her response is, nothing, I do not know this man.

Mr. Chairman, an 11 year old should never be anyone's wife, and that is why I want child marriage to end. It is my firm belief that all girls in America, Ethiopia, or Afghanistan deserve the right to enter adulthood to decide for themselves who their husband should be. A girl is not a commodity to be traded. She is a precious member of a community who needs to be valued and allowed to grow into adulthood, just like any boy.

As you have pointed out, I have authored legislation H.R. 2103, the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Marriage Act, because the U.S. has an interest and an opportunity to ensure girls in the developing world can grow up to be healthy, productive, contributing members of their communities and their countries. Not only do girls deserve the right to choose their future husband, they deserve the opportunity to get an education, to contribute their skills and talents to their country. H.R. 2103 is a bipartisan bill with 103 co-sponsors, and I urge you to even help me get more. The legislation is intended to support and expand successful models. As been pointed out, there are successful models in place for promoting girls' education, protecting human rights of all girls, and eliminating the practice of child marriage.

The work that is being done to end child marriage has some true champions, and I know you have them today testifying. But I would especially like to commend you and FPA, UNICEF, ICRW, CARE, the Population Council, along with USAID, for the commitment and work for empowering girls and protecting their most basic rights.

I was also pleased that you had the Ambassador here earlier, not only to talk about the policies but to also talk about the actions the Obama administration is working on to make sure no girl is ever forced again into marriage again.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for having this hearing. We cannot be quiet. We cannot be silent. Our sisters all over the world, our young sisters are counting on us to stand up and give them a chance.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much. Thank you very much for your statement and your leadership.

I have a few questions, if you don't mind. I would like to again thank you for being here.

You reference a number of examples of child marriage in specific countries, and I think it would be important for the record to get your opinion as to where do you see some of the most egregious cases of forced child marriage and where do you see countries changing the practices, either culturally, legally, or both, in order to better protect against child marriage and in affected kids.

Because I think it is important that we not only shed light on kind of the people who are behaving badly, the bad practices, but also kind of shine some light on where there is some change for the good; and your opinions on that would be very welcome.

Ms. MONETI. Well, if I could, I would like to take an example from South Asia, which is an area of the world where this is very prevalent, and a different one from West Africa. The South Asia example I would like to give is India. India is a huge country, as we all know, with a very, very large population. It is not just an issue of how young the girls are. It is an issue of how many there are.

The government of India has been extremely active in passing legislation. There is a law in India that prohibits child marriage under the age of 18. And they have also been very innovative in understanding that the law enforcement officials shouldn't their role is not just a role to put people in jail. In context, they would have to put a lot of people in jail, so that is not possible anyway. But they have become educational officers.

In areas where the prevalence is extremely high and where putting somebody in jail would actually increase social conflict and tension between government and the society because the social norm is so strong, they realize they have to align the legal norm and the social norm as much as possible; and so the law enforcement officials become educators. At first, they really encourage people to not do this, and they bring up the fact that it is against the law. This has really shifted the role and given much more confidence of people who do not want to continue child marriage to feel that they have a partner now in the government rather than an adversary. So this is very important, and things are changing in India.

We have in certain states a very large scale abandonment happening. And, interestingly enough, and to me fascinating in a development context, where we see that change is happening, as was just pointed out in the previous statement, we see that it is happening because communities on a very large scale are looking at the differential treatment of their boys and of their girls.

Before focusing on the specific practice, they first reach a basic consensus about what we care about in our culture, why is our culture important, what is the good of it. Social justice is what we care about. We would like a world where everybody enjoys their rights. And only then, once they have that consensus, they bring out, well, there is a

very different way in which we treat our boys than we treat our girls. And then they can question the practice but without undermining the good things of their culture.

So it is the programs, as you were rightly pointing out, that somehow address and confront the gender discrimination that is going on, that lead not only to the abandonment of child marriage but to a decrease in domestic violence against girls and women, to an increase of education of girls, to an increase in birth registration of girls and immunization of girls, et cetera, et cetera. Because, as Ambassador Verveer was saying, it is an increase in the status of girls.

In West Africa, in a number of countries, but I will use an example from Senegal, we have been working, UNICEF has been working with government on a number of NGOs, but particularly one that is known well I think in this fora which is Tostan. There have been mass abandonments not only of child marriage but also of female genital cutting, and the two things go hand in hand. The abandonments began slowly about 10 years ago, and by now approximately 4,500 communities have abandoned.

And the government of Senegal has adopted the approach that I very briefly tried to describe as the national policy. They already had a law. They had a hard time implementing the law because the social norm was still strong. Now the social norm is changing and people are using the law effectively. So implementation of the law happens by the people themselves who want to make sure that other people are also abandoning. And the government of Senegal is convinced that by 2015 they will reach total declarations of abandonment, both of female genital cutting and of child marriage.

We had an example very recently. There was a girl who was about--I think she was about 10 in what will be a middle school girl in our European and American systems. And the program had not reached her village. It had reached a village not far away. And she was to be betrothed in marriage to a man who was much, much older than she. She is a very smart girl and she had heard the village next door had already taken a position against child marriage. So she ran to the village next door and begged support from the community management committee. And the community management committee went to her village and in a very nonoffensive way went in and explained to them that they should not force the girl to marry, that a law exists in Senegal against child marriage. And eventually they convinced the village that it was okay, and the marriage was called off.

But you all will be glad to know that this girl, who was very smart, like I said, she not only became the best in her village in her school, not in her district, not in her region, but in all of Senegal, and she is now in the most prestigious high school in Senegal.

Why do I bring up this story in particular? Because this is the acceleration of the positive change.

Now with people knowing that story, all of that area is changing much, much faster. Because they themselves have seen when a girl doesn't get married look at the

potential that she has, look at what she does, and they see it with their own eyes. And that says to them I am not going to marry my girl. Why are we marrying our girls?

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, thank you. That is actually a very positive story here, and I appreciate that.

I have a couple more questions. How does UNICEF work in places like Yemen and Afghanistan when, you know, to address child marriage and girls more generally, when you face multiple challenges, including traditions and the armed conflict for a legal system, among other things, how do you operate?

Ms. MONETI. The short answer, I mean, it depends a lot on the different contexts, whether the humanitarian context, armed conflicts, and so on. But the short answer is that we work primarily through government, when government is legitimate and working, but also through civil society.

So one of the biggest challenges and greater satisfactions of program officers and representatives is to find the avenues of least resistance and work with them. And the beauty of being a U.N. agency such as UNICEF is that we do have the capacity to tap into many, many, many different partners. For example, some U.N. agencies have a very strict mandate they can only work in one area so they can only have one set of partners. We are very lucky to be able to work with very many and to actually be able to bring some to the same table who would never come and talk to one another without us bringing them together. So it is very rare for us not to be able to at all go in an area for a long period of time. We find ways. It is because of the multitude of alliances. We don't do anything on our own.

Mr. McGOVERN. I wish we could figure out how to form alliances in Afghanistan and be able to not have to fight wars, but that is a whole other hearing.

Ms. MONETI. Well, we can try that one next.

Mr. McGOVERN. One final question, and then I will yield to my colleague. When Ambassador Verveer was here earlier I asked her a similar question, and that is, do you see the problem of child marriage being addressed effectively by the U.N. agencies and by the international institutions that exist? And, also, in terms of the United States, I mean, I raised the issue about what happens when somebody comes here who married a child from another country where it is legal but they enter this country and unless there is a complaint filed really nothing is done, as far as I understand. What can we do more?

I will tell you, I have great regard and just highest admiration for Ambassador Verveer. I think her appointment by this administration indicates a real seriousness. She is a respected and powerful figure here, and I think to me it indicates that the administration is taking this issue very, very seriously. But I am just curious in terms of action items for the international agencies and for us, what do we all need to be doing that we are not doing? That is a nice way to put it, I think.

Ms. MONETI. Well, we are also very happy to see Ambassador Verveer. We are very happy to have you also as our allies.

In terms of the effectiveness of addressing the issue of child marriage, I think there has been a lot of improvements in the last few years. More needs to be done.

One of the difficulties is that child marriages, as has been described, affects it is an issue of nutrition. It is an issue of education. It is a crosscutting issue. It is an issue of the whole girl. And so how do we get the U.N. agencies of the world and the USAIDs of the world and the other bilateral

Mr. McGOVERN. Can you hold on one second? Where are you kids from? In D.C.? Ethiopian Community Center. I know you have to go, but we are all thrilled that you are here. It is so important. So I would like to thank you.

Anyway, I am sorry. I was so amazed these kids were here at this hearing and so attentive and fascinated by everything you were saying and Ambassador Verveer that I just didn't want them to leave without me saying thank you.

Ms. McCOLLUM. I think the 10 year old girls were very captivated by the discussion and glad they are living in the United States.

Ms. MONETI. I think the boys sometimes are even more captivated. They are like, oh, my God, I didn't know about this.

So we were talking about the cross sectoral nature of child marriage. And in UNICEF, for example, we have been able in the last couple of years to really bring it higher on the agenda as a child protection issue. Because in child protection we can talk and work across sectors. I think that is a challenge for USAID. That is a challenge for the U.N. system as a whole. And, as you know, we work very closely with UNFPA, WHO, increasingly with UNDP. Because this in some ways becomes a governance issue even.

So it is finding the alliances and also pooling the resources, in some cases, to really address the issue in a holistic way. And, quite honestly, it is also a need of more resources for these kinds of issues overall. We are very appreciative in UNICEF, of course, of the very important contribution made by the U.S. which allows us to do some of this work, but we are also very clear that if we want to make a real difference, and we can make a difference in terms of having this practice disappear in a generation, if the resources are there we could do it together. I mean not UNICEF but all of us together.

[3:06 p.m.]

Mr. McGOVERN. Do you believe that a binding international definition would make a positive difference in this effort to combat child marriage? That is one of the questions I asked Ambassador Verveer.

Ms. MONETI. That is a very interesting question. I think it would be because it just clears the parameters. It is not just a definition in and of itself, though. It is how you get the consensus on it. And to me--or to us, the process of getting that kind of consensus which is part of the larger process of understanding about the reality, the severity of the practice is almost--it is as important. So if this is one way to get that dialogue and debate and that consensus, that is fine. There are many other ways in which we have to get that consensus.

Mr. McGOVERN. I appreciate you pointing out how the answer to this is complicated. There is not just one thing we need to do and it all magically decreases to exist, that there most of the work that I have focused on has been in the international arena has been dealing with the issue of hunger and making sure people have enough to eat, especially children. And I have been a big champion for international school feeding programs and I have seen that in and of itself has been kind of a disincentive for child marriage because parents have an option to send their kids to school, they get fed and girls have an opportunity to learn, become literate, get good nutrition.

And the good education they tend to get, the less likely they are to get married at such an early age and have kids at such an early age. And it just changes the whole dynamic, kind of in a more subtle way than just banning all child marriage. But it is one of those things that helps kind of move things in the direction we want.

