

**PROTECTING GIRLS: GLOBAL EFFORTS
TO END CHILD MARRIAGE**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN
HEMISPHERE, TRANSNATIONAL
CRIME, CIVILIAN SECURITY,
DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS,
AND GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

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PROTECTING GIRLS: GLOBAL EFFORTS TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2016

U.S. SENATE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE,
TRANSNATIONAL CRIME, CIVILIAN SECURITY, DEMOC-
RACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,

Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m. in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Marco Rubio, chairman of the subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Rubio [presiding], Gardner, and Boxer.

Also Present: Senator Durbin.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MARCO RUBIO, U.S. SENATOR FROM FLORIDA

Senator RUBIO. Good morning. This hearing of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crimes, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues will come to order.

The title of this hearing is "Protecting Girls: Global Efforts to End Child Marriage."

We will have two panels testifying today. The first panel will feature the Honorable Catherine Russell, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State, and I want to welcome back Ambassador Russell; and also from the Department the Honorable Anne Richard, Assistant Secretary for Population Refugees and Migration.

The second panel will include Ms. Lakshmi Sundaram, the Executive Director of Girls Not Brides, a global partnership of more than 600 civil society organizations from over 80 countries; and Dr. Suzanne Petroni, who is the Senior Director for Global Health, Youth and Development at the International Center for Research on Women.

Thank you all for being here today.

I would especially like to recognize the diverse array of civil society organizations working tirelessly on this issue, many of whom partnered with my staff and Senator Boxer's staff to make this hearing possible.

Child marriage rarely receives the attention it deserves, especially given the frequency with which it occurs. There are roughly 250 million women alive today who were married before the age of 15, and the devastating impact it has on girls and sometimes boys is impossible to overstate. It perpetuates poverty, it has lasting ma-

ternal and infant health ramifications, and it often contributes to violence. It is not limited just to distant lands. It happens even in our own hemisphere. Child marriage cuts across countries, regions, and cultures.

In our own hemisphere, Brazil and Mexico are fourth and ninth, respectively, in the world in terms of absolute numbers for child brides. India ranks first in the world, followed by Bangladesh and Nigeria, according to data from the Council on Foreign Relations.

In many countries, child marriage is a systematic problem inextricably linked to other developmental issues which this committee has focused on—for example, girls' education, which I chaired a hearing on in June. Leaving school early makes girls more vulnerable to child marriage, and marrying young often prevents girls from furthering their education. I hope we can further explore the nexus between education and child marriage during the course of today's discussion.

Cultural traditions, poverty and gender inequality also play a role. Given the manifold contributing factors, there is no single solution. Legislative and legal fixes, while important, will not alone provide a solution. Consider, for example, that a Human Rights Watch report released this month found that one in three girls in Nepal are married before they reach the age of 18 despite the fact the legal age for marriage is 20. But the absence of simple answers must not lull us into complacency. The stakes are too high.

In addition to the factors I have just described, there are contexts where insecurity, instability, violence and war have exacerbated this problem. This reality prompted us to invite Assistant Secretary Richard to contribute to today's hearing, and I am particularly interested in better understanding how refugee and otherwise displaced communities impact child marriage.

Early assessments are cause for alarm. The Syrian crisis has been described as the single biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time. Approximately 7.6 million Syrians are forcibly displaced, including many within Syria. More than 4.8 million have fled to neighboring countries like Jordan, where civil society groups reported growing incidents of child marriage. A May 2013 piece in the Atlantic featured the story of a 14-year-old Syrian refugee, Maya, who had just recently been engaged to a wealthy Lebanese man, age 45. The piece quotes Maya's mother as saying, quote, "I am marrying my daughter so they can be safe and we can be secure." Maya herself, understandably inconsolable, laments—and this is her quote—"The man I am marrying tells me I am the one who protects you. I am the one who feeds you. You have to do what I say or I will throw you in the street." She says, "I am disgusted by him, but I am doing this for my family so we can live in security," and she continued by saying, "He's right, he is the man who feeds us and protects us, and I would rather be violated by one man than by every man in town."

There are many reports of wealthy men from surrounding Gulf countries further exploiting vulnerable refugee populations and essentially out there shopping for child brides, enticing families like Maya's with promises of material security and physical protection. These sobering realities were reflected in the findings of a recent Interfaith Humanitarian Assessment Mission led by the Lutheran

Immigration and Refugee Service, which observed that more underage Syrian girls are being married, and at younger ages. Some of these early marriages are entered into for economic reasons. It is one less mouth to feed for families living in dire poverty.

