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Exploring Pathways in Ending Child Marriage

An Online Dialogue of Parliamentarians from Asia Pacific

11:30 - 13:30 TOKYO TIME
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WELCOME REMARKS



Prof. Kiyoko Ikegami, the *Interim Executive Director of AFPPD* and the learning session's overall facilitator, greeted all the honorable members of different parliaments in Asia and the Pacific, speakers, guests, observers from civil society that came to participate in the session. She thanked everyone for choosing to spend their time with AFPPD to discuss persisting social and legal issues that affects everyone. To provide a context on the event, Prof. Kiyoko shared to the body that the AFPPD is embarking on its new strategic planning, this is why the AFPPD Steering Committee on Women and Gender Equality is co-organizing the event with the Philippine parliament to achieve the following objectives: 1) generate knowledge and share best practices in policy reform initiatives prohibiting child marriage; 2) build on current efforts to harmonize existing laws and regulatory frameworks to setting the minimum age for marriage based on international human rights agreements and instruments; and 3) contribute in the prevention of gender-based violence against children including harmful practices based on culture and tradition and economic circumstances. She then remarked that there is an impressive line-up of speakers who are not only active members of the AFPPD Steering Committee on Women and Gender Equality, but are also advocates of the different dimensions of gender-related issues, who will ensure that the objectives of the learning session will be achieved. She then proceeded to explain the Zoom online protocols for the smooth conduct of the Dialogue.

OPENING REMARKS



Hon. Prof. Keizo Takemi, who is the Chair of AFPPD started his opening remarks with the following message:

“Good morning and good afternoon. It is such a pleasure to see you, colleagues and partners, even though online meeting. I really hope you stay safe under the critical circumstances caused by COVID-19. As you know, it is always exciting to discuss something important, especially on thematic topics such as gender equality and protection of girls' rights, which we, at the Members Assembly in May 2021, adopted as one of three activity pillars for AFPPD to work on, for next four years. I am happy to be here today, to participate in the seminar, which is jointly organized by the National Committee of the Philippines and Standing Committee of AFPPD on Women's empowerment and gender equality.

We today witness an “inequality pandemic”, with rising disparities in between countries. Women are in many ways the heroes of the pandemic, making valiant efforts in health care and essential services, both at work and at home. While seeing an already double workload increase, women and girls at the same time face the brunt of economic hardship. 47 million additional women and girls are slipping into poverty. Women and girls are also at an increased risk of human rights violations and abuses, including not only violating their bodily integrity and autonomy, but violating the law on girls marriage against the marital age for girls. Lockdowns around the world have entailed a “shadow pandemic” of domestic violence. According to the UN, 15 million additional women and girls worldwide have suffered from violence, for every three months of lockdown measures.

I hope we, Parliamentarians can exchange information and experiences as good practices on this topic, and in future, can come to the stage for possible legal protection for girls in member countries of AFPPD.

Thank you for your time and let’s get on with our business.”

“Women are in many ways the heroes of the pandemic in making valiant efforts in work and at home. Women and girls face increased risks in human rights violations including child marriage.”



Hon. Prof. Keizo Takemi
AFPPD Chairperson

At the Online Dialogue of Parliamentarians in Asia Pacific titled, Exploring Pathways in Ending Child Marriage, 7 June 2021



The PARTICIPANTS



In the photos: Speakers and presenters coming from the parliaments of Japan, India, Indonesia, Philippines, and Bangladesh as well as presenters from UNFPA and Plan International posed for the photo session together with observers and participants coming from various civil society organizations advocating to end child marriage.

After the photo session and reminder to accomplish the registration form, **Prof. Ikegami** introduced the speakers who will be giving the context on the issue of child marriage.

Part I

Situation of Child, Early and Forced Marriages in the Asia-Pacific Region



Dr. Leila Joudane is the current Country Representative of UNFPA in the Philippines with 20 years of experience in sexual and reproductive health advocacy.

Analysis and intervention on ending child marriage in Asia and Pacific



Mr. Rasa Sekulovic is the current Regional Head of Child Protection and Partnerships, Plan International Asia and Pacific Regional Hub with 28 years of continuous development work experience.

Situation of Child, Early and Forced Marriages in Asia-Pacific Region with focus on the Philippines

Dr. Joudane started with the overview of her presentation, namely: 1) Review of Child Marriage Data and Situation; 2) Interrelated Factors Including Conflict; and 3) Formulating Effective Solutions; and promised to also discuss the other underlying factors that cause child marriage. She first mentioned the definitions of child and child marriage in international treaties, which the Philippines has ratified, and the domestic legal frameworks like the Family Code, Magna Carta of Women, and Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination.

Despite these international agreements and policies safeguarding the rights of women and children, Dr. Joudane revealed the widespread practice of child marriage with 1 out of 5 girls married before they reach 18 years old. Global data also reveals that it disproportionately affects least developed countries where approximately 40% of girls are married before the age of 18, and 12% are married before the age of 15. These data includes informal unions. She noted that it's also important to notice that the percentage of informal to formal unions, religious and cultural marriages, varies

across different countries in Asia. Registry data of marriage in the Philippines shows that marriages involving those below 18 are predominant in Muslim and Indigenous Cultural Communities. It is not an isolated practice by religious communities, but it's practiced across cultures.

To begin the discussion of related factors that cause child marriage, Dr. Joudane shared that cases of child marriage increase during armed conflicts, as families see child marriage as a way to cope and survive. She said that it is one of the most common form of violence during armed conflict where 31% of transitional sites reported cases of child , early and forced marriages (CEFM), and 12% of the sites reported incidents of sexual violence survivors marrying their perpetrators. Dr. Joudane demanded that there is a need for more data on the various forms of child unions. Broadly, there are three forms that overlap - traditional, circumstantial child marriage, and peer-led "love" marriage or cohabitation. To look closely on the effects of circumstantial child marriage such as adolescent pregnancy, she said majority of the cases of child marriage are due to premarital pregnancy, where Philippines has 32.4% of ever-married girls aged 20-29 who gave birth as adolescents. While the adolescent birth rates have been declining globally, they have increased in Southeast Asia in the past 2 decades. This is in stark contrast to the over 50% decline in South Asia, largely due to marked reductions in India. The adolescent birth rate in Southeast Asia, with 47 births per 1000 females aged 15-19 in the Philippines, is now higher than that of South Asia, currently 35 births per 1000 females.

Dr. Joudane reiterated the need for more qualitative and quantitative data on the inter-related factors and drivers between the onset of sexual intercourse and adolescent pregnancy and early union and marriage. It is imperative that the girls' agency and adolescents' biological readiness for sex are not ignored. However, she expressed those interventions in the pattern of adolescent pregnancy preceding child marriage among adolescent girls in ASEAN must be tailored according to the context, where the approach is always girl-focused. According to Dr. Joudane, these interventions in the region must include comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and access to services. There is an abundant number of evidences showing that CSE delays the onset of sexual activity compared to abstinence programs that do not. She underscored the importance to acknowledge the need of adolescents for CSE as an investment in adolescent girls towards building human capital and ensuring that they reach their full social and economic potential.

In UNFPA Philippines Longitudinal Cohort Study following 10-years old, data show significant differences among children whose mothers became pregnant before the age of 20 vs. those who became pregnant at a later date, as shared by Dr. Joudane. She explained that for children who had Adolescent mothers, when looking at the characteristics of the mothers, the following can be observed:

- Adolescent mothers are more likely to have poorer educational attainment.
- Adolescent mothers are less likely to be employed.

- Adolescent mothers are significantly more likely to be a Conditional Cash Transfer beneficiary - meaning they are considered to be poor.