So I appreciate the fact that you have kind of highlighted that there are many things that we all need to do here.

And I am going to yield to my colleague, Betty McCollum.

Ms. McCOLLUM. Well, thank you. Just sitting here, being reminded what can we do, the United States could get the Senate to move on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children and we could become a ratifying member, which Somalia and the United States are the only two countries who are not.

For those people who saw the New York Times on child soldiers, that would be another unfortunate and very interesting hearing to have.

I think we have touched on something and Jim's questions kind of went back over that again. It is not a one size fits all solution. In some countries it is severe poverty. In others, it is conflict and refugee populations. In other countries it is going to be working to have laws in force such as you pointed out in India, raising community standards together as to how children are going to be treated.

So the question then to me is resources; all of this takes resources. And so what are some of the resources and partnerships that we need to focus on in collaboration not only as part of the international community through UNICEF, but as the United States working with UNICEF? And that is why I just thought maybe you would be too polite to point out as a guest testifier that we hadn't signed the Convention on the Rights of Children. So I will bring that up.

Ms. MONETI. Thank you.

Ms. McCOLLUM. As something that must be on our to do list.

Ms. MONETI. Of course, we would more than welcome--we have been working together to try to have the United States make that important step and we look forward to it happening very soon. On the one size fits all solution not one size fits all solution rather, I would like to make a comment which is that I completely agree that that is true. But at the same time, there are some things that are true for all context, whether they be economic--context of economic hardship, context of humanitarian emergencies, or normal development context.

As we approach this problem, we have to be conscious of working on reinforcing the positive moral norms, aligning them with legal norms and the social norms. And ultimately the specific size for the specific context will depend on where all of those are, and will shift over time. And we need to shift accordingly and we need to support that process of alignment, if you will, so that child marriage disappears.

And hence the resources, where do they go? Do they go in putting a law? Well, if the practice is overwhelmingly present, a law will be important. But we have to make sure that it has to be done with a process of consensus building. So if we have the vision clear, how we use the resources becomes almost obvious, but we do need more resources. There is no question that we need more resources to do this. I don't know if I answered the

Ms. McCOLLUM. You answered. I mean, part of it is more resources and part of it is having laws in place and that. But if you are seeing it happen in a country where there is extreme poverty, such as in the case of this young woman, where it was like we can't we can't feed you.

Ms. MONETI. Exactly.

Ms. McCOLLUM. And we are starving and by doing the bride price, I have been guaranteed that you will be fed as a wife, and then I have sustenance for the rest of the family.

So to Mr. McGovern's point, school feeding and things like that can make a difference, but also tackling the issues of extreme poverty can be it. And in other

countries, it is just--maybe it is not the extreme poverty; it is just a traditional, so called traditional practice that has become harmful and out of place.

Do you work much with--in your capacity--you mentioned India and seeing the results of the police department. I was with some community and religious leaders, both Christian and Muslim, many years ago in Ethiopia. And Ethiopia had passed a law, and the religious leaders were saying, we are working on it here, in honest, but I am not feeling so positive that I have gotten the message really delivered out to the countryside. So one of the things that people often do--you mentioned registering girls' births--but registering marriages and that, and working with community and social leaders. What has been your experience in doing that and getting leaders to show leadership?

Ms. MONETI. Thank you so much for raising that point because it is really, really, really fundamental. Maybe now I can give the very quick story of when I was in Burkina Faso just recently, and went up to the--quite far from the capital city, Ouagadougou, up in the Sahel region, where there is very high prevalence of child marriage, and had the honor to assist in a meeting that ran the entire day of all the cultural and traditional religious leaders from the entire district. And it was held in the court of the amir, the amir being the highest of the leaders, the absolute top.

And the way that the discussion was framed didn't at first condemn child marriage, but the amir said that he--that he personally had taken a stand against child marriage, and the reason why was because his most fundamental concern was for the well-being of children, and he had become aware of how child marriage went against this concern.

And then he went on and reaffirmed, and there was a discussion about us as traditional leaders, them, as religious and traditional leaders, because you have the two, that their fundamental concern and value was the well-being of children. This was very important to them. And only then, hours later, they began to get into the details of child marriage and how it really hurts the girls and how they needed and then by the end of the day, they took a solemn commitment in front of one another that they would each in their own area that they had influence on continue to let this information be known and promote the end of the practice.

So traditional and religious leaders are extremely important. They are the trusted figures. And if the information comes from them, they are extremely key in helping to for people to even accept that information, of the harms of the marriage, which at first they might not believe it is true.

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, thank you very much for your testimony, for being here, and for your patience as we have had votes, and we are getting out of here. And I also want to thank UNICEF for all of the incredible work that it does all over the world. So thank you so much.

Ms. MONETI. Thank you very much. It has been an honor. Thank you.

Mr. McGOVERN. Our final panel, last but certainly not least, and I am hoping I am going to pronounce everybody's name correctly. But I ask people to repeat it so that for the record it is pronounced accurately.

Anju Malhotra, vice president of Research, Innovation and Impact, International Center for Research on Women; Kakenya Ntaiya, founder of the Kakenya Center for Excellence; and Stephanie Baric, CARE USA, senior technical advisor.

How badly did I mispronounce your name?

Ms. MALHOTRA. You did pretty well. But it is just Anju. The D is not silent. Sort of like d'anjou pears.

STATEMENTS OF ANJU MALHOTRA, PH.D., VICE PRESIDENT OF RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND IMPACT, INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN; KAKENYA NTAIYA, FOUNDER, KAKENYA CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE; AND STEPHANIE BARIC, CARE USA, SENIOR TECHNICAL ADVISER

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, I appreciate it very much. Doctor, we will begin with you. And we welcome all of you here. And we look forward to your testimony.

STATEMENT OF ANJU MALHOTRA, PH.D.

Ms. MALHOTRA. Thank you, Chairman McGovern and Congresswoman McCollum. Thank you for holding this hearing. I come to you as the vice president at the International Center for Research on Women, ICRW, where I have worked on this issue for over a decade. As you know, Congresswoman McCollum, at ICRW we do research to develop practical solutions so that not just a few but millions of women can thrive and be part of the solution to global poverty.

Today I am here to talk to you about why child marriage is a problem for global development and what we can do about it. As you have already heard from Ambassador Verveer, the numbers on child marriage are large and astounding. It is estimated that about 10 million to 12 million girls get married as child brides every year, and over the next decade we are looking at about 100 million girls being married as children if nothing is done about it.

Not only is child marriage a horrendous violation of these girls' human rights, but it has enormous costs for humanity. It costs these girls their childhood, but it also costs us meaningful results for the development efforts that we are trying to take to eradicate poverty around the world.

And let me just start by talking a little bit about why this is such a costly practice, people keep doing. And as some of my predecessors have mentioned, fundamentally, child marriage is still happening in such large numbers, A, because development is failing a lot of families, and they continue to live in poverty, and because girls continue to be undervalued. Child marriage is much more common in poorer nations and, in those poorer nations, among poor people. For these parents, as Congresswoman McCollum has noted, it often means one less mouth to feed, clothe and educate.

Lack of schools is another reason for child marriage, even when parents want to educate daughters, the schools are too far, too expensive, or too unsafe. At other times, families get more out of sending a son to school rather than a daughter; the returns are much higher. And so marrying the girl is the easiest and the only option.

We have talked some today about tradition. And it is true because this is an easy practice to take on, but because tradition and culture often dictate that girls be married at

or around puberty, many times parents are afraid that no one will marry her if she goes onto the ripe old age of 16. And it is generally tradition rather than religion that is at the heart of child marriage. ICRW's research shows that no single religion is a proponent of child marriage; rather Hindus, Muslims, Christians all practice child marriage. We see high rates of child marriage in countries ranging from India to Bangladesh to Mali to Niger, where anywhere from three quarters of girls are married before age 18.

As others have mentioned, the consequences of child marriage are devastating for girls, but they are also devastating for societies. Think about this. Where there is child marriage, we have the highest rates of maternal mortality. Where there is child marriage, rates of infant mortality are high. Where there is child marriage, there are high rates of domestic violence. Where there is child marriage, there is high prevalence of HIV/AIDS among girls. Child marriage perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Poor girls who marry as children lose their future, then they raise children in poverty, creating the next generation of daughters without hope.

But I want to point out today that not only our girls are robbed of their childhood and a future, but every type of development effort is impeded by child marriage. That is because too few development efforts take child marriage into account, and as a result, they either fail or yield partial results. Everything that U.S. citizens and our government relevance is in, girls' schooling, the global health initiative, nutrition programs in schools, PEPFAR, public private enterprises, employment programs, enterprises programs, they are all missing optimal returns on investment because of child marriage.

For example, we have the story of Afghanistan right here. We are spending billions in Afghanistan. We are trying to spend millions on schooling. But what good are schools if girls are married and they can't go to them?

We are spending millions on improving maternal health in India. We can't get the full return on investment because girls continue to have babies and die while they are still children.

And as Ambassador Verveer already said, we have signed onto the Millennium Development Goals, and six out of those eight Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved as long as there is child marriage. That is the bad news.

But the good news is that, daunting as it may seem, there are solutions that work, and Francesca has already pointed out to some of those. And we already have tested out many of them, and the U.S. can support many of these solutions. The basic problem is many of them are very small scale, and we need to scale them up so that they are meaningful to many, many more girls.

So we can strengthen girls' education programs. We can increase nutrition in schools but really start targeting that 12 to 14, 12 to 15 age group where it really matters that girls stay in school. We can make schools safer, safe spaces where parents want to send their daughters to school, because you know, one additional year of schooling yields

10 to 20 percent increase in income, really showing parents that there is value to sending girls to school. Schooling is the single largest protective factor against child marriage.

We can also empower girls with life skills so that they can make a phone call when they need to, they can convince their parents. Like some of the stories we were listening to, they don't want to get married. They want to go to school. They want to play sports. They want to have friends.

We can raise awareness among influential adults, religious leaders, parents. We did a program in Nepal with EngenderHealth where we found that 95 percent of parents wanted to marry their daughters at 20, and 50 percent of girls are getting married below age 16. It was stunning to us the disconnect between the two. When we ran the programs, parents found out, oh, all of us want to do this, why are we afraid to move forward? The age of child marriage dropped within 2 years in that community child marriage dropped.

Many people think that culture and tradition are hard to change, but believe me, culture and tradition are changing all the time. The thousand year old practice of Chinese foot binding disappeared in 15 years. Today we have female genital cutting starting to shift and move.

There are many countries in the world where child marriage was common only a generation or two ago, and they have disappeared. It is totally gone. In countries like Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, child marriage is a thing of the past. We can make that happen in other places.

There are many people in developing countries who are already committed to this change, and we can support them as the international community.

Congresswoman McCollum, thank you for supporting the International Protecting Girls By Preventing Child Marriage Act which has been introduced in both houses of Congress. That is the path to change. With this legislation, the United States can help significantly bring down the rates of child marriage.