However, the group issued a report which found that other child marriages are intended to protect the girl from sexual abuse directed towards unattached girls or to provide an alternative to idleness resulting from not being in school. In some cases, early marriage is also occurring to assist men in gaining access to countries whose borders are, for the most part, closed to single men. A September 2016 story in a prominent German newspaper found that government officials have reportedly encountered hundreds of married minors among the refugee population. This phenomenon is not limited to Germany. Similar reports have now emerged from Denmark and Norway. According to one news report, at least 61 minors were married when they sought asylum in Norway last year. The youngest was an 11-year-old girl.

Child and forced marriage is also being employed as a weapon of war by groups like the Islamic State and Boko Haram. Yazidi girls have reported being captured, separated from their families, and sold into sexual slavery. One victim recounted being taken to a wedding hall with dozens of other girls and women and told by ISIS fighters, "Forget about your relatives. From now on, you will marry us. You will bear our children."

In some contexts, girls who are also religious minorities are especially susceptible to this abuse. This is true in Pakistan, which is the country with the sixth largest number of child marriages in terms of absolute numbers. Civil society organizations, especially those working in the area of religious freedom, note that forced marriage and conversion are prevalent among Christian and Hindu girls, particularly in Punjab and Sindh districts. Similarly in Egypt, there have been reports for many years of Coptic Christian women and girls of being abducted and forced to marry and convert to Islam.

While today's hearing will focus on global dimensions of this issue, a domestic component comes into play when a U.S. citizen who is a minor is taken to another country, typically their parents' country of origin, and compelled into a forced marriage. It is my understanding that civil society organizations have for several years now engaged the State Department, particularly the Office of Overseas Citizen Services, to propose ways to improve protections and to support U.S. victims. However, it is unclear to what extent the Department has taken action. I hope we can address that today.

As a father of four, with two school-age girls, these statistics are particularly sobering as each number represents a girl denied the opportunity to live up to her God-given potential. It represents a bride whose wedding day is not a celebration but rather a memorial as she marks what could only be described as the death of her childhood.

I look forward to hearing from our Administration witnesses about the scope of the U.S. Government's work in this arena, about trends, about areas where we are doing things right, and areas where there is room for improvement. I am also keen to hear from

our panel of private witnesses. You have experience in the field, and that will contribute greatly to what can too easily become an abstract policy discussion.

I would now like to recognize our ranking member and ask if she would like to recognize—do you want to go first or have Senator Durbin, who I know —

Senator BOXER. I am happy to yield to my colleague because I know he has things on his agenda.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Durbin, I appreciate you taking the time to come here. You have taken a leadership role on this issue for many years now, and you are more than welcome, obviously, to stay for the duration of the hearing, but we understand that you may be leaving after your remarks because I know you have a full schedule ahead of you as well. But thank you so much for your work and for being here.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DICK DURBIN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM ILLINOIS**

Senator DURBIN. Senator Rubio and my friend Senator Boxer, and my colleague Senator Gardner, I want to sincerely thank you for this hearing, really. I do not know how often we have had hearings on this subject. We should have many, and the fact that you have taken time from your schedule and made it a priority is very, very important.

I was thinking about this on the way over here, and there is something troubling about the title “child marriage,” because when you think about it, marriage, by conventional wisdom and human experience, is a consensual agreement. It is a social contract freely entered into. In fact, it is one of the few contracts we enter into that we do publicly: Do you take this person to be your wife? Do you take this person to be your husband?

But what we are discussing today is not consensual. It cannot be. One of the parties is a child, legally incapable of making a binding, legal agreement. And it is not free. It is the product of coercion. We know that.

This publication, which I hope you will get a chance to see that I was just handed, on page 18, from our State Department on the subject, in one photograph it shows the story as clearly as possible: “Here in Yemen, two grown men with 8-year-old brides.” That is not marriage. What we are discussing is no more marriage than rape is love, or slavery is an employment contract. It is not. I wish we had a better word. We tend to give this a legal definition, a legal status which it does not deserve.

Worldwide, more than 700 million women alive today and more than 150 million men were married as children. Many were girls married before the age of 15, some as young as 7 years of age. An average 15 million such girls are married annually. We know what happens to these girls. They are more likely to not go to school or drop out, experience domestic violence, face great risk of sexually transmitted disease, and experience complications and even death in childbirth. In fact, pregnancy is consistently among the leading cause of death for girls age 15 to 19.