She expressed concern on the observed characteristics of the index child, that those with adolescent mothers are:

- More likely to have repeated a grade/performed worse in school.
- More likely to be stunted.

She explained that the baseline data is emerging evidence that adolescent mothers can pre-dispose their children to the same disadvantageous socioeconomic, educational and health conditions that led them to be an adolescent parent in the first place.

Recommendations by UNFPA:

I. More research needed

- There are quantitative data but they are not giving the information needed to develop appropriate solutions and programs.
- In every country it is imperative to know what types of child marriage are included in the “child marriage” data.
- What percentage are legal agreements, religious ceremonies or more flexible unions comprised? Were they forced, arranged, peer-led or “resolving” an adolescent pregnancy?
- How to work with adolescents to ensure that peer-led unions do not have adverse consequences e.g. school dropout, adolescent pregnancy.

II. Recommendations to inform effective policy

These evidences should inform policies that:

- Recognize the right of adolescents to express their own views on all matters of concern to them and be responsible for decisions affecting them.
- Should not in any way - either directly or indirectly - disadvantage, stigmatize, or penalize adolescents.
- Promote adolescent-centered investments that address the root causes of child marriage.

III. Response services and protection

- Policies and support to married children and pregnant girls to continue their education and skills development.
- Targeted pregnancy care, holistic psycho-social and maternal health care for adolescent girls and mothers.
- For married girls, provision of targeted SRH services and family planning for informed birth spacing decisions.
- Response services to GBV and intimate partner violence (IPV) against married girls and teenage mothers.
- Addressing stigmatization and isolation of married children, pregnant adolescent girls, and teenage mothers.

IV. National legislation to solve CEFM

Although currently, pending legislations in the Philippine Congress seek to address and end CEFM, it is unclear whether they will have the intended impact. Dr. Joudane underscored the need to prioritize tackling underlying drivers of child marriage such as poverty, lack of educational and economic opportunities, and addressing gender inequalities. She explained that in countries or communities where unions are peer-led, there is a strong argument to address these through adolescent pregnancy and education/employment programmes, not elimination of child marriage programmes. Eliminating CEFM requires addressing sexuality in a positive way, since it is sexuality, along with gender inequality and poverty, that shapes families' perceptions of the advantage to marrying daughters early.

Finally, Dr. Joudane summarized that there are 5 strategies that legislators can use to deepen the collective impact - empower adolescent girls who are at risk of child marriage, or who are already married, with knowledge about their rights and consequences of child marriage, and with skills to express their views and exercise their choices.

1. **Empower** adolescent girls who are at risk of child marriage, or who are already married, with knowledge about their rights and consequences of child marriage, and with skills to express their views and exercise their choices.
2. **Educate** and mobilize families, communities and leaders to invest in adolescent girls, also by engaging men and boys, against child marriage
3. **Strengthen** the accessibility, quality and responsiveness of services for adolescent girls in key sectors especially education, health, child and social protection.
4. **Foster laws** and policies that protect and promote the rights of adolescent girls.
5. **Generate and use data** and evidence to inform programs and policies relating to adolescent girls

Dr. Joudane ended her presentation and wished that coordinated efforts will finally end child marriage in the Philippines and in the region.

Analysis and Intervention on Ending Child Marriage in Asia and the Pacific

Mr. Sekulovic reiterated that Plan International condemns the harmful practice of child early and forced marriage and unions which is a violation of human rights, a harmful practice, and in many cases, a form of gender-based violence. He reaffirms the commitment of all signed parties of UN in the Sustainable Development Goal and

to eliminate harmful practices such as CEFM and female genital mutilation (FGM) by 2030. He said that he will not explain further what was already shared and explained by Dr. Joudane on the different patterns and root causes and consequences of child early and forced marriage, as well as the regional overview, but will focus on the dynamics, manifestations and triggers and how they are different across the greater Asia region.

He said that it is important to remember that CEFM globally, has a huge economic cost, and there are comprehensive studies that provides evidences on this, that's why it is important to invest in ending this harmful practice. He highlighted how complex problems require comprehensive, integrated and multisectoral holistic response and solutions. He proceeded by informing the body of Plan's global strategic framework, focused at the legal policy framework and budget dimensions towards **consistent enforcement**. He highlighted the following points:

1. Governments at different levels implement and enforce overarching legal and policy framework to prevent and stop CEFM (customary law superseded).
2. Governments at different levels make specific budget allocation to tackle CEFM across all relevant ministries.
3. Judiciary implements and reinforces legal and policy framework
4. Civil Society Organizations strengthen partnerships, structures, and networks to contribute to consistent law enforcement
5. Girls influence legal and policy frameworks and budgeting (including tracking) through the amplification of their voices in all sectors

Focusing at the Social Norms, Attitudes, Behaviors and Traditions dimensions towards **empowerment and equality**, here are the points shared by Mr. Sekulovic:

1. Girls are empowered to make choices about if, when and who to get married to
2. Boys and men challenge gender stereotypes and engage in actions to prevent and eliminate CEFM
3. Families (including caregivers) and communities transform harmful gender norms and practices that drive and perpetuate CEFM
4. Religious and traditional leaders, champions and role models actively oppose CEFM
5. Civil Society Organizations initiate and scale up innovative approaches and programmes to end CEFM
6. Governments and technocrats challenge gender stereotypes and lead the actions to end CEFM

While on the Social and economic resources and safety nets dimensions towards **economic strengthening and self-determination**, here are the points shared:

1. Parents (fathers and mothers) and relevant family members (both men and women) allocate resources for girls' alternatives to marriage, strive for equal participation of men and women in decision-making processes, and have peer support available for doing so.
2. Private/public sector/NGOs advance and make economic opportunities accessible to women and girls (employment, loans, saving schemes etc.).
3. Community volunteers and leaders empower girls with psychological/legal/CSE/skills/information.
4. Girls (married & unmarried) have and utilize skills (CSE, education, vocational etc.) and benefit from continuous peer support to reject CEFM.
5. Service providers deliver gender-responsive, child-sensitive quality services (SRHR, education, protection, etc.).

In response to COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Sekulovic also shared that they've been intensifying and stepping up the efforts and specific investments in girls' continuous education, economic independence and empowerment for themselves and their families; safety and protection from violence related to CEFM, as well as for girls being able to decide for themselves when and whom to marry, and on matters relating to family planning and child bearing. He also gave credits to girls' youth activism in helping them scale up their interventions in communities.

Mr. Sekulovic shared that these efforts, which they call Time to Act! must be translated into reality through evidence-based, holistic and gender-transformative programming and influencing, which they have been supporting. He also mentioned that there are around 20 interventions across the greater Asia Pacific region in ten countries that focus on different causes of CEFM. Countries where interventions are being implemented are Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Cambodia, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Laos, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The following are countries with their respective focus of interventions:

Cambodia	Economic Empowerment and protection from violence and SRHR
Indonesia	SRHR holistic blend
Timor-Leste	Blend of GBV and SRHR response
Laos	SRHR and girls empowerment
Thailand	SRHR, challenging social norms and providing access to services
Vietnam	Education, empowerment and support services

Mr. Sekulovic also underscored the importance of harnessing the power of digital technologies and online platforms. The use of the technology is very prominent and it is helpful in reaching the key affected populations and help them access services. He said that there are a lot of holistic interventions that are being implemented during

the COVID-19 pandemic through the help of digital technology and online platform. He then shared that recently, Plan launched a research called “Time to Act: Let’s Go Digital”, which explains the many ways to use the digital technology and online platform in verification of age of prospective brides and grooms. Additionally, this will also be helpful in raising awareness on child marriage through online campaigns and support reporting in several mechanisms and pathways. This will also galvanize youth engagement and girls activism and provide safe spaces and allow them to raise concerns towards the policymakers.