For the world and for the U.S. government, ending child marriage will yield a double dividend. It will save the future was not only girls, but their countries. Eliminating it is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. I would like to end by saying that today we have the largest generation of girls that history has ever seen, and we want to give them a chance to change their lives and our world for the better. ICRW stands ready to support your efforts. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The statement of Ms. Malhotra follows:]

Chairman Wolf, Chairman McGovern and honorable members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, thank you for holding this hearing on such an important topic. Forced child marriage is a gross violation of human rights and a barrier to girls' health and social well-being.

I come to you today as the vice president of research, innovation and impact at the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). ICRW works to make women an integral part of alleviating global poverty. We do this by using evidence-based approaches to demonstrate that a focus on women is critical for lasting social and economic change.

ICRW differs from other think tanks in that we translate our research into concrete steps that program designers, donors and policy makers can use to create the conditions in which women can thrive. The practical solutions we develop strive to impact not just one life, but millions. And most importantly, our work helps women to change their own lives and their communities for the better.

My testimony will show how and why forced child marriage is a pervasive problem across the developing world, affecting the lives of millions of girls. It violates their human rights and it severely impedes global development efforts. Forced marriage undermines initiatives to raise girls' education, to reduce maternal mortality, and to increase employment and enterprise levels. I also will discuss how this problem is surmountable. Existing solutions can go very far in making a difference. The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act, introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate in 2009, begins to outline some of these solutions. With political will and resources authorized in this legislation, the United States can support on the ground efforts that many countries are undertaking to help bring down perceptibly forced child marriage rates over the next few years.

The Scope of the Problem

Forced child marriage is a life-changing reality for many of the world's girls. Some as young as 8 or 9 are forced to trade their childhoods for a life that can be defined by isolation, violence and illness. It is a practice rooted more in tradition than religious custom, and one that spans the globe, from Asia to Africa to the Americas. The number of girls who are married as children is astounding.

According to UNICEF, in 2007 more than more than 60 million girls aged 20-24 worldwide had married before their 18th birthday. If current trends continue, an additional 100 million girls – or 25,000-30,000 girls every day -- will become child brides over the next decade. While boys are subjected to early marriage, most child marriages involve girls. For instance, in Mali the ratio of girls ages 15-19 who were married as children compared to boys, is 72 to one, and in El Salvador it is six to one.

An ICRW review shows that rates of child marriage are highest in parts of Africa, and in South Asia, where one-half to three-fourths of girls are married before age 18. Niger, Mali and Chad have the highest rates of forced child marriage in the world, ranging from 71 percent to 77 percent.⁴ But because of the large populations of countries such as India and Bangladesh, the greatest number of child brides lives in South Asia, where 46 percent of all marriages take place before the girl is 18.

Meanwhile, there is sometimes large variation of rates of child marriage within countries. For instance, some Indian states, such as Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, have high rates of forced child marriage, while other states such as Kerala have lower rates. In Ethiopia, national rates hover close to 50 percent, but the state of Amhara has a rate of more than 80 percent.

For these reasons, investments aimed at eradicating child marriage should target both countries with high rates of child marriage as well as hotspots within countries with high rates.

Four Main Causes of Child Marriage

Child marriage continues to be a reality for many of the world's girls because of a variety of factors. These include poverty, lack of education and job opportunities, insecurity in the face of war and conflict, and the force of custom and tradition.

Poverty

For many poor families, marrying their daughter at an early age essentially is a strategy for economic survival; it means one less person to feed, clothe and educate. In Asia and Africa, the importance of financial transactions at the time of marriage also tends to push families to marry their daughters early. For example, in many sub-Saharan cultures parents get a high bride price for a daughter who is married near puberty. In Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal, parents feel that their burden of paying a dowry at their daughter's marriage will be lower if she is married at a young age.

Globally, forced child marriage is much more common in poorer countries and regions, and within those countries, it tends to be concentrated among the poorest households. For example, a girl from a poor household in Senegal is four times more likely to marry as a child than a girl from a rich household. In impoverished situations, parents see few alternatives for their daughters, aside from early marriage.

Limited education and economic options

Little or no schooling strongly correlates with being married at a young age. Conversely, attending school and having higher levels of education protect girls from the possibility of early marriage.

In many countries, educating girls often is less of a priority than educating boys. When a woman's most important role is considered to be that of a wife, mother and homemaker, schooling girls and preparing them for the jobs may be given short shrift. And even when poor families want to send their daughters to school, they often lack access to nearby, quality schools and the ability to pay school fees. It is usually safer and economically more rewarding to spend limited resources on educating sons than daughters. This boxes families into early marriage as the only viable option for girls.

Insecurity in the face of conflict

When families live in unsafe regions, parents may genuinely believe that marrying their daughters is the best way to protect them from danger. In war-affected areas in Afghanistan, Burundi, Northern Uganda or Somalia, for example, a girl may be married to a warlord or another authority figure who can ensure that she and her family remain safe. In the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere, girls have been abducted or recruited by armed groups and made into the 'bush wives' of combatants and commanders.

Tradition and Religion

In many societies, parents are under pressure to marry off their daughters as early as possible in an effort to prevent her from becoming sexually active before marriage; a woman who does so brings dishonor to her family and community. Because marriage often determines a woman's status in many societies, parents also worry that if they don't marry their daughters according to social expectations, they will not be able to marry them at all. Forced child marriage also is a route to cementing family, clan, and tribal connections or settling obligations. For example, in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, Afghanistan and in some parts of the Middle East, marrying young girls is a common practice to help the grooms' families offset debts or to settle inter-family disputes.

At its core, forced child marriage is rooted in tradition. A 2007 ICRW study found that **no one religious affiliation was associated with the practice**. Rather, a variety of religions were associated with a high prevalence of forced child marriage, in a diversity of countries throughout the world.

However, customs and traditions do change. In fact, forced child marriage has nearly disappeared in several countries where it used to be an entrenched cultural practice only a generation or two ago. These countries include China, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia. There is no reason why this harmful traditional practice can't also become a thing of the past in the countries where it remains common today.

Immediate Consequences

The consequences of child marriage are devastating and often determine a life's trajectory. Girls who marry young are at a higher risk of dying during childbirth, having their child die before its first birthday, contracting AIDS and becoming a victim of domestic violence.

Increased maternal and infant health risks

Girls who marry and give birth before their bodies are fully developed are more at risk of death or terrible injury and illness in childbirth. In 2007, UNICEF reported that a girl under the age of 15 is five times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than a woman in her 20s. Risks extend to infants, too: if a mother is under age 18, her baby's chance of dying in the first year of life is 60 percent greater than that of a baby born to a mother older than 19.

In addition to death, young girls face tremendous health risks in childbirth, including a serious condition known as obstetric fistula. Obstetric fistula results when a young mother's vagina, bladder and/or rectum tear during childbirth. It causes urine and feces to leak from her, and without surgery, the condition lasts the rest of the girl's life. Fistula patients are commonly poor women, ages 15 to 20, many of whom were child brides.

Greater exposure to HIV/AIDS

Child brides also are at far greater risk of contracting HIV than their counterparts who marry later. Often they are married to older, more sexually experienced men with whom it is difficult to negotiate safe sexual behaviors, especially when under pressure to bear children. A study conducted in Kenya and Zambia in 2004 finds that married girls aged 15-19 were 75 percent more likely to contract HIV than sexually active, unmarried girls of the same age. Similar figures have been found in 29 countries across Africa and Latin America.

Greater exposure to domestic and sexual violence

Girls who are married early are more likely to be abused sexually, physically and emotionally. An ICRW study in India shows that girls who married before age 18 reported experiencing physical violence twice as often, and sexual violence three times as often as girls who married at a later age.

Deprivation of childhood and a future

More than anything else, early marriage deprives girls of their childhood. They are thrust into the full burden of domestic responsibility, motherhood and sexual relations rather than playing with friends, dreaming about a career or fretting about a school exam.

In many countries, young married girls move away from their parents' home to live with their husband and his family, where they have no friends, no support, and little say in their own lives or in household matters. Research shows that young married girls often are isolated and powerless. They are unable to negotiate or obtain support for issues in their own interest. And they're frequently exposed to violence and threats of abandonment and divorce.

Outside the family, the doors to schooling are usually closed to young married girls in most countries. This means that they have little chance to prosper later in jobs or as entrepreneurs. Often dependent and with little knowledge and income to support or invest in their children, child brides also end up raising daughters who face the same challenges as their mothers.

U.S. Development Consequences of Child Marriage

Not only does child marriage paralyze young girls' opportunities, but it also hinders U.S. development efforts.

The United States spends more than \$450 million each year on development programs that are consistently undermined by child marriage. Research shows that young married girls are least likely to benefit from educational and economic policies and programs. These include primary and secondary school enrollment and expanded opportunities for credit or participation in the paid workforce. As noted above, their isolation and powerlessness means that many of the basic resources and services available to other segments of the population – such as basic health care or skills training – also are beyond the reach of young married girls.

Consider this scenario: The United States is spending billions of dollars in Afghanistan to rebuild the infrastructure. When USAID builds a school for girls in a province with high rates of child marriage, how much more effective would the school be if it were combined with a program to reduce child marriage? Or

consider another scenario, this time in Uttar Pradesh, India. If USAID is seeking to reduce maternal and infant mortality in this Indian state, taxpayer dollars would be dramatically more effective if the program also addressed raising the age of marriage for girls.

Finally, the practice of forced child marriage stands in direct conflict with the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted by the Congress, which include promoting education, women's empowerment and reducing poverty, maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS rates. Research shows the clear negative correlation between a country's rate of forced child marriage and its Human Development Index (HDI) ranking: By and large countries that are not scoring well on their citizens' well-being also are the countries where forced child marriage is most common. What's more, unless addressed directly, this trajectory is likely to continue into the future because forced child marriage perpetuates the cycle of poverty in the developing world. Girls from poverty are the most likely to become child brides, and child brides are more likely to live in poverty and raise children in poverty.

What Works to Prevent Child Marriage

We know the problem is forced child marriage. We know the causes and consequences are terrible. But the good news is that we also know solutions. We know that before launching any new program, it's critical to first talk to girls. They are the starting point for any solution to ending forced child marriage. Girls understand acutely the obstacles that bar them from opportunities, and they have clear ideas about what needs to change in their lives in order to succeed. It's also important to support parents who support their daughters' decision to continue their studies and enjoy their childhood – delaying the choice to become a wife and mother. These parents who are bold enough to go against what tradition dictates can be stigmatized by and ostracized from their community.

The answers lie with the world's girls and within several already successful programs. Over the past 10 years, efforts by ICRW and others in several countries—India, Nepal, Ethiopia—reduced the prevalence of child marriage within a two- to three-year period. In the Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand, ICRW's Development Initiative Supporting Healthy Adolescents (DISHA) program reduced the rate of child marriage from 60 percent to 40 percent. In Nepal, ICRW and Engenderhealth, an international health organization, cut the rate of child marriage in half, from 44 percent to 21 percent, in urban areas surrounding Kathmandu.