He also shared that they significantly invest in girls’ leadership index, where he showed several domains and indicators such as education, economic opportunities, protection from violence, health, political voices and representation, and laws and policies. He also said that supporting youth-led engagement and campaigns is among the most significant priority of Plan.

To summarize his presentation, Mr. Sekulovic shared that there are currently key approaches being pursued which are:

1. **COMPREHENSIVE, MULTI-SECTORAL AND HOLISTIC INTERVENTIONS:** eliminating CEFM and adolescent pregnancies should not be approached in isolation, but rather through well-planned, resourced and coordinated systemic efforts by all sectors and with the engagement of traditional and faith-based leaders and building partnerships to involve all key actors. It is of particular importance to ensure joint efforts in ensuring continuous education, economic empowerment, protection from violence and access to SRHR related information and services.
2. **APPLYING A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH:** by tackling the root causes of gender inequality, discriminatory social norms, policies and legislation. Improvements are needed not only in daily condition of girls, but also to advance their position and value in society. Achieving positive changes and sustainable outcomes for girls implies transforming norms, attitudes and behaviors; social and economic resources and policy frameworks and budgets.
3. **INVESTMENT IN GENDER-RESPONSIVE SERVICES:** continuity of sexual and reproductive health services must be assured to promote access for girls of reproductive age, and the obstacles and barriers to addressing the mental health, psychosocial well-being and resiliency of girl survivors and those most at-risk must be urgently promoted.
4. **STRENGTHENING EVIDENCE THROUGH RESEARCH AND LEARNING:** investing in ongoing research, documenting promising practices, innovations and experimenting with new approaches is critical to reflect the dynamic nature of the ways in which CEFM & AP manifest and evolve. New emerging forms of CEFM need to be properly researched and examined to ensure appropriate, timely and effective response.

5. **CONTINUOUS EDUCATION AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT:** many girls and women are undervalued, underestimated and continue to experience gender related inequalities and deprivation. Adolescence is an important time when girls develop their leadership capabilities through continuous education and empowerment.

He underscored the importance of following these approaches so that child marriage will be completely abolished and won't be able to bounce back in the society. He concluded his presentation by leaving a message to never stop partnering, reach out, and join interventions in ending child marriage, so that girls can learn, lead, decide and thrive. He thanked everyone for being a critical power in ending this practice.

Brief intervention by Ms. Upala Devi, UNFPA APRO's Focal Point for Child Marriage

Ms. Devi reminded everyone that she will focus on the context of COVID-19 pandemic, as it severely impacted the cases of child marriage across the Southeast Asia and the Pacific region.

She expressed that beyond the havoc it caused, the pandemic requires humanitarian response and it exacerbated ongoing gender-based violence, like culturally sanctioned and ill-informed social norms that show that girls and women actually have less value than boys and men. She said that it is one of the worst humanitarian disaster. She shared that according to UNFPA, the pandemic can result or affect 13 million more unions taking place in 2020-2030 that need to be averted. Not surprisingly, child marriage has been occurring more frequently as well as other violation of girls' rights.

She shared that the new cases have been well documented in the recent research by the UNICEF and UNFPA on child marriage in the COVID-19 context. She then expressed that she will end her remark with an optimistic one by highlighting how parliamentarians can use the multisectoral framework in ending child marriage by involving other actors like the UN and civil societies. She then proceeded to share the following key action points:

1. The parliamentarians must work with their respective governments to strengthen laws, policies and programs all the more and be diligent on the impact especially on the context of humanitarian response.
2. Advocates must be agile to shift course as disasters bring forth unintended outcomes and unexpected drivers of harmful practices including CEFMU. Efforts bolster women and girls' empowerment and physical equality and that is granted by gender equality rights that the government should prioritize, including disaster response measure.

3. Finally, the comprehensive data which Dr. Joudane also shared as the 5th pillar in the presentation. Comprehensive data on child marriage across the Asia can help to understand the true scale of CEFM. Data is key. She said that parliamentarians must work together with the governments and civil societies to fill this dire gap.

She concluded her remark by saying that from crisis there are opportunities. Humanitarian settings during pandemic could open doors, and bring forth some good practices on policy and programming and can be leveraged in ending child marriage and unions. She thanked everyone and cued Prof. Kiyoko on the end of her remark.

Part II

Shortly after Prof. Ikegami thanked everyone who presented, she introduced the session chair who will be presiding over the second part of the learning session.

SESSION CHAIR



Hon. Maria Lourdes Acosta-Alba is a Member of the Philippine Parliament, Chairperson of PLCPD for the House of Representatives and current Chairperson of the House Committee on Women and Gender Equality.

Rep. Acosta-Alba thanked Prof. Ikegami for the kind introduction and sent her greetings to the body. She expressed her gratitude for being able to moderate the session in exploring pathways to end child marriage. She sends her hope that even if this is a challenging task, it is not impossible through the help of the distinguished parliamentarians who will be sharing experiences and strategies in how to effectively legislate measure to end this harmful practice in various cultural settings. She then invited everyone to see this as an opportunity for collaboration to legislate policies for the protection of children, especially of girls, and their rights.

Sharing of Experiences in Enacting Legislation Banning Child Marriage



Hon. Meher Afroze is a member of the Bangladesh Parliament and the current State Minister for Women and Children.



Hon. Shri Md. Nadimul Haque from India is currently the Chairman of the West Bengal Haj Committee.



Hon. Ermalena Muslim Hasbullah is the Executive Director of the IFPPD and a Special Expert Staff of the Deputy Chairman of People's Consultative Assembly Republic of Indonesia.

Bangladesh

Hon. **Afroze** thanked the body and organizers for the privilege to share their experience in the enactment of child marriage restraint law in Bangladesh, which has the 2nd highest absolute number of child marriage in 2019. Child marriage is a huge impediment for girls' development and hampers women participation in labor force. Despite the decrease in number of cases over the last decade, she revealed that it is still being practiced in Bangladesh according to the monthly indicator cluster survey of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in collaboration with UNICEF, it is found that girls married under 18 comprised 62% of the population from

“ Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina committed to end marriage of girls below the age of 15, reduce by a third the rate of marriage of girls aged 15-18 by 2021, and completely eliminate child marriage by 2041. We need more consistent and continuous force from the government, non-government organizations, and other partners to achieve the goal.”



Hon. Meher Afroze
Member of Parliament, Bangladesh

At the Online Dialogue of Parliamentarians in Asia Pacific titled, Exploring Pathways in Ending Child Marriage, 7 June 2021



2012-2013, but the number was reduced to 51% in 2019.

According to Hon. **Afroze**, Bangladesh has given high priority in reducing child marriage as their country ranks high in absolute number of cases both in South Asia and globally due to gender discriminatory behaviors and other root causes. She said that through the leadership of H. E. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2014, a committee was formed to end marriage of girls below 15 years old and to reduce by 1/3 the rate of marriage for girls between 15-18 by 2021, and to completely eliminate child marriage by 2041. The priority target of the SDG implementation set by the government is to reduce child marriage before the age of 18 to 10% and eliminate marriage of children aged of 15 by 2030. She also noted that this requires a huge pool of resources as it would also require consistent and continuous efforts from the government and NGOs to achieve the goal. The Bangladesh government has enacted Child Marriage Restraint Act in 2017 and Child Marriage Restraint Rules in 2018, which further strengthened the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929. The offense under Child Marriage Restraint Act in 2017 has been included in the Mobile Court Act of 2009. These policies provide significant roles in punishing the offenders.

She also said that the Ministry of Women and Children has prepared a national action plan to end child marriage for 2018-2030, and has been continuously working on the implementation of the action plan. The national action plan will be implemented in 3 phases: 1) Short term (2018-2019), 2) Mid-term (2019-2021) and 3) Long term (2029-2030). She also said that they are conducting seminars, workshops, and meetings regularly for treating ironies against dowry and child marriage.

She expressed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, they are aware of the barriers it caused not just in social and economic aspect, but also on the worsening of pre-existing discrimination and inequalities. Women have a high risk of income loss, violence and harassment, exploitation and will suffer more economically as employment are less secured for women workers especially in the informal sectors. She underscored that in Bangladeshi law, legal age of marriage for women is 18, and 21 for men. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a steady rise of child marriage in their country due to various existing issues in Bangladesh such as poverty, food insecurity and others. She informed the body that Hon. PM Hashina, has taken different measures to end child marriage in 2041, these measures include enactment of Child Marriage Restraint Act in 2017 and remain active in helping students and sending financial support to vulnerable groups.

The parliamentarians in Bangladesh have been addressing critical social issues, and under the kind leadership of the Association of Bangladesh Parliament on Population and Development, BPPD in 2014, and formed 3 committees to eliminate child marriage and prevent gender-based violence, improve maternal health, ensure safe delivery, family planning and population dynamics and youth development. Hon. Afroze said that she is currently leading the eliminating child marriage and prevent

gender-based violence committee and organizing consultations with concerned standing committees and these are guiding ministries for enforcement of laws and policies to eliminate child marriage and gender-based violence. This also ensure transparency and accountability in budgetary provisions. There are also workshops, consultations and hearings done both in local and national to capacitate parliamentarians, different sectors and key stakeholders in preventing gender-based violence.

She happily shared to the body that through various interventions, administrations of 20 districts have also taken a number of activities to address child marriage and gender-based violence and have made it as one of their main agendas. They are also conducting monthly reporting, and meetings and discussions for follow up regular monitoring. She also promised that they will organize actions and activities for parliamentarians and key stakeholders to continue these efforts. Before concluding her sharing, she said that the root causes of child marriage in their country are poverty and lack of education. She then shared her hopes that they will soon witness change in the situation of their country on child marriage and hoped that everyone is on board in ending this practice.

India

Hon. Haque said that this is rooted in gender inequality and patriarchal social norms, and it is also linked to various inaccessibility of services and education. It further persists due to poor enforcement of law. There was also a lack of information on law and consequences, and officials refuse to report the social barriers that affects the enforcement of this policy measure, as there is limited trust in the institution in ending child marriage.

In India, Hon. Haque shared that there are 3 considerations in the right age of marriage for women: 1) they should be physically, emotionally and biologically mature; 2) they should be capable of giving their legal consent, so that they can ensure a marital commitment; and 3) they should be able to fulfill a happy married life. He said that girls and women should already have stability in her menstrual cycles and their ovulation comes around the age of 20 years old, thus, the right age of reproduction is about 20 or 18 years old. He also shared that there are several reasons why many girls marry at much earlier ages- poverty, insecurity, financial hardship, lack of education and poor enforcement of Marriage Laws.

Hon. Haque said that there are many risks on child marriages and early reproduction, and this includes delay on physical growth, school dropout, exposure to domestic violence, early pregnancy and childbirth, health complications, infant mortality and poor pregnancy outcomes. This is why in India, several child marriage laws have been passed to address child marriage and its consequences. He shared that the Child Marriage Restraint Act, also called Sarda Act was passed 1929, and was enacted on April 1,

1930 to whole nation with the exception of princely states. This clearly defines 18 years or younger and female 15 years or younger as a child. But this was raised to 21 for male and 18 years or younger for female, due to several revisions after Independence. This law is applicable in the entire India although it has been challenged in India's courts by some organizations.

“ There are three considerations to be made in setting the minimum age for marriage: 1) physical, emotional, and biological maturity; 2) capability to give own legal consent to ensure marital commitment; and 3) capability to fulfill a happy married life.

Elected officials and parliamentarians need to be involved in addressing these.”



Hon. Shri. Md. Nadimul Haque
Member of Parliament, India

At the Online Dialogue of Parliamentarians in Asia Pacific titled, Exploring Pathways in Ending Child Marriage, 7 June 2021



“ In India, many are getting married before the legal age for many reasons that are linked to lack of education, inequality, and the view that women are liabilities. There is failure to implement laws that reduce discrimination. The law has been amended to fix the minimum age of marriage for females at 18. And there are current efforts to increase it further to 21.”



Hon. Shri. Md. Nadimul Haque
Member of Parliament, India

At the Online Dialogue of Parliamentarians in Asia Pacific titled, Exploring Pathways in Ending Child Marriage, 7 June 2021



He shared that this law has been updated in 2006 through the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, which was made effective on November of 2007, and highlights the definition of child marriage as 21 and 18 years for males and females or younger, respectively. This definition is valid for all religions. This act hopes to fix the shortcomings of the earlier act which are the following:

1. Change in name now reflects “ prohibition” from earlier version of “restraining”.
2. It made relatively easy and less time consuming to act against child marriage.
3. It also fixed responsibility on Child Marriage Prohibition Officer appointed under the Act.
4. It made male responsible for marriage with minor a punishable Act.

5. Boys and girls forced into child marriage as minors have option of voiding their marriage up to two years after reaching adulthood.

Considering these, Hon. Haque shared that there's been a re-evaluation on the child marriage age, as civil societies in India are voicing out the need to raise the age of marriage of female and several processes took place after the examination of this proposal by an appointed task force. The recommendation that came out was to raise the minimum age of marriage for girls at 21 years in phased manner and that the States must be given enough time and space to do groundwork for this legislation.

According to Hon. Haque, to support the existing laws, there are also incentive schemes which have been designed and introduced to delay marriages and for the overall development of adolescent girls. These schemes provides monetary incentives to the family of girl child, to support girls' education and to support (towards dowry) if they marry after age of 18 years. Their National Commission for Women also oversees and is involved in prevention of this practice by raising awareness.

However, Hon. Haque expressed that despite all these efforts, achievement remain limited, as decline in incidences of child marriage are moving slowly from 1990-2019/2020, ranging from 54.2% decline to 26.8% last 2015-2016. It is also on this period when some states are showing high incidence of CM with Bengal having 43.9%. He said that this low achievement may be attributed to several factors. He shared that child marriage is not considered as a crime but a welfare measure that falls in welfare section of Ministry of Women & Child Development (MWCD). Additionally, promotion of delayed marriages is only one component of overall development agenda of adolescent girls of MWCD, as described under SDG. The 2006 Laws also have inherent problems and not seriously implemented, like the MWCD's prepared Plan of Action for Prevention of Child Marriage which is still pending implementation since 2014. Simply put, Hon. Haque said that child marriage has not been receiving serious attention in India.

These gaps in efforts were due to several factors like the inaction of Government on implementation, not treating it as a crime but a welfare measure, non-accountability, inconsistent monitoring, non-involvement of grass-root level elected representatives/institutions and communities, as well being unable to mobilize and consolidate the support of other community like NGOs, CSO, youth groups, self-help groups, and field level workers. To address these indicated gaps, there are 5 identified challenges that needs to be solved in addressing this issue. These are:

1. Empower girls with information on laws, ill-effects of early marriages and support network for help if needed. Schools and Field level workers, Youth Organizations may be mobilized.
2. Provide incentives to girls for education and parents for delaying marriage. Give adequate publicity to these incentive schemes.

3. Educate and mobilize parents/elderly and opinion-makers in the community. Involve women, self-help groups, local leaders, field level workers. Civil society members NGOs and elected representatives at all levels.
4. Enhance access of girls to education --accessible with built-in security and make it affordable (for poorer families).
5. Implement supportive laws and policies with all seriousness, built-in accountability and close monitoring of its serious implementation.