These programs focused on three key issues:

- 1) Providing girls with life skills such as numeracy, literacy, using a telephone or articulating their needs and interests to elders;
- 2) Raising awareness and commitment among parents, teachers, religious leaders and other influential adults to eradicate forced child marriage; and
- 3) Working with young people—including boys—to understand and build peer support on the idea of preventing forced child marriage.

Finally, any effort aimed at ending forced child marriage, must address how to strengthen girls' education programs to ensure that girls stay in school and learn enough for parents to consider it worthwhile postponing their marriage. Education is the single most important factor associated with girls marrying before the age of 18, according to a 2007 ICRW study. Even one more year of school than the national average can increase a woman's earning potential by 10 percent to 20 percent.

Conclusion

The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act is a critical step towards increasing U.S. support for the eradication of forced child marriage. The legislation would draw attention to child marriage as a human rights abuse by requiring the U.S. Department of State to include child marriage rates in its annual Country Report on Human Rights. The bill also calls for integrating child marriage prevention activities into existing USAID development programs. This would increase the effectiveness of U.S. foreign assistance efforts by guaranteeing that girls and young women are able to take advantage of the education, health and economic development opportunities USAID delivers. I applaud the efforts currently

underway at USAID and the State Department, and know this legislation will build upon current investments in this critical issue.

If passed, the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act will strengthen the capacity of local civil society organizations to conduct child marriage prevention activities. And it will encourage more research on child marriage to identify the most promising strategies.

The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act has unprecedented bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress. Provisions of the legislation were included in the Foreign Relations Authorization Act that passed the House of Representatives in June 2009. I urge Congress to pass this legislation without delay. Action by Congress through this legislation can achieve many wins – it will improve the return on investment of our ongoing foreign assistance activities; it will protect the human rights of girls around the world; and it will represent a strong statement by the United States that the practice of forced child marriage is unacceptable.

Girls around the world have a right to experience childhood – to make friends, go to school, pursue their aspirations and live a healthy life free from violence. The practice of forced child marriage robs girls of these opportunities. But it does not need to be this way – we have successful solutions. In many communities, the desire to abandon child marriage exists, and local organizations are doing substantial work. What is lacking is sustained and coordinated support from governments, the international community and donors. With increased leadership and support, we have the opportunity to significantly diminish the number of child marriages in the next few years.

Ending child marriage will yield a double dividend. Not only is it the right thing to do – it is the smart thing to do. This bill will help protect the human rights of adolescent girls – and it will and provide them opportunities to live fuller lives that could break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

ICRW stands ready to support your efforts. Thank you for your time and I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you for your great testimony.

We will now go to Kakenya Ntaiya. Did I pronounce that right, or did I mess that up?

Ms. NTAIYA. Yes, you pronounced it very well.

Mr. McGOVERN. Oh, good. That is a rarity for me. I appreciate that. We look forward to your testimony. Welcome.

STATEMENT OF KAKENYA NTAIYA

Ms. NTAIYA. Thank you, Chairman McGovern, Congresswoman McCollum.

I am honored to be here today to share with you my personal story, but also the story of young girls from my community of southern Kenya. These girls represent millions of other girls who are around the world crying out, but their voices are not heard. Their dreams of a better life and a better future will likely not be realized because they are forced into early marriage.

Statistics show that 60 million girls in the developing world are married, some of them as early as 8 years old. Many girls are dropping out of school at an early age, and most of them do not follow their education beyond primary school.

In order to understand the reason for this cause, let me share my personal story, for the person I have become today. I was born 32 years ago in a small Maasai village, a village with no running water, no electricity, no paved roads and no telephones. The only distinct thing that people recognize us by is our deep beliefs in our traditions.

According to our cultural beliefs and traditions, girls are for marriage, a source of wealth for the family. In order to maximize this wealth, they need to harvest it as soon as possible and as soon as a girl is born. Myself, I was engaged when I was 5 years old and to be married as soon as I reached puberty. Throughout my childhood, I was constantly reminded that my husband was waiting; and as soon as I underwent genital cutting, the right of passage to womanhood, I was going to be his wife. I was expected to know how to care for a family and to care for my husband.

As you may be guessing, yes, I did go to school, because of my mother. Due to the hard life she had endured, she held a different belief and a different perspective. She believed that we should never grow up to be like her.

What did she exactly mean by us not growing up to be like her? My father worked as a policeman and lived in the city very well. He only came home once a year. Sometimes we didn't see him for 2 years. When he came home, he came to supervise his wealth, the farm, the cows, the goats and the sheep.

But who worked on the farm, and who cared for these animals? It was my mother. But because women are not supposed to own anything, then, by default, all the property which was in my home were my father's. Whenever he visited, he would treat my mother so badly, beating her, calling her names in front of us and selling the products that we had worked so hard for.

I despised this so much, and I saw that I never wanted to really grow up like my mother, but I wanted to live a different life. With the help of my mother, I was able to continue with school.

This was not the case with other girls in the community. When I was in sixth grade, my best friend was Emma. We played together. We had lunch together. And we studied together. When school was closed for the holiday in December, Emma and I hugged and parted ways to go home for the holiday. We looked forward to being together in class seven the next year.

However, something drastic had happened that holiday day. Emma was going through the cutting, and Emma got married. That was the end of her education. And at 12 years of age, Emma had to take care of a family. A year later, she had a baby girl. To feed her family, Emma had to work on the farm, and sometimes she walked around into homes and borrowed food.

Now, Emma has eight children, and the first born, her daughter, is already married with two children. Last year, I met Emma in our local market. If it was not for her to call me by my name, I could not recognize her. Emma was carrying this huge bag of maize on her back, and her health was not looking good. At 30, she was looking like a 50 year old woman. My conversation with her started with her saying I wish I had continued with school like you did.

Truly, I enjoyed going to school. Although I knew that I had a husband and the probability for me to continue with school beyond primary school was low, I kept on pushing, and I knew that I would overcome. The education system in Kenya did not provide a level playing ground for girls and boys. Despite the challenges that girls faced at home, at school, teachers, who came from the local community, favored boys and paid less attention to the girls. Despite all this and also given the fact that, at home, I couldn't do my homework because I had to care for my little siblings, collect water for my mother and firewood and cook for the entire family. And even that, there was no lights to study at night, I still remained competitive at school.

I fought hard. I created alliances, negotiated deals, and I finally made my way through high school. Eventually, I was able to convince the community to send me to college, something that had never been done by any girl in my village.

As a child, my dream was to become a primary school teacher. But as I fought hard and started overcoming obstacles, my dreams and priorities changed. Currently, I am pursuing my Ph.D. in education at the University of Pittsburgh. I no longer want to stop at teaching at primary school. I want to help girls in my community. I want to help girls, the daughters of Emma, and mothers and other girls around the world gain access to education and help them become what they dream to become in life.

Girls in my village are only hoping somebody can remember them, and I want to say, yes. I want to remember you, and, sure, you can become whatever you want to become in life.

By passing the International Protecting Girls By Preventing Child Marriage Act, the United States will be taking another step towards ensuring that all girls are offered the

opportunity that education provides and that early marriage does not hinder that opportunity. The legislation will help to break the cycle of poverty, violence and maternal and child mortality.

Last year, we started the first girls primary school, boarding school, in my community. The school serves vulnerable underprivileged girls, girls who are at high risk of forced early marriage and female genital cutting. The school does not only focus on academic excellence, but also female empowerment, leadership, community development. We provide girls an opportunity that they would otherwise not have. We tell the girls it is okay to look up, even when the community is telling you to look down. We provide them with food, a safe place to learn and to believe that they can achieve their dreams. We tell them it is okay for a girl to dream to become a doctor, to become a pilot, to become a teacher, or whatever they want to in life. Yes, we tell our girls that there are no limits to what they can achieve in life because you are a girl. You too can make a positive impact in your community.

We are working to provide this generation of girls with the knowledge and tools necessary to be productive and equal members of the household and community. By preventing early marriage or forced marriage, another world of possibility exists. And the United States can play a vital role in these communities by ensuring that its health and development program incorporates child marriage prevention activities in areas where child marriage is prevalent, like my community.

Together we can create a future that is different from that my mother, that of Emma and her daughter, and millions of other girls, including me, faced, one that was predetermined for us merely because we were born females. My story that has brought me here today is an exception, but for all other millions of girls who have had and continue to have their human rights violated by this practice, we must not delay in addressing this issue and providing them with opportunities to achieve their dreams. Let us rise, join hands, and bring this practice to an end.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on this very important topic. And I look forward to answering all of your questions. Thank you very much.

[The statement of Ms. Ntaiya follows:]

Chairman Wolf, Chairman McGovern and the honorable members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, I am honored to stand before you to share with you the plights but also the hopes of young girls in my community of Southern Kenya.

These girls represent millions of other voices of young girls around the world who are crying out and their voices are not heard. Their dreams of a better life and a better future will likely not be realized because of not being able to get an Education. Education, as all of you know, is the key--- the key to not only a better future for an individual, but also for a better nation at large. Education brings development to a home, a community, a nation and to the whole world. And most importantly it prevents early marriage. Education is the key to empowerment.

Statistics show that 60 million girls in developing world are married; some are as young as eight years old. Many girls are dropping out of school at an early age and most of them do not further their education

beyond primary school. In order to state the reasons for this cause let me share my personal journey to the person I have become today.

I was born 32 years ago in a small Maasai village; a village with no running water, no electricity, no paved roads, no telephone, and no modern schools. The only distinct thing other people recognize us by is our deep belief in our traditions.

According to our cultural beliefs and traditions, girls are for marriage—a source of wealth to the family. In order to maximize and harvest this wealth as early as possible, girls are prepared for marriage as early as they are born, they are not sent to school and they are engaged to be married at an early age. Myself, I was engaged at age 5 and to be married as soon as I reached puberty. Throughout my childhood, I was constantly reminded that my husband was waiting and as soon as I underwent female genital cutting - a traditional rite of passage to adulthood, I was going to be his wife. All I was expected to know is how to care for a husband and the children.

As you may be guessing, yes, I did go to school -- because of one woman I am currently indebted to—my mother. Due to the hard life she has endured, she held a different perspective. She believed that we should never grow up to be like her. What did she mean by us not being like her?

My father worked as a police man and lived well in the city. Only visited home once a year or sometimes stayed away for two years without coming home. He came home to supervise his wealth, which included the farm, produce, cows, goats and sheep. But who worked in the farm and took care of the animals—my mother. Because women are not supposed to own anything, then this by default was my father's property. Whenever he visited, he would treat my mother so badly including beating her in front of us, calling her names and then selling almost half of what we had worked so hard for. I despised this, and I swore to do the best I could so I could have a different life than my mother's. With the help of my mother I was able to continue with school.

When I was in six-grade Emma was my best friend, we played together, ate lunch together and we studied together. When school was closed for the holidays in December, Emma and I hugged and parted ways to go home for the holiday. We looked forward to being together in class seven the coming year. However, something drastic had happened that December; Emma went through the cutting and got married. That was the end of her education and at 12 years of age Emma had a family to care for. A year later she had her first baby – a girl. To feed her children Emma had to work on the farm and sometimes she borrowed food from other people. Now Emma has eight children and her first born daughter is already married with two children. Last year, I met Emma in our local market – If it was not for her calling my name. I could not have recognized her. Emma was carrying a huge bag of Maize in her back and her health has deteriorated – at 30 she looked like a 50 year old woman. My conversation with her started with her saying, “I wish I had continued with school like you did”.

As for my case, I enjoyed going to school and competing with boys. Although I knew I had a husband and the probability of continuing past primary school was low, I kept on pushing and believing that I would overcome. The education system did not provide a level playing ground for girls and boys despite the challenges girls faced at home. At school teachers who came from the local community favored boys and paid less attention to girls. Despite all this, and also given the fact that I did not have time to do my homework at home because after school there was no lighting to use at night and before nightfall I had to help my mother carry water, collect firewood, take care of my little siblings, and prepare food for the rest of the family. Despite all of these challenges I was still able to remain competitive at school.

I fought hard, created alliances, negotiated deals and I finally worked through high school. Eventually I was able to convince the community to send me to a college in the United States; something that has never been done by any other girl in the village. As a child my dream was to become a primary school teacher but as I fought and started overcoming obstacles my dreams and priorities changed.

Currently, I am pursuing my PhD in Education at the University of Pittsburgh and I no longer want to stop at teaching primary schools. I want to help girls in my community and around the world gain access to an

education and help them become what they dream of becoming in their lives. I want to help girls who are in the situation I was in 20 years ago. I want to offer hope to those who do not yet see it.

Girls in my villages are only hoping someone can remember them and I want to say yes I remember you and you sure can be whatever you want to become in life. While I know there are millions of kids in the world who need an education I realize that a thousand mile journey begins with taking one step. I am not going to sit and wait for the help to come from somewhere else—it can only begin with us, little by little until every child has an opportunity, has a chance to realize what most of us in this room have – an education. I believe that it is possible and I know we can make a change. Starting with myself and by you listening here to my story today.

By passing the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act, the United States will take another step toward ensuring that all girls have the opportunities that an education provides and that early marriage does not thwart that opportunity for an education. This legislation will help to break the cycle of poverty, violence, and maternal and child mortality.

Last year we started the first girls' primary boarding school in my community. The school serves the most vulnerable underprivileged girls -- girls who are at high risk of forced early marriage and those who will be forced into genital cutting. The school does not only focus on academic excellence but also female empowerment, leadership and community development. We provide girls an opportunity that otherwise they would not have. We tell the girls it is okay to look up even when the society is telling them to look down. We provide them with food and a safe place to learn and believe that they can achieve their dreams. We tell them it is okay for girls to dream to become a doctor, a pilot, a teacher, or whatever they want in life. Yes, we tell our girls there are no limits to what you can achieve in life – because you are a girl you too can make a positive impact in your community.

We are working to provide this generation of girls with the knowledge and tools necessary to be productive and equal members of their household and community. By preventing early or forced marriages, another world of possibilities exist and the United States can play a vital role in these communities by ensuring that its health and development programs incorporate child marriage prevention activities in areas where child marriage is prevalent, such as in my village in Kenya.

Together, we can create a future that is different from what my mother, that of Emma and her daughter and millions of others, including me have faced - one that was predetermined for us merely because we were born females. My story that brought me here today is the exception, but for all of the other millions of girls who have had and continue to have their human rights violated by this practice, we must not delay in addressing this issue and providing them with opportunities to achieve their dreams.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today on this important topic and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much, Ms. Ntaiya, for that very powerful statement. And let me say that it is a real privilege to have you on this panel. And we appreciate you being here.

Finally we will turn to Stephanie Baric.

Am I pronouncing that correctly?

Ms. BARIC. Stephanie Baric, but I am used to having it anglicized. It is not a problem.

Mr. McGOVERN. I apologize, of all the names I mispronounce. But with CARE, you are senior technical advisor. We are very happy that you are here.

So we welcome your testimony.

STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE BARIC

Ms. BARIC. Thank you for having me. On behalf of CARE, I would like to thank the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and its co-chairs, Representative Jim McGovern, and honorable members of the commission for bringing attention to the harmful practice of child marriage.

Child marriage is a human rights violation. It seals a girl's fate and undermines the progress of entire communities and nations. We need swift action to address it. In my testimony today, I will cover three areas. Number one, I will share why CARE has decided to focus our efforts on preventing child marriage. Number two, I will provide a few examples of child marriage prevention programming that show that this challenge, if addressed in a comprehensive manner, is one that can be overcome. And number three, I will urge Congress to pass the International Protecting Girls By Preventing Child Marriage Act, which embodies the type of solutions that are needed to address this issue.

CARE strongly supports this legislation and encourages you to pass it before the end of the 111th Congress. During our 64 years of efforts to end poverty in more than 70 developing countries, we have broadened our perspective to understand poverty not only as a phenomena of unmet needs but unmet rights. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of women and girls who are often among the poorest, most marginalized and most systematically discriminated against in their societies.

We also know that empowering women and girls, working with them to develop their skills, building attitudes that support them and ensuring their right to healthy and prosperous futures is the most sustainable way to reduce extreme poverty. Empowering women and girls includes ensuring that they have control over their futures and can make their own decisions, including when and whom to marry.

We focus on reducing child marriage not only because it is a violation of girls rights but because it has a strong detrimental effect on other development goals, including HIV/AIDS prevention, ensuring that all children have access to a basic education, and reducing maternal mortality.

Addressing child marriage is one component of a major initiative that CARE has recently introduced called the Power Within program. Power Within is a transformative, multicountry initiative that ensures 10 to 14 year old girls worldwide have the opportunity to complete a quality basic education, develop leadership skills and participate in decision making to shape their futures. It also seeks to address the vulnerabilities and harmful practices that undermined girls advancement. While there isn't enough time to fully explain the program, I would like to submit a short report of Power Within for the record, with the chairman's permission.

Mr. McGOVERN. Without objection.

Ms. BARIC. Thank you.

I would also like to submit a written statement into record on behalf of a close partner in child marriage prevention advocacy work, the International Women's Health Coalition.

Mr. McGOVERN. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

Early and Forced Marriage: Detrimental Effects on Girls' Health and Human Rights

Testimony Submitted to U.S. House of Representatives Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

**By Adrienne Germain
President
International Women's Health Coalition
Washington, D.C.
July 15, 2010**

On behalf of the International Women's Health Coalition and our partners throughout the world, thank you Chairman Wolf, Chairman McGovern and the honorable members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for holding a hearing and bringing attention to the important issue of early and forced marriages.

Every day, girls, some as young as eight or nine, are forced to marry men who are often decades older. Worldwide, more than 60 million girls between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before the age of 18—often at the encouragement of their parents and often to much older men - with no say in the decision. These marriages occur despite the fact that national laws often prohibit it and that an international human rights treaty states that marriage should be entered into with the free and full consent of both partners.

Worldwide, marriage laws and practices are diverse. In most developing countries, between 20 percent and 70 percent of young women marry (or start living with a partner) before age 18. In many countries, the arranged marriage of girls at or before puberty in order to “protect their virginity” or the family’s “honor,” or to increase their “exchange value” was never widely practiced; in others, it is common among some groups. Socioeconomic factors also play a role. Parents may feel “forced” to marry their daughter early because they fear for her safety and economic security.

Marriage laws of developing countries vary widely. The most common minimum age at which a young person who wishes to marry may do so without obtaining parental consent is 18 years. The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 unless adulthood is legally attained earlier under the applicable country law. Thus, with some exceptions, “child marriages” are generally understood to mean marriages taking place before age 18. Virtually all developing countries permit earlier marriages with the consent of parents, legal guardians, or judicial or religious authorities, however, often without specifying any minimum age or requiring the consent of the underage bride or groom. Notably, marriages before age 15 or 16 violate the laws setting a minimum age for a young person’s consent to sex in most countries.

Beyond being a fundamental human rights violation, girls married young and/or forced into marriage experience a myriad of disadvantages compared to those who marry later including: greater control over the young bride by her husband and his family, such as restrictions on her freedom of movement and her capacity to seek health care and family planning services; increased likelihood that she will experience domestic violence and sexual abuse; little if any schooling and little possibility of pursuing educational opportunities; limited capacity to enter the paid labor force and earn an independent income; greater

personal insecurity in the face of the possibility of divorce or early widowhood; and social isolation from her own family, friends, and other social networks.

In addition, child brides experience several threats to their health and well-being. Often living in their husband's household and community, they face intense pressures to bear children as soon as possible, with potentially disastrous results. Because their bodies (bone structure, pelvis, and reproductive organs) are not yet fully developed, girls ages 14 and younger run a very high risk of complications in pregnancy and childbirth compared with older adolescents.

Child marriage is the major cause worldwide of pregnancies before age 15. In most of the developing world, 90 percent of girls who give birth before age 18 are married.

Prolonged and obstructed labor, which is common among pregnant young adolescents, can lead to hemorrhage, severe infection, and maternal death. This is especially true for girls who experience additional pregnancy-related complications such as eclampsia. Those who survive may suffer from obstetric fistula, a debilitating condition that causes chronic incontinence and results in shame and social isolation.

Girls who are married young are also more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS and the older the husband, the more likely it is that he has had multiple sexual partners and may be HIV-positive. For example, in Kisumu, Kenya, HIV infection rates are nearly 33 percent among married girls ages 15 – 19, compared with 22 percent among unmarried, sexually-active girls of the same age. Girls' physiological vulnerability due to the small size, inelasticity, and lack of lubrication of the vagina and cervix is compounded by their exposure to frequent, unprotected, and sometimes forced sexual intercourse within marriage; lack of information about STIs, including HIV; and inability to negotiate their own protection.

The International Women's Health Coalition supports local organizations in Asia, Africa and Latin America working to promote and protect the health and rights of women and young people. In Northern Cameroun, our partner Association pour la Promotion de l'Autonomie et des Droits de la Fille/Femme (APAD) supports young mothers and survivors of early and forced marriage. Their work focuses on training survivors of early and forced marriage in livelihoods, health, and other life skills. APAD members also educate community leaders on the causes and consequences of early and forced marriage and human rights of girls so they can speak out and advocate against this traditional practice.