Hon. Haque remarked that elected representatives are strong influencers, and they are important actors in bridging government machinery and community as they can provide support to all of the 5 identified challenges, and they have specific impact on community members and capable of dissuading marriage parties. However, this also means that they need to be capacitated and be sensitized on the issue and have them take an oath to never be involved in any event promoting CM. He also highlighted the significant role of IAPPD in this action, as they have also been working with elected representatives at all level- MPS, MLAs, and *Panchayati Raj Institutions (village level)* -- to sensitize and involve them on important social issues, so they will become vocal on the issue and make it their mission.

He expressed that this should also be handled diplomatically, and propagate the idea that this is a criminal act. It is also imperative to make the communities understand not to discriminate their offspring and allow them to marry at their legal age of marriage. With this, Hon. Haque once again thanked the body and concluded his sharing.

Indonesia

Hon. Hasbullah started her sharing by saying that it is not easy to look closely at the history of marriage law in Indonesia. Law No 1 of 1974 prescribed 16 years as the marriageable age for girls and 19 years for boys. The first Judicial Review in 2014 was rejected by the Institutional Court but was accepted in 2017 which resulted in the endorsement of Law 16 of 2019 which defines 19 years as the marriageable age for both girls and boys. To understand these decisions, Hon. Hasbullah shared some reasons or arguments from Judicial review of 2014 and 2017 and their differences.

“ It is the State's responsibility to fulfill the rights of individuals to form their own families, to guarantee children's rights and protection. Child marriage has negative impacts on children's growth, safety, health, and education. ”

Hon. Ermalena Muslim Hasbullah
 Indonesian Parliamentarian on Populations and Development

At the Online Dialogue of Parliamentarians in Asia Pacific titled, Exploring Pathways in Ending Child Marriage, 7 June 2021







The Judicial Review of 2014 was proposed by several NGOs and individuals aiming to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18, without mentioning the same rights of boy and girls. Reproductive rights was also one of the main arguments during the time. In 2017, however, the review was proposed by three actual victims of child marriage named Endang Wasrinah, Maryanti and Rasminah. It was argued that this is a discrimination of girls from boys and are in contrast with other laws such as the Art. 27 (1) of Constitutional Law (UUD) of 1945 on equality before the law for girls and boy, and against the goal of marriage itself in Art. 1 (a) and (d) of Law No 1 of 1974. Personal reasons such as less access to education, economy, and reproductive health problems faced were also raised.

Hon. Hasbullah explained that the process in Indonesia can be two-way - can come from the parliament, second from the government. In their experience in Law No 16 of 2019, this was directly brought to the parliamentarians and she also shared a brief background on its enactment. She shared that the State has a responsibility to fulfil the rights of individual to form a family and continue the lineage through a legal marriage by guaranteeing children's rights and protection from violence and discrimination. They also raised that negative impacts of child marriage on children's rights, health and development, and said that it is important to implement the Decision of Constitutional Court No 22 of 2017. Hon. Hasbullah explained that in Law 16 of 2019, it is highlighted that marriage is only allowed if boys and girls reach 19 years of age, dispensation can be requested to the Court with urgent reasons, and the Court should listen to the opinions of the girl and boy performing marriage, before endorsing the dispensation.

Looking closely on how Indonesia tackles child marriage, Hon. Hasbullah shared the current status of child marriage in their country following the SDG target. She revealed that according to the annual social economic survey in 2018, Indonesia has been seeing reduction in cases of child marriage as the 14.67% in 2008 turned to 11.21 in 2018. She noted, however, that the geographical differences and risk factors like household with lower quintile of expenditure, rural areas, and low household education are responsible for the prevalence of child marriage like in West Sulawesi which has the highest prevalence at 19.43% and West Java, which has the highest absolute number of 273,300 child marriages. She shared that in 2018, 1 in 9 women aged 20-24 were married before 18 while there is 1 in 100 men. The problem in the legal framework is, while the legal age of marriage without parental consent is 21, dispensation request allows exemption which also allows children to marry at an earlier age. Despite this, they aim to improve this and target to reduce child marriage from 11.2% in 2018 to 8.74% in 2024.

To be able to achieve this goal, Hon. Hasbullah said that a National Strategy for Child Marriage Prevention has been endorsed in 2019. Its approach stand in these seven crafted principles: participatory, multi-sector, THIS (Thematic, Holistic, Integrative,

Spatial), child protection principles, gender equality, effective, efficient, measurable, continuous, and debottlenecking strategy. She also shared the five strategies of this plan which are optimization of child capacity, supporting environment, accessibility and expanding services, Strengthen regulation and institution, and strengthen coordination among stakeholders. She also highlighted that there must be a division of labor from the central government down to the regional to provinces, district-subdistrict and villages. To conclude her sharing, she informed that body that IAPPD has been working closely with UNFPA Indonesia to make sure that local regulation in the spatial area is conducted and monitor the number of child marriages. With this, she ended her sharing and thanked everyone.

Part III



Hon. Raissa H. Jajurie is the elected Deputy Majority Floor Leader of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority in the Philippines, and the first woman to join the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) delegation in negotiation with the Government of the Philippines for peace in the Bangsamoro



Hon. Laisa Masuhud-Alamia is the current Minority Floor Leader of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority in the Philippines and a human rights lawyer, an educator, and a frontline health care worker who has worked in different sectors.



Hon. Bernadette Herrera is the Representative of Bagong Henerasyon Party List and is one of the Deputy Speakers. She is a member of PLCPD and one of the principal authors of the first bill that seeks to end child marriages in the Philippines in the previous Congress.

I. Perspective on Ending Child Marriage through Policy Reform

Hon. Jajurie greeted the body as the Majority Floor Leader of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) and also on behalf of the Chief Minister of BTA, Ahod Ebrahim, for the invitation to BARMM to share experiences and perspectives on CEFM. She informed the body that the BTA is a new entity having been established in 2019 as a product of decades of negotiations between the government of Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and was given fiscal autonomy and the opportunity to decide on its own programs. She shared that prior to this it generally continued the same programs of its predecessor, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which already had funds.

She noted that under the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), there is a regional government in BARMM that is graced with certain powers. Although still in transition, the 80 members that now sit in the Parliament of Bangsamoro have all been appointed by the President of the Philippines. During the transition period, the members are mandated by BOL to manage the transition of previous autonomous government, set up the bureaucracy, legislate priority codes mentioned in the law itself and prepare for the election for the regular Bangsamoro government. Given this context, along with a vast range of information and experiences on the matter of CEFM, she said that the BTA takes this matter seriously considering the mandate of BOL.

She expressed that it covers a lot of issues related to the vulnerability of children, sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls, gender-based violence, the right to education and personal development among others. The prevalence in the country, especially in the Bangsamoro was also highlighted earlier. She stated that them in the Bangsamoro must also uphold and protect the fundamental rights of women and children as they aware of various international commitments and through the mandate under BOL to respect protect, and promote the rights of children take measures that will protect them.

“Penalizing the act of child marriage may not be enough in itself; the underlying reasons for child marriages should be addressed. It should be a tailor-fit approach, not a one-size-fits-all approach.”



Hon. Atty. Raisa Jajurie
Bangsamoro Transition Authority

At the Online Dialogue of Parliamentarians in Asia Pacific titled, Exploring Pathways in Ending Child Marriage, 7 June 2021



She also underscored the important role of the Darul-Iftah of the Bangsamoro, who issued a Fatwah entitled “the Model Family in Islam” which was released in 2015, as it highlights the important considerations on the interest and comfort of couples with regards to marriage, which was backed by experts and specialists outside of the

religious realm. She then raised the question “What is written in our law and what is the practice on the ground?” She said that it should be known that while the Family Code of the Philippines sets 18 as the legal age of marriage, there is an existing Code of Muslim Personal Laws that allows marriages of individuals who are less than 18. On the ground it is being practiced, and encouraged not just among Muslims which the CMPL covers, but also among the non-Moro indigenous peoples in the region.