Investments in strong local organizations such as APAD are critical to preventing girls from being married off as children, and only by working in and with communities can sustainable change in norms and behavior occur. Other needed actions include but are by no means limited to:

- Advocating for governments to set a minimum legal age at marriage of 18 years without parental consent for young people who wish to marry, and at least 15 years with the free consent of both parties and the consent of parents, guardians, or judicial authorities;
- Strengthening marriage registration systems to require compulsory civil registration, age confirmation, and "free and full consent" of the bride and groom;
- Creating incentives and promoting campaigns for the elimination of child marriage among community leaders and organizations, stressing the benefits for girls' health and human rights, for families, and for communities;
- Working to dispel the myth that marriage is automatically a safety zone for girls and women;
- Expanding investments in girls' education to achieve universal attendance of all girls, at least up to age 15; the quality of teaching; and the safety of school environments;
- Eliminating school fees and provide incentives for parents to send their daughters to school;

- Supporting comprehensive sexuality education programs that stress human rights and gender equality, including the right to refuse marriage in schools and communities that begin early in primary school and continue through adolescence;
- Providing vocational training and financial literacy programs, both in schools and also for out-of-school girls ages 10-14, to facilitate their income-earning capacity and employment now or later; establishing safe girls-only spaces in schools and clubs for girls who are out of school and may already be married; and
- Investing in the sexual and reproductive health of young adolescent girls, both married and unmarried, by providing comprehensive reproductive health care that is accessible to girls of all ages and includes family planning and HIV prevention services, pregnancy and delivery care, and information and education on sexual and reproductive health.

Before the United States is a wonderful opportunity to join the international community in rejecting harmful practices that force young girls into marriages for which they are not physically, emotionally, or socially ready.

By passing and implementing the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act, the United States will take an important step towards securing the rights of girls and women everywhere to a just and healthy life. This Act promotes the development of a strategy to combat child marriage; reporting on this practice as a human rights violation; integrating child marriage prevention programs into pre-existing U.S. foreign assistance programs; and ensuring the most effective use of taxpayer dollars by addressing one of the root causes of poverty, maternal mortality; HIV infection, domestic violence; and lack of access to education.

Our partners and colleagues around the world applaud the Commission's commitment to addressing the issue of early and forced marriages. We also thank Representative McCollum and Senators Durbin and Snowe for their leadership on this important issue as well as all of the Members of Congress that have joined them in calling for the passage of the this bipartisan piece of legislation.

Ms. BARIC. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Many different factors, which my colleagues before me discussed, combine to push families to marry their daughters early. Responding to the problem, therefore, demands holistic strategies across areas such as education, community mobilization, health, income generation and policy reform. I would like to highlight two examples of CARE's programs that demonstrate preventing child marriage is possible and illustrate the types of approaches necessary.

In 2000, with funding from USAID, CARE established the New Schools Program, also known as NSP, in poor rural areas in upper Egypt that aim to increase access to primary education for girls who dropped out or never enrolled in school. The project uses innovative methods to support girls' access to education and prevent child marriage, including alternative community run schools. These multigrade schools aim to remove barriers to girls' education through a catch up curriculum; girls only classes; and female facilitators from the local community. Over 8 year, the project established 189 schools serving over 6,000 girls in a region where over 70 percent of the participating girls' parents were illiterate.

NSP was also specifically designed to influence parents in favor of educating girls. It included efforts to engage parents in communities and school construction and governance and ensured regular contact and follow up by teachers. A study of the project's impact found evidence of the girls' greater determination to complete schooling and delay marriage and increase parental support for girls' education. In a number of cases, participant girls engaged family members to influence decisions around their own education, marriage, or employment.

In Bangladesh, CARE is implementing a combined initiative, called ARSHI, that aims to promote the health and rights of adolescents and women to address harmful practices, such as child marriage. This initiative uses a comprehensive approach to prevent child marriage, including peer support groups for girls and boys, advocacy, community awareness and action. Over 100 child marriages have been prevented through such community efforts. And many girls have continued their education.

In the words of 15 year old Radha Rani, whose marriage was prevented through the intervention of an adolescent girls group, "the girls group has constructed a dream in me, and I would like to continue my education once again."

Mr. Chairman, around this room, you will see images from the unique advocacy efforts spearheaded by the Bangladesh program called "Art For Life, Stories of Child Mothers," partly funded by USAID. These photos come from an exhibition unveiled during a recent national campaign to end child marriage in Bangladesh. Some of these images depict the real life struggles and stories of young girls through marriage and motherhood. The campaign is part of the community's efforts through art to influence policy by detailing the harsh realities of child marriage.

In closing, based on CARE's vast experience working alongside women and girls, we offer the following three recommendations. Number one, pass the International Protecting Girls By Preventing Child Marriage Act this Congress. This critical legislation outlines a bold agenda to prevent child marriage. This legislation has significant bipartisan support in both Chambers of Congress and should be signed into law and passed this year.

And we thank Congresswoman McCollum for her leadership on this legislation.

Also policymakers, you have the support of the U.S. public in doing this. In late April, CARE worked with Heart Research to conduct an online national survey of more than 1,200 American voters. The polling revealed that 73 percent of respondents were in favor of US legislation aimed at addressing child marriage. We look to Congress for leadership on this issue, and the time for action is now.

Number two, continue to increase assistance for quality girls' education. Keeping girls in school is perhaps the single best method of preventing early marriage. We appreciate the increased support that the U.S. Congress has provided for girls' education in recent years. We urge the U.S. and other donors to increase assistance to address the

large financing gap which continues to hinder access to basic education for many children in low income countries, particularly marginalized girls.

And number three, support interventions that address underlying causes of poverty by empowering women and girls. A comprehensive approach is necessary to empower women and girls. This involves giving them access to information, resources and skills, as well as long term efforts to promote social and policy change aimed at providing women and girls with equitable opportunities.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this important hearing. CARE stands ready to assist your efforts and strongly urges the members of the human rights commission and the U.S. Congress to take action to make sure girls worldwide are not robbed of their futures. And I look forward to answering any questions.

[The statement of Ms. Baric follows:]

On behalf of CARE, I would like to thank the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, its Co-Chairs, Representatives Jim McGovern and Frank Wolf, and honorable Members of the Commission, for bringing attention to the harmful practice of child marriage. Child marriage is a human rights violation that condemns girls and women to a life of poverty. This all-too common violation not only endangers the health and well-being of girls themselves, it undermines the progress of entire communities and developing nations.

The U.S. government has a critical opportunity right now to take a bold step forward in preventing this harmful practice by passing the bipartisan International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009 (H.R. 2103). CARE comes before the Human Rights Commission today not only to share its experience in child marriage prevention programming, but also to express our strong support of this legislation and to urge you to pass it before the end of the 111th Congress.

CARE is an international poverty fighting organization with programming in over 70 countries globally. In its work, CARE places special emphasis on working closely with women and girls because our decades of experience have shown that such investments are key to pulling them, their families and entire communities out of poverty.

A growing body of research and analysis supports this concept that empowering women and girls creates a cycle of social progress and economic growth in communities, nations and regions. In particular, investments in girls' education have been shown to have a multiplier effect across a range of development indicators. An educated girl is more likely to delay marriage and child bearing and have fewer, healthier and better-educated children. She is more likely to participate in the labor force, engage in paid employment and earn more income for her family over her lifetime.

However, around the world, women and girls continue to form the majority of the poor and most marginalized in society. They represent approximately two-thirds of the world's illiterate people, own less than one percent of the world's property and earn less than ten percent of the world's income.³ In many contexts, women and girls are subject to various forms of discrimination and abuse on a daily basis, fueled by gender norms that constrain their ability to exercise control over their own lives and bodies.

This situation is especially true for millions of girls in the developing world who are subject to systematic disadvantages. These include bearing the overwhelming burden of household tasks like collecting water and caring for other children, lacking opportunities and the support of their families to attend school and having limited access to information and health services. Studies have found that 15-19-year-old girls spend more time on labor market work and household work combined, than boys of the same age group in countries in Africa, South Asia, and Latin America.

In many countries, girls' gender, age and social status expose them to social constraints and risks that make the transition between childhood and adulthood particularly hazardous. Child marriage is one of these hazards—one that can undeniably derail a girl's life by limiting her future educational and economic opportunities and pushing her into situations of early motherhood and social isolation that expose her to a variety of risks. Not only does early marriage put a girl at risk and rob her of her ability to succeed in life, it perpetuates a cycle of poverty, as she and her family will not benefit from the skills, knowledge, resources, social status and life choices she would gain through continued opportunities for schooling and labor force participation.

CARE's experience has shown, however, that girls can avoid early marriage and navigate a successful transition to adulthood if the right mix of policies and programs is in place. Child marriage can be prevented by ensuring economic and educational opportunities for girls and their families and by working with communities and local stakeholders to promote social norms, policies and practices that value girls' futures equally to boys'. Such strategies are laid forth in the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009, which is why we offer it our strong organizational support and call on Congress to enact it into law.

The Context: Causes and Consequences

As the years in which a girl stands at the cusp of adulthood, the period of puberty and adolescence is crucial in determining how the rest of her life will unfold. In many poor communities, the onset of puberty signals a girl's readiness to be married off, often to a much older man. One girl in seven in developing countries (excluding China) marries before the age of 15. Early marriage is most common in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where out of 15 countries almost half of all girls are married before age 18.

Child marriage is the result of a variety of inter-related issues and factors. In poor communities where livelihood options and opportunities are scarce, parents may choose to marry off their daughters at a young age as a way of relieving the household economic burden and in the hope of providing them with some form of social and economic security. This decision takes place within a context in which social norms and attitudes assign low value to women and girls and limit the roles and opportunities available to them outside of marriage and the domestic realm.

Further, in many cultures, certain traditional customs and expectations increase the social and economic incentive for parents to marry their daughters at an early age. In Ethiopia, for example, where certain regions experience some of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, CARE's research and programming indicates that the practice of "bride price"—in which a man must pay the bride's family in order to marry her—has contributed to a situation where communities attach economic value to young girls as wives, thereby increasing the likelihood their parents will marry them off at an early age.

In most instances, marriage spells the end of a girl's education, thereby undermining further possibilities for personal growth, social mobility and economic advancement. Further, early marriage is often followed by early motherhood, exposing the girl to health risks associated with pregnancy and child bearing. Medical complications from pregnancy are the leading cause of death among girls 15-19. Compared with women over 20, girls aged 10-14 are five times more likely to die from child birth and girls 15-19 twice as likely. For those who survive pregnancy and delivery complications, long-term consequences may include obstetric fistula, reproductive tract infections and infertility.⁹ Simply put, young girls' bodies are not fully developed and therefore cannot carry a pregnancy or deliver children without doing tremendous damage to their undeveloped bodies.

Children of young mothers also face greater health risks. If a mother is under 18, her baby's chance of dying in the first year of life is 60% greater than that of a baby born to a mother older than 19. Children who survive are also more likely to suffer from under-nutrition, late physical and cognitive development, and chronic diseases in adulthood.

Child marriage also dramatically increases girls' vulnerability to unhealthy and abusive situations. At a young age, girls cannot effectively consent to marriage, and they have limited ability to exercise power and

autonomy in relation to their husbands and his family once married. This in turn limits their ability to exercise control over important aspects of their lives, including their reproductive health, making them vulnerable to health risks including HIV/AIDS. For example, research in Kenya and Zambia shows the prevalence of HIV infection among married adolescent females to be significantly higher than that of their unmarried counterparts. There are also studies indicating that women who married younger are more likely to be beaten or threatened, and more likely to believe that a husband might sometimes be justified in beating his wife.

There is conclusive evidence that girls' education plays a critical role in preventing child marriage. In a study of 42 countries, women between the ages of 20 and 24 who attended primary school were less likely to marry by 18 than women without a primary education. Schooling has protective and empowering effects on girls, including by helping them develop aspirations and giving them skills to negotiate who and when they will marry.

However, despite recent global progress in closing the gender gap in education, particularly at the primary level, girls are still lagging behind. Globally they represent 54% of the 72 million children out of primary school, with the gender disadvantage being more pronounced in much of South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. The target of Millennium Development Goal 3 around achievement of gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 was not met and is still out of reach for many developing regions.¹⁷ Data shows that girls' school enrollment drastically drops in the upper primary grades and in secondary school, with only one in five girls enrolled in secondary school in Africa. Girls from certain socio-economic, ethnic and other marginalized groups face an additional layer of disadvantage, with roughly 70% of girls aged 6-11 not in primary schools belonging to marginalized groups – including ethnic, religious, linguistic or other minorities. Further, the poor quality of education in many countries has contributed to poor learning outcomes and high drop out rates among girls as a result. When the quality of education or the perceived benefits are negligible, parents may be even more reluctant to let girls enter or continue with school.

Currently, efforts to accelerate access to basic education are hindered by a large gap in financing for education in low-income countries. In particular, efforts to reach the most marginalized children—those disadvantaged by poverty, gender, ethnicity, language and remoteness—require a major increase in education financing from governments and donors.

Poverty and lack of opportunity are also key contributors to child marriage. Providing girls and their families with economic and livelihood options is an important part of strategies to delaying marriage. Also critical are efforts to promote community norms that discourage early marriage and the creation of an enabling policy environment for girls' rights.

CARE's Response

In recognition of the multiple vulnerabilities girls face, as well as their potential to be forces of change in their families and communities, CARE has long supported interventions aimed at addressing the needs and rights of girls, with a particular focus on marginalized and vulnerable girls. This support includes programming aimed at increasing girls' access to quality education, health services, livelihood options and protection from violence and abuse.

In recent years, CARE has launched a strategic initiative aimed at increasing support for adolescent girls' education and leadership globally. The program, called Power Within, is focused on the 10-14 age cohort, because this is a critical age when targeted support can have a significant impact on girls' future trajectory. The program is built around a comprehensive approach that establishes education as a cornerstone of girls' rights, but also recognizes that simply providing girls access to school is not enough to unleash their full potential. Beyond educational access, increased attention must be given to supporting girls in acquiring and cultivating relevant skills and competencies, providing girls with supportive relationships and networks and addressing various risks, vulnerabilities and structures that undermine their welfare and limit the opportunities available to them.

Specifically the Power Within Program aims to:

- Increase the number of girls who complete primary school and obtain an equitable and quality education
- Build girls' leadership skills and increase the spaces and opportunities to exercise them
- Advocate for girls' rights by addressing harmful practices and creating champions for girls' advancement

More information on CARE's approach in support of girls' education and leadership can be found in a report entitled "Power Within: Empowering Girls to Learn & Lead". Mr. Chairman, we would like to submit this report for the official record.

CARE recognizes child marriage as a grave human rights violation, which undermines girls' well-being and acts as a barrier to reducing cyclical poverty. Our experience working in communities globally has shown us that addressing the multiple factors that contribute to child marriage requires holistic interventions and strategies across a range of areas including education, community mobilization, health, economic livelihoods and policy reform.

In Egypt, CARE's work with poor communities revealed that high rates of early marriage were linked to cultural norms, as well as to economic and social factors such as household poverty, non-availability of schools, and poor quality of education. With funding from USAID, CARE established the New Schools Program (NSP) aimed at increasing school access and enrollment of girls in poor rural areas of upper Egypt that were least served by public education. Among other activities, the project established alternative community-run schools to serve girls unable to join public school. These multi-grade schools incorporated a range of strategies designed to address barriers to girls' education, including flexible scheduling to allow girls to meet family responsibilities, "girls only" classes, and use of female facilitators/teachers from the local community. Over the eight-year life of the project, the NSP constructed 98 single-grade schools serving more than 36,000 girls and 189 multigrade schools serving over 6,000 girls.

The NSP was specifically designed to influence parents in favor of educating girls. It included efforts to mobilize and engage parents and communities in school construction and governance, and ensured regular contact and follow up by teachers. A study of the project's impact after a number of years found evidence of girls' greater determination to complete schooling and delay marriage.²³ In a number of cases, girls demonstrated increased capacity to engage family members on decisions around their own education, marriage or employment. There was also evidence of increased parental support for girls' education. This parental support was detailed in interviews with NSP beneficiary girls, which highlighted parents' change in attitude. One girl noted, "*My father changed. At the beginning he said we will only educate the boys, but when Ms. Halla came and told him she knows of a good school, he said okay. I did not have a birth certificate and they helped me get one.*"

In Bangladesh, CARE is implementing a project known as the Adolescent's and Women's Reproductive and Sexual Health Initiative (ARSHI). The initiative aims to empower adolescents and women with information and skills to promote health, and mobilize community action to end discriminatory and harmful norms and practices, including child marriage. Using advocacy, community mobilization and behavior change communication strategies, the project engages adolescents, parents, religious leaders and local authorities to raise awareness of the harmful effects of practices such as child marriage and promotes community and policy action against them. Among other things, the project has helped to establish hundreds of community peer support groups for adolescent boys, girls and mothers, which promote dialogue and awareness on health issues, build essential life-skills and promote collective action to stop harmful social practices and promote good ones. Such strategies have proved effective in promoting action to discourage child marriage. In 2008, for example, a total of 42 early marriages were prevented through community group action.

Recommendations for U.S. action

The experience of organizations that have worked to reduce child marriage, provide increased opportunities for girls, and combat the deep poverty that causes and results from this harmful traditional practice, have shown that change is possible. However, it requires a holistic view of the situation and the patience and long-term focus to work with communities to create change from within.

In light of this experience, CARE would offer the following recommendations to the U.S. government, which has a moral and strategic interest in preventing the practice of child marriage:

1. Pass the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009 this Congress. This legislation outlines a bold agenda to prevent child marriage by integrating proven child marriage prevention strategies through U.S. foreign assistance programs, requiring the President to develop a multi-year strategy and mandating the Department of State to address child marriage in its annual Human Rights Report. It has significant bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress and should be signed into law. Members of Congress have many difficult choices to make each day; passing this legislation is not one of them.
2. Increase assistance to ensure girls' access to quality basic education. Keeping girls in school is perhaps the single best method of preventing early marriage, ensuring girls reach their potential, and assisting communities in breaking the cycle of poverty. However, a large financing gap for education in low-income countries is hindering access to basic education for many children, particularly marginalized girls. We commend the U.S. government for recent increases in funding for basic education globally and urge policy makers to sustain and increase this global commitment to basic education to ensure access for the most hard-to-reach children, including marginalized girls.
3. Support interventions to address underlying causes of poverty by empowering women and girls. Investing in the lives of women and girls is a high return strategy that is likely to help achieve multiple U.S. foreign assistance goals while unleashing untapped potential around the world. CARE's experience suggests that a comprehensive approach is key to empowering women and girls and helping to eliminate practices such as child marriage. This type of holistic approach requires that the U.S. government and other donors invest in programs that go beyond simply providing women and girls with skills, information and resources. It must include investments in long term efforts aimed at challenging underlying causes of poverty including the relations and power structures that force women and girls into a position of vulnerability. This requires, among other things, support for local advocacy, behavior change communication strategies and community mobilization to address social norms that fuel practices such as child marriage.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for calling this important hearing. CARE stands by ready to assist your efforts and strongly urges the members of the Human Rights Commission and the U.S. Congress to take action to make sure girls worldwide are not robbed of their futures. I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, thank you for your excellent testimony. And I also want to thank CARE USA for all of the incredible work that it does on so many important issues.

Before I ask any questions, I want to acknowledge the presence of another one of our colleagues, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, who has been a champion on this issue.

I don't know if you would like to say a few words.

And Congresswoman McCollum has to leave to go to an Appropriation Committee—

Ms. McCOLLUM. Resources.

Mr. McGOVERN. These votes kind of screwed everything up.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As she leaves, let us acknowledge the Congresswoman for the enormous leadership she has given to this issue.

And if I might just--I am very delighted to have the opportunity to hear a portion of the testimony, and forgive me for missing the other. We were dealing with issues that may have some overlap that Chairman McGovern and I have some consensus on, and that is the future of the Afghanistan war and how we provide the right kind of direction, but also be able to use those resources as we use it for smart power.

And I believe that this legislation, this effort, addressing the question of childhood marriages is the key to empowering women who are, in essence, part of a nation or a belief of peace and freedom. When women are in charge, when women begin to have the rights that are given to them by being educated and having greater opportunities, the world changes, but nations change.

I know that I missed Ambassador Verveer, but I am well aware of the work that she has done in the past, and also with the former Secretary of State Madeline Albright, where we first saw a lot of these issues in sub Saharan Africa, as the map shows, and then also in Bangladesh.

I believe if we can pass legislation, Mr. Chairman, And if we equate the elimination of childhood marriage as, in essence, an unwieldy slave system, we can provide the open door to countries advancing economically. We can stamp out the epidemic of HIV/AIDS. Sometimes where there are customs that virgins will cure you, and many times men will marry young girls to do so, and that has not happened. So these are vile things that happen to young women.

And if we find one story where there is a success story, where someone was married at 12, and now they are 35, and they may be doing well, there are thousands upon thousands of disaster situations, and certainly, Dr. Ntaiya, I believe, I would simply say to you--am I almost there in pronunciation?

Ms. Ntaiya. Yes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you very much.

Your story is one that really needs to be a light in the darkness. So my commitment is to work as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the wonderful--in the wonderful legacy of Tom Lantos, who would be sitting here today and leading on this issue, because he certainly was a champion of the human rights of all people. This is something that we have to have enough courage to say, this is not culture; it is not custom. It is in fact a modified version of slavery. It is as vile and as hostile as it seems to take a young and unwilling child, girl child, and to give her to a man twice, three, four times her age in order to satisfy a sexual, cultural or other needs. It is time to stop it, and I am very grateful to be part of the effort that will see that it does stop.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I yield back.

Mr. McGOVERN. I appreciate you being here and all the work that you do.

Well, I think all the panels have made it clear what our assignment is. We need to pass Congresswoman McCollum's bill. So we will work with the Foreign Affairs Committee to try to exert the appropriate pressure and use our powers of persuasion to try to move this thing through. I think there is a good chance we could probably do this. I think this is something that is doable.

I cannot vouch for the other body across there, because they don't really do anything that we send them. But that is another debate we don't want to have here.