She expressed that this practice cannot be addressed through policy alone. There is a need for a more comprehensive and coordinated effort that would include child protection systems, access to justice, inclusive access to education and health care including SRHR, among others. She said that legislation that merely penalizes child marriages without recognizing the context will not be enough to stop the practice and may even backfire in the advocacy. She suggested that there should be more engagement with the community, more consultations and more awareness raising, so that there will be more support for the bills.

She also highlighted the importance of addressing the underlying reasons why CEFM thrives, saying that it should be a tailored-fit approach and not a one size fits all approach. She declared that the Bangsamoro government is committed to protect the right of the children, especially the girl child against any practice that will expose them to harm and ignorance and exclude them from opportunities. This is why more stakeholders must be engaged at this point so that they are informed on the impacts of CEFM and its various dimensions.

She reiterated that when they make decisions on this matter, it cannot be just one aspect or perspective alone, it requires a holistic approach and bring the discussions on the ground. She also shared that in the Cabinet of the Bangsamoro government, she had proposed the crafting or enactment of a Children’s Code as one of the priority legislative of the Government of the Day. She informed the body that part of this Code are measures that will discourage early marriages and ensure that children (below 18) are provided with all the opportunities.

Before ending her sharing, she informed the body that this is still in the process of deliberation and she hopes to bring the Code to the Parliament so that there can be stronger policy support in ending child, early and forced marriages.

II. Perspectives on Ending Child Marriage through Policy Reform

Hon. Alamia said that she will not be discussing child marriage in details as it has already been discussed by previous speakers, but she will try to give a better highlight and answer the question on how BARMM perceives the issue on child marriage in terms of children’s rights to protection, participation, survival and development, and its position on the ongoing deliberation in Congress of bills that will prohibit child marriage in the Philippines.

She started her presentation with the overview of BARMM, mentioning once more the nature of the Bangsamoro's transition since its establishment. The GPH-MILF Peace Process which started in 1997 resulted to the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro which was signed in 2014 and followed normalization and political track in the implementation. The establishment of BARMM was part of the political track which includes the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), while the normalization track mainly includes the decommissioning of combatants and putting their weapons beyond use. She noted that BARMM is currently in a post-conflict peace building process. She explained that BOL provided for a 3 years transition period starting in 2019 and is supposed to end by 2022, but there are proposals in Congress for the extension of transition.

She informed the body that BARMM is a region in transition, while there used to be an autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao, but has expanded with 5 provinces, showing the various ethnic groups in BARMM which is also a reflection of its robust culture. The Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) is an interim government to lead the political transition. There is an ongoing decommissioning of combatants in the MILF, where 12,000 BIAF have already been decommissioned under Phase 2. She said that this transition also comes with different challenges such as on poverty and socio-economic inequalities as BARMM has a huge poverty index, on violent conflicts and displacement which are caused by clan feuds, and on governance and service delivery.

Hon. Alamia underscored that these challenges has a gender dimension, where the effects are being carried by women and children. She shared three facts on this concern- (1) that 49% of the Philippine population is female, where BARMM reported to have 50.2% of female population, (2) that 68% of children and 62% of women in BARMM belong to poor families, and (3), that 44% of women in BARMM aged 20-29 are economically active, which is significantly lower than men (90%). Upon analysing these challenges, she said that it can be surmised that the prevalence of child marriage in Bangsamoro can be attributed to different factors.

She revealed that there are approximately 88,600 child brides in the BARMM, which is anchored in the disproportionate factors that affects women and children. According to her, they consider it as a harmful traditional practice common among Moro and indigenous communities with religious, legal, and cultural influences, and mentioned that in terms of legal framework, the body must be aware that the Muslim people has its own Code of Muslim Personal Laws which allow Muslim girls and boys to marry at the age of 15 and that the Shari'ah court can issue the solemnization of the marriage of a female who have reached puberty at the age of 12. As observed, the Muslim people who commit CEFM actually used the CMPL to legitimize forced and early marriages.

She then explained several factors that causes its continuous practice starting with the fact that girls who are subjected to child marriage are seen as a ticket to a family's socioeconomic mobility. However, in a study in 2013, the young people in the region said that the ideal age of marriage for men is 22.6 yo and 21.8 for women. She reiterated the point raised by Hon. Jajurie earlier that the Bangsamoro Government shall respect, protect and promote the rights of children, and that they shall be protected from exploitation, abuse or discrimination which was highlighted in Section 12, Article IX of Bangsamoro Organic Law.

Currently, Hon. Alamia informed the body that there are institutions in BARMM that are mandated to protect the rights of children, as Resolution No. 174, the BTA pledges full support to the Bangsamoro Children's Declaration. Some of these institutions, agencies and ministries are the BWC, MSSD, MOH, and BHRC which are focused on gender, child and youth welfare, and human rights. She underscored that allowing child marriages to continue is also allowing systemic violence to continue and persist in the society and leave these sectors vulnerable to abuse. She demanded that policies must be weaved across levels and strengthen institutions to criminalize child marriage. She also noted that in the national law, **criminal laws in the Philippines also applies in BARMM**. In the present, there are existing agreements and policy efforts from global to regional such as the UNCRC, pending legislation on prohibition of child marriage bills in congress, Gender and Development Code in Regional level where there are proposals to amend provisions like raising the minimum prescribed age for marriage and strong penal provisions.

After recalling the various negative impacts of child marriage to girls and its adverse consequences, she remarked that addressing child marriage does not only require a sound legal framework, but also holistic solutions in the form of post-conflict peace building, as child marriage in the BARMM is often rooted from socio-economic inequalities created by poverty and violent conflict. She then proceeded to share that there are various ways to pursue this track, but highlighted her recommended fundamental reforms which are important at this point of transition of BARMM:

1. Address human capital shortfalls
2. Strengthen recovery and rehabilitation efforts

“Allowing child marriages to continue is to allow social conditions that would let systemic violence against women and children to persist in our society, leading them vulnerable to abuse as their rights are set aside and ignored.”

Hon. Atty. Laisa Alamia
Bangsamoro Transition Authority

At the Online Dialogue of Parliamentarians in Asia Pacific titled, Exploring Pathways in Ending Child Marriage, 7 June 2021

#END Child Marriage

CRN
CHILD RIGHTS NETWORK

PLCPD
Philippine Legislative Commission on Population and Development
Foundation, Inc.

AFPPD

3. Increase women and youth representation in political spaces and public life
4. Pursue transitional justice

To summarize her presentation, she declared that she fully support the initiatives to end child marriage in BARMM, as well as the Bangsamoro Transition Authority. She expressed that there is a need to correct the harmful traditional practice of child marriage which is often legitimized by perpetrators by weaponizing Islamic beliefs in the Bangsamoro culture. Second, she explained that BTA's position on this issue is mainly linked on child protection, and there are existing and ongoing initiatives in BARMM that pursue policy and program interventions to prohibit child marriage in the region. Finally, she underscored that addressing child marriage does not only require policy reforms, but also a holistic multi-dimensional solutions in the form of post-conflict peace building.