But it is clear that we have a role here, and as I said earlier, too, I think, even in terms of our State Department reporting on human rights, consistently this issue needs to be brought up because those reports do have an impact on the way nations think and how they react. So we--I think we need to see that as well.

We also need to figure out a way to work with the international agencies and institutions to have a clearer definition and gain broader consensus on what needs to be done.

As I was listening to all of you speak, I cannot help but think that--I cannot help but realize how difficult it is to change age old attitudes. And we are not talking about traditions that just appeared in the last 10 years. These are traditions that have gone on for decades and centuries. And it is difficult to change things. And there are a variety of ways to do it, and you talked about a number of them here today.

And we have heard today that decisions of when to marry a girl off often originate with her parents. My question is, how do we involve fathers and other male family members and male leaders of the community to put an end to this practice? Because it will take both men and women to find a solution to this problem. How do we ensure that that happens, because a lot of problems Ms. Ntaiya mentioned her father. Obviously a lot of the problem is overcoming the attitudes of men. I am curious to hear from all of you, how do we do that? How do we better engage? Are there things we can do here to be helpful in that?

Mr. MALHOTRA. Sure. I will take a stab at answering that question. I think it is critical to involve fathers, but also brothers and young men. They play a huge role in not only decision making but changes the norms in societies.

In a program we did in Nepal, one of the very smart things we have done is gotten all of the youth in that community mobilized, and young men were accompanying young girls in writing skit, doing plays, taking to television programs that they had created to

show what are the results, horrible results, of early marriage. And so they are right there with their sisters.

And I agree that mobilizing fathers is critical. And it is interesting; it is easier to do than you think because fathers do, ultimately, most fathers, not all fathers, but most fathers do have the benefit of their daughters in mind. I can tell you personally in my own family, my mother was the youngest of 6 daughters. Her eldest sister was married at 13 in Punjab, India. She had a fourth grade education. And by the time my mother reached 12 or 13, my grandfather was convinced that the new world needed a different type of girl. And he did everything that he could to get her a college education before she was married. And she was 20 years old when she married, and she has had an entirely different life than her sister.

Ms. BARIC. Yeah. I would like to talk bit about work that CARE has been doing. Certainly, in education, when we look at what are the barriers to girls education, they are typically barriers to equitable participation in society in all spheres, economic, political and social. But certainly the leading driving factor for child marriage is poverty. So it is critical that, as we address poverty, we also look at what are the gender norms and attitudes that drive some of these harmful, traditional practices, and that definitely involves working with the entire community.

So it is not just about getting kids into school. It is also looking at, what are the broader issues within a particular community, the health issues, livelihoods issues? And your question around engaging men and boys and also to follow onto Anju's example, I am a project manager for a project that is funded by USAID called The Power to Lead Alliance. And it seeks to build girls' leadership. In addition to getting them into school, giving them opportunities after school through extra-curricular activities, social networks, to develop leadership skills.

But we are also working with peer adolescent boys. Most of these kids are young adolescents, and it is the perfect age to begin to have conversations around what drives certain behaviors and to give boys, young boys, the opportunity to begin to unpack some of the gender norms and attitudes that lead to discriminatory behaviors, including things such as child marriage.

Ms. NTAIYA. And from my own experiences of working with the Maasai in my own village, the fathers are leading the cause. And what happens--the Maasai, the men are very proud of being part of something. So when we started our school, I went to the fathers, and I said, I want to build a school. So they took that as it is their project, and it is them that are leading the cause. So it is very important that whenever we start any programs that are tied towards child marriage and any communal or any traditional practices, it is very important that we include the men from the beginning because we don't want the men to feel threatened that we are coming up with another movement that is going to undertake them.

So, really, what I really, really have been doing is to see how the fathers are proud of a girl, his daughter becoming number one in class. Because it is something he had never seen, he said, oh, she is actually good in math, and paying attention. We bring our fathers in to look at their academic records of their daughters. We tell them, these are conversations, especially in my community, where a father and a daughter never talk. You have to go through a mother. But we are creating that system of creating the bond and a father really focusing on a daughter.

And as Anju already said, every father wants his daughter to succeed. No father wants his daughter to fail. And I have become myself, have become a role model, and that is something else some communities have never seen what an education does to a woman or a girl. So being bringing those role models into the community, and then the fathers start to realize that, oh, if I could let my daughter go to school, this is what she will become. And so those are some of the things I have seen in my community, and you cannot do anything really without men being part of it, and it becomes a very critical part of our work, especially when we are trying to deal with these issues.

Mr. McGOVERN. I appreciate the insight.

I will tell you that all three of you have outlined models that work, things-- projects that actually work. So the challenge really is to make sure that we have the resources so that you can expand some of what you are doing.

And, Ms. Ntaiya, have you ever thought of running for anything?

Ms. NTAIYA. When I grow older. This is the Maasai talking. I will probably one day.

Mr. McGOVERN. We look forward to it.

I am sorry. I should just tell you, though, politics is not as glamorous as it looks.

I would like to yield to Congresswoman Jackson Lee.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I hear and I hear comments intertwining access to education, and I know in developing nations, there is not a system, in many instances, of free public school education. How much work do we need to do, and maybe I will start with Ntaiya, of the importance of universal access for education? I know there are fees that have to be paid, and sometimes the villagers cannot pay fees. And how do we work on that as a complement to creating opportunity for girls and to complement the legislation that we are pushing as to provide that universal access to education?

Ms. NTAIYA. Thank you, Congresswoman.

Education is key. For me it is what has made me who I have become. And any opportunities that can be given to every child in the whole world is an education, because once you give them an education, you have given them a tool that no one will ever take it

away from them. And universal education is very important, the role of free primary education.

But we really need to go on a more comprehensive, because when we say free primary education, we end up having so many kids in one classroom, and this is the case which happened in my country where we had free primary education, but there were no teachers. There were no schools. And it ends up, the quality of the education that is happening, it is not good. And so the girls in that situation are forced out because the father is saying, well, she is not doing very well anyway; I better give her away so that I can get the cows. So really it is the quality.

We need to look at the quality. Free education is good. We need to hire more teachers and, this is why we need more resources. It is not just about putting it onto the policy but actually committing, even financially, to bringing it into a reality. Thank you.

Ms. BARIC. I just wanted to add that definitely, as Kakenya has pointed out, we have made some significant strides in terms of access to primary education, but the tradeoff in a lot of context has been quality. And so what we are discovering is that even though children are completing an eighth grade education, they are semiliterate. Their levels of education are quite low. So this goes back to the need for resources.

Also what we know is there is still a gender disparity when it comes to education, primary education in a lot of countries.

What we also need to think about are post primary options. Because I know that in Malawi, my colleagues will say we are doing a fantastic job in terms of getting girls into school and supporting them to complete an eighth grade education, but because there are no post primary options, whether it is secondary school or vocational training, this is the reason they get married at ages 14, 15 or 16, because there is nothing for them to do after they have finished their eighth grade education.

So, in addition to definitely putting resources towards primary education, we need to think about post primary options, especially since we know across the developing world, we are seeing a youth bulge, a generation of youth who we don't know what the opportunities will be for them.

Mr. McGovern. Do you have anything to add?

Mr. MALHOTRA. Yeah. Just to strengthen what my colleagues have just said. We did a study a couple of years ago where what Stephanie has just said, was very much borne out, that primary schooling can sometimes empower women on a number of front, either reduce violence or give them more decision making power or give them economic opportunity.

But secondary schooling almost always does. And in this day and age, we can't be satisfied with just primary schooling for girls because we are really writing the charter

to keeping them behind. As the world is moving forward in the 21st century, if we are just saying that that is all we want for girls, we are going to end up having more and more girls being behind, more and more girls being economically not viable, more and more parents thinking it is not worth the trouble to send them to school. So those investments do need to be greater, not just for schooling quality, but also schooling levels.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Well, thank you very much. I think that was a comprehensive answer to my question on education, and it means that we have to partnership and look for greater goals, not limit ourselves to primary overcrowded classrooms, no teachers. We have got to really fight to partnership with legislation dealing with no child marriages that will now find a pathway of opportunity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much.

Just let me conclude by reiterating what the mission of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission is all about.

Speaker Pelosi wanted to elevate the Human Rights Caucus to a commission because she believes that the issue of human rights needs to be included in all of our debates, whether it is economic assistance, military assistance, whether it is trade agreements, whatever. But if the United States of America is going to stand for anything, it needs to stand out loud and foursquare for human rights.

So part of what our job here is to not only highlight some of the human rights challenges we face, but also because this is all on videotape and people will see it. But it is also to make sure our colleagues are aware of what is happening here. And that they are also aware of some of the things that we can do to fix some of these terrible situations.

I mean, the topic that we are talking about here today in some ways is very depressing. But the testimonies here today have been very inspirational. And I just want you to know that. You all have been really good. It has been I kind of end this hearing not in despair but with hope. And I much rather expected that when we began here.

To all of you, I want to thank you very much for being here. I also want to extend this offer to you that as we move forward, I mean, the people on this commission want to be helpful. So if you have ideas, if there are things that we can do, large and small, please do not hesitate to contact us. That is what we are here for. That is what we are supposed to do. So I thank you all for being here today.

And I, again, apologize for all of the delays. But I couldn't control that.

But I appreciate it. And thank you.

And the hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:04 p.m., the commission was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (TLHRC)
Hearing Notice**

Targeting Girls in the Name of Tradition: Child Marriage

Thursday, July 15

1:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Room: 2226 Rayburn

Please join the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for a hearing on child marriage. The hearing is open to the media and the public.

Child marriage is a grave violation of human rights which severely violates the rights of the girl child to healthy psychological and physiological development and also poses serious public health implications. Globally, approximately 60 million women ages 20-24 were married -- often by force -- before turning 18, and one out of seven were married before the age of 15 (Population Council, Inc. analysis 2006). Based in large part on cultural traditions of patriarchal societies that disregard a female's right to form and give an informed consent to a marriage, child marriage severely violates a girl's ability to develop and mature. These marriages undermine their ability to form an independent personality and value system, and expose girls to increased maternal mortality rates, higher rates of HIV/AIDS infections, and domestic violence.

The hearing will focus on governmental efforts to end the practice of child marriage, the important work of U.N. agencies to work to protect children, and ongoing crucial nongovernmental projects.

To discuss these issues, we will welcome the following witnesses:***

Panel I

Ambassador Melanne Verwee, United States Department of State, Office of Global Women's Issues

Panel II

Francesca Moneti, UNICEF, senior Child Protection specialist

Panel III

Anju Malhotra, vice president of Research, Innovation and Impact, International Center for Research on Women

Kakenya Ntaiya, founder, Kakenya Center for Excellence

Stephanie Baric, CARE USA, senior technical adviser

***Witness list subject to change.

If you have any questions, please contact Allison McGuire (Rep. McGovern) or Elizabeth Hoffman (Rep. Wolf) at 202-225-3599.

/s/James P. McGovern, M.C.
Co-Chair, TLHRC

/s/Frank R. Wolf, M.C.
Co-Chair, TLHRC