Updates on Policy Reform Efforts to End Child Marriage in the Philippines

After thanking the body for the opportunity to share, DS Herrera started her update on the policy reform efforts starting with the status of the bills on prohibition of child marriage at the House of Representatives. She shared that once the hearing under the Committee on Women and Gender Equality is completed, the bills will go to the Committee on Rules and then for Plenary for deliberation. She mentioned that this has already been passed third reading at the Senate level, and it is crucial to pass the same in the House of Representatives so becomes a law of the land.

She expressed her appreciation towards the members of the parliament from BARMM who shared their perspectives and reminded that they only have two or three months to make sure that consultations will be done thoroughly as requested. She called on the women and children's rights organization present in the session to speed up this process and consult if there are any amendments. She also expressed that she was happy to hear that there is common goal and commitment to ending child marriage in the country.

Once again, she said that in the two month break before the deliberation, her office sees an opportunity to organize packets of consultations. She committed to entertain any concerns or inputs. She also assured that the House of Representatives will resume consideration of the bills as soon as the third regular session commences.

She recalled that she filed this bill in the 17th Congress, and now that it is the 18th Congress, she expressed that it has been a long period and parties should be able to submit their respective position. Additionally, she shared to the body that this is also a best opportunity to pass this bill into a law, as the House speaker has already expressed his support on this measure.

“ I welcome our MPs from BARMM, your inputs are welcome as to how we can further improve this so we can altogether end child marriage in the Philippines, considering your religion, your culture and all other indigenous communities. ”



Hon. Bernadette Herrera-Dy
Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives
At the Online Dialogue of Parliamentarians in Asia Pacific titled,
Exploring Pathways in Ending Child Marriage, 7 June 2021



DS Herrera called on the MPs from BARMM to share their inputs so that they can smoothly legislate this policy considering their cultures and religions, as well as the other indigenous communities. To conclude her update and sharing, she emphasized the need to pass this bill already, not just because of religion or belief, but because it is high time to protect the children, and not use poverty as an excuse to allow practices that can jeopardize the future of children. She called for the help of the Muslim brother and sisters, indigenous cultural communities, and offered that she’s

open to hearing their inputs and suggestions hoping that the common goal is to ending child marriage in the Philippines regardless of race, nationality, religion and belief.

She hopes that they all share the common understanding that children deserve their future, the right to achieve their dreams, to finish their studies, and the right to choose for themselves, and asked for the support of everyone in achieving this through the abolishment of child marriage..

Part IV

Open Forum

Rep. Acosta-Alba officially opened the open forum for the parliamentarians and called if there is anyone who would like to ask a question.

Hon. Jajurie raised a question on the main hurdle in enacting policies against child marriage. She said that religion allows this and even endorse it, and asked, especially the Indonesian parliamentarians how they were able to overcome this, relating also to other initiatives such as raising the age of marriage. **Hon. Hasbullah** stated that it wasn’t easy to pass the law and it was a long process. However, she shared that it wasn’t enough to just approach the champions in the parliament, but there is a need to also tap other stakeholders and religious leaders and take the time to discuss how to raise the age of marriage for girls. Even though religious leaders refuses and still believe that this is allowed in Islam, but they brought in experts to dialogue with

religious leaders and impart understanding on the effects of child marriage. The other side includes consolidating the support from international organizations like UNFPA to help with the analysis on the situation of child marriage in Indonesia. Lastly, she said that they are still working with UNFPA for one specific area in Indonesia which is a big Muslim province, and try to talk with their local parliamentarian and try to propose local regulation.

Rep. Acosta-Alba called Hon. Haque to ask a question on the penalties that were applied in violating laws on child marriage. **Hon. Haque** answered by saying that the latest act which is the PCMA of 2016, if he remembers correctly, provides two years of imprisonment for offenders (groom/bride who married a minor), but at the same time those who helped in facilitating this marriage will also be punished. But he reminded that India has very poor implementation and very low awareness on laws, especially females who have very low law knowledge on their rights. Although there is significant decline in cases, it's still prevalent in the Eastern part of India, which is because these parts are less developed than the other parts of India. He also reminded the body of his earlier proposal to really educate the religious leaders more so that these social taboos can be broken. **Mr. Manmohan Sharma** raised a follow-up question asking if there are complaints filed. **Hon. Haque** said that nobody comes up to complain because of the earlier points raised and also because there is no accountability from the child protection officer who are supposed to protect these child marriages, and also, the lack of monitoring. These are gaps and challenges that he recognizes are ones that need to be addressed.

Hon. Hasbullah sent her short message to UNFPA and AFPPD to continue these kinds of conversations in the future so that countries may connect on these issues. She also sent her gratitude towards UNFPA and said that they should continue to support countries on the issue of child marriage.

Hon. Afroze thanked the body and said that they were able to know a lot in the learning session. She underscored that aside from child marriage, there are also other challenges that need to be addressed to end child marriage, that is why they are prioritizing multiple interventions and programs as they also focus on eliminating poverty. She said that Bangladesh is facing a lot of socio-economic problems that proves to be a challenge and causes delay in addressing child marriage. This is why the Prime Minister has decided to focus on these as they. She concluded her comment by emphasizing that there are existing socio-economic problems that need to be addressed first before successfully ending child marriage.

After this final comment, Rep. Acosta-Alba officially closed the open forum and returned the facilitation to Prof. Ikegami. She expressed that definitely, there should be more dialogues in the future like this one. After this, Prof. Ikegami called the Hon. Lagman for the closing message.

CLOSING



Hon. Edcel Lagman, PLCPD Chairperson Emeritus and AFPPD Vice Chairperson, shared his closing remarks with the following message:

“Child marriage causes irreversible damage to children as it cheats them of their birthright to enjoy their childhood. Children have the right to remain youngsters for as long as possible. Their right to quality education, to be healthy and safe from harm, and to be free from adult responsibilities carry as much weight as their inalienable right to run in the sunshine; climb trees; and laugh and play with friends.

The power of play cannot be overemphasized because play enlivens children’s imaginations, nurtures a sense of adventure, and helps them acquire life skills such as the importance of teamwork, sharing, and friendship.

As we have heard from our speakers, inordinately affected by the aberration of child marriage are girl brides who make up more than 80% of the victims of child unions. Considering that we are already in the 21st century, the staggering number of child marriages around the world is both alarming and damning. This statistic is a searing indictment, but let us make this a challenge to confront with confidence and conviction the global menace of child marriage.

This adverse, abhorrent, and antediluvian practice must be consigned to the past soonest and our forum today signifies our solidarity and commitment to finally end child marriage in our respective countries.

We can all learn from each other’s experiences in the initiation of genuine reforms to address traditional practices harmful to children, especially girls, like child marriage; and the implementation of innovative programs and relevant projects that will raise awareness on this gross violation of children’s human rights and drum up support for the swift passage of laws banning child marriage and prescribing penalties for this repugnant crime.

Moreover, I am certain that the best practices shared by our speakers today in the crafting of laws to truly stamp out child marriage into obsolescence will prove useful to advocates in other countries that are yet to enact laws outlawing and criminalizing child marriage, including the Philippines.

“If we work together, we can all slay the monster that is child marriage, which has preyed on our children far too long, harmed their chances of reaching their full potential, damaged their health and development outcomes, and destroyed their future.”



Hon. Edcel Lagman
1st District Representative, Albay
Chairperson Emeritus, PLCPD
At the Online Dialogue of Parliamentarians in
Asia Pacific titled, Exploring Pathways in
Ending Child Marriage, 7 June 2021



Our cause is buttressed by international human rights instruments and conventions foremost of which are the United Nations Convention on Consent to Marriage which provides that States Parties “shall take legislative action to specify a minimum age for marriage” and the Convention on the Rights of the Child - which mandates the abolition of “traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children”.

Child marriage vitiates marital consent because either or both the bride and groom are underage to give valid consent. Moreover, it adversely affects the welfare and wellbeing of

children, principally girls. Their development is seriously prejudiced as their education is abruptly cut short; their employment opportunities become limited; they become more vulnerable to inter-generational poverty; and their health is compromised by early childbearing and multiple pregnancies even as their babies are also more vulnerable to ill-health, developmental delays, and even early childhood mortality.

Archaic cultural and customary practices cannot sacrifice children to the disastrous consequences of child marriages which must be outlawed for general enforcement.

Likewise, the concept of “child marriage” must be revised to include cohabitations outside of wedlock between children, and between adult men and young girls. These live-in unions should be proscribed because they have the same adverse consequences of child marriages.

The passage of a law prohibiting child marriages and clandestine live-in unions involving children must be reinforced by the creation of a social environment where child marriage cannot breed. Government must implement the following policies: a) empowering girls with information, skills and support networks; b) enhancing girls’ access to and completion of quality education; c) providing economic support and incentives to girls and their families; and d) encouraging parents and community leaders to stamp out child marriages.

If we work together, I am confident that we can slay the monster that is child marriage which has preyed on our children for far too long, harmed their chances of reaching their full potential, damaged their health and development outcomes, and destroyed their futures.

“Ending child marriage now is not a slogan. It is a call to action to save our children and assure them a better future.”



Hon. Edcel Lagman
1st District Representative, Albay
Chairperson Emeritus, PLCPD

At the Online Dialogue of Parliamentarians in Asia Pacific titled, Exploring Pathways in Ending Child Marriage, 7 June 2021



This closing message does not close an enduring advocacy and campaign to end child marriage worldwide. Ending child marriage now is not a slogan. It is a call to action to save our children and assure them a better future.”

With this, he concluded his closing message for the learning session.

After Hon. Lagman’s closing message, **Prof. Ikegami** shared the next AFPPD activity for the latter part of the year, which is a youth seminar which is tentatively set on September. She informed the body that invitations will be sent in August for this activity. The second one is the meeting on ICPD 2025 for the AFPPD members in Tokyo in November hoping that this will be a face-to-face meeting, however it is not guaranteed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Concluding her reminders and invitations, Prof. Ikegami officially closed the learning session and thanked all the participants of the event.

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Regional Dialogue on Ending Child Marriage
June 7, 2021 | | 11:30AM – 1:30PM (Tokyo time)

Participants' List

No	Title	Name	Country	Position
AFPPD National Committees on Population and Development				
1	Hon.	Meher Afroze	Bangladesh	MP
2	Hon.	Nadimul Haque	India	MP
3	Hon.	Ermalena Muslim Hasbullah	Indonesia	MP, Chair of Indonesian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (IFPPD)
4	Hon. Prof.	Keizo Takemi	Japan	MP, Chair of AFPPD, Executive Director of JPFP
5	Hon.	Maria Lourdes Acosta-Alba	Philippines	MP, Chair of the House Committee on Women and Gender Equality and PLCPD's Chairperson for the House of Representatives
6	Hon.	Bernadette Herrera	Philippines	MP, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives
7	Hon.	Edcel Lagman	Philippines	MP, Chairperson Emeritus of PLCPD
8	Hon.	Laisa Masuhud Alamia	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao - Philippines	MP, Minority Floor Leader, Bangsamoro Transition Authority
9	Hon.	Raissa H. Jajurie	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao - Philippines	MP, Majority Floor Leader, Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BARMM BTA)

10	Hon.	Hadja Bainon Karon	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao - Philippines	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao - Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BARMM BTA)
11	Hon.	Baintan Adil-Ampatuan	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao - Philippines	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao - Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BARMM BTA)
National Committee Secretariat				
12	Ms.	Nenita Dalde	Philippines	Manager of Advocacy and Partnership of PLCPD
13	Mr.	Romeo Dongeto	Philippines	Executive Director, PLCPD
14	Ms.	Ma. Aurora Quilala	Philippines	Manager of Advocacy and Partnership of PLCPD
15	Ms.	Angelica Ramirez	Philippines	Manager of Advocacy and Partnership of PLCPD
16	Mr.	Rio Magpayo	Philippines	Manager of Advocacy and Partnership of PLCPD
17	Ms.	Luisa Galicia	Philippines	Advocacy and Partnership Officer of PLCPD
18	Ms.	Gillian Lauren Garcia	Philippines	Advocacy and Partnership Officer of PLCPD
19	Ms.	Luisa Galicia	Philippines	Advocacy and Partnership Officer of PLCPD
20	Ms.	Glyziel Gotiango	Philippines	Advocacy and Partnership Officer of PLCPD
21	Ms.	Mikaela Jena Alfonso	Philippines	Advocacy and Partnership Officer of PLCPD
22	Ms.	Mary Antonette Flores	Philippines	Child Rights Network Coordinator
23	Ms.	Maureen Ana Palacios	Philippines	Administrative Officer, PLCPD
24	Ms.	Alma Rosales	Philippines	Finance Officer, PLCPD
25	Ms.	Marilyn Perol	Philippines	Administrative Assistant, PLCPD
26	Ms.	Gemma Moriaga	Philippines	Bookkeeper, PLCPD
27	Mr.	Kisterjay Llever	Philippines	Multimedia artist, PLCPD

28	Ms.	Mariquit Melgar	Philippines	Office of Hon. Maria Lourdes Acosta-Alba
29	Mr.	Rommel Pastor	Philippines	Committee on Women and Gender, House of Representatives
30	Ms.	Joy Piccio	Philippines	Committee on Women and Gender, House of Representatives
31	Ms.	Normina Hadjula Tadifa	Philippines	BARMM BTA
32	Ms.	Ana Martha Galindes	Philippines	BARMM BTA
33	Ms.	Kei Sadang	Philippines	BARMM BTA
34	Ms.	Alexandra Pura	Philippines	BARMM BTA
35	Ms.	Anisa Taha Arab	Philippines	BARMM BTA
36	Mr.	Jonathan Alcantara	Philippines	BARMM BTA
37	Mr.	Manmohan Sharma	India	Executive Director, IAPPD
MP Secretary				
38	Mr.	Yoshiharu Makino	Japan	Secretary to Hon. Keizo Takemi
The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)				
39	Ms.	Upala Devi	APRO	Gender Advisor of UNFPA APRO
40	Dr.	Leila Saiji Joudane	Philippines	Country Representative
41	Mr.	Rio Grace Otara	Philippines	UNFPA Country Office
42	Ms.	Aimee Santos	Philippines	UNFPA Country Office
43	Ms.	Rochel Angela Yu	Philippines	UNFPA Country Office
CSOs				
44	Mr.	Rasa Sekulovic	APRO	Regional Child Protection and Partnerships of Plan International Asia and Pacific Regional Hub

45	Ms.	Shigemi Muramatsu	Philippines	Plan International
46	Ms.	Akrima Arap	Philippines	UnyPhil Women
47	Ms.	Rabiya Sansaluna Mustapha	APRO	Plan International
Related Institutions				
Asian Forum for Parliamentarians' on Population and Development (AFPPD)				
48	Prof. Dr.	Kiyoko Ikegami	Japan	Interim Executive Director
49	Ms.	Yoko Oshima	Japan	Assistant to Interim Executive Director
50	Ms.	Eri Osada	Japan	Staff
-	Ms.	Nenita Dalde	Philippines	Rapporteur
The Asian Population and Development Association (APDA)				
51	Dr.	Osamu Kusumoto	Japan	Secretary-General / Executive Director
52	Ms.	Hitomi Tsunekawa	Japan	Chief Manager, International Affairs
53	Dr.	Farrukh Usmonov	Japan	Assistant Manager of International Affairs/Senior Researcher