Now, it has been in decline in recent years, but girls living in developing countries or in poor households are almost twice as likely to marry before age 18. Progress is not happening fast enough.

In 2006, 10 years ago, I introduced the bipartisan International Protecting Girls By Preventing Child Marriage Act, which set out to reduce this harmful practice. I believe, and I think many here agree, child marriage poses a direct threat to investments in education, HIV/AIDS prevention, poverty reduction and, most critically, the basic human rights and safety of girls around the world.

Seven years later my bill passed—that is, by Senate standards, a pretty quick response—as part of the 2013 Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act. It required the Secretary of State to establish and implement a multi-year, multi-sectorial strategy to prevent child marriage, making it a clear policy of the government. I am told this publication is part of the response.

Let me thank Senators Boxer, Cardin, and Isakson for being original co-sponsors of the legislation, and for the support of Senator Lindsay Graham and Pat Leahy for including funding in the Foreign Operations Appropriations bills.

In the years since the legislation passed, our government has made a commitment to ending this practice. Last fall USAID published its Child Early and Forced Marriage Resource Guide, building off its 2012 Vision of Action. The annual State Department Country Reports on Human Rights now include data on child marriage, as it should.

These efforts are changing lives. In Ethiopia, USAID-supported community-based programs have helped educate girls and women on their rights and build skills for becoming peer educators. In Fiscal Year 2013 alone, over 1,000 early marriages were deferred or cancelled just in Ethiopia as a result of this work. In Bangladesh, USAID-funded programs have helped promote girl-friendly educational environments.

But in today's world, girls continue to face the sustained practice of early forced marriage, not just because of the ongoing cycle of poverty but because, as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, of humanitarian crises and terrorism.

We need to do more. We must continue to focus in areas where this practice is most prevalent. We need to utilize a government-wide approach, and I am going to do what I can to help.

I want to thank you again, Mr. Chairman, as well as Senator Boxer, Senator Markey, who is not here at the moment, as well as Senator Gardner. I am happy that several of you have joined me in co-sponsoring the bipartisan Education for All Act, which aligns with the goal of reducing child marriage.

This measure—incidentally, I commend to your attention that Congresswoman Nita Lowey has been a great champion and partner on this bill. She passed it in the House of Representatives. It is now before your committee.

I am going to make a call to the chairman today and ask him to make this a priority. We do not have much time left this year, but this I think can be something that we work on. Education is a key to lifting the lives of girls and thwarting the route of terrorism.

I look forward to all the progress we can make together on this issue, and thanks for this hearing.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you, Senator, for being here.

The ranking member.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BARBARA BOXER,
U.S. SENATOR FROM CALIFORNIA**

Senator BOXER. Thank you.

Senator Durbin, thank you so much. I know you as a colleague, as a friend for so many years, more than we both care to admit. That is how long our family friendship goes back. You have a heart, and you have brought it to so many issues, including this one.

I want to thank the chairman for this hearing. And before you leave, I just want to say two quick things. First of all, when you look at a world in which there are child soldiers, in which there are child prostitutes, in which there is child marriage, there is something wrong. As I wind down my days in the Senate but not my days in this world, hopefully not, people say what are you most proud of, and you try to come up—there are a lot of things that we do that we really are pleased that we could accomplish.

But one of them is the day that I talked to then-chairman John Kerry about setting up a subcommittee that focused on women's issues, because there was never any committee here, subcommittee, that looked at global women's issues. And he said yes, and our ranking member said yes, and Senator Corker kept the subcommittee intact. This gives us a platform to talk about these things.

So before you have to leave, and I know you have to go to the floor, I want to thank you for your leadership on this. All right.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I really again want to thank you for this hearing. Child marriage is more than a human rights concern. It is a violation of an individual's freedom. I think Senator Durbin made an excellent point. Marriage has been an institution that has been celebrated throughout the world, and here we have it being used to exploit and destroy, frankly, a little girl's life, and her life forever.

You know, it is an epidemic of global magnitude. It perpetuates cycles of poverty and violence and inequality, and it affects economies, public health and security. So making our case, we not only can make it on the level of the cruelty of it but also the impacts of it on whole economies.

The statistics are staggering. Roughly one of every three girls in the developing world is married before the age of 18. That is about 15 million girls a year. That amounts to 41,000 girls every single day, and the consequences are clear for global health.

For instance, girls who give birth before the age of 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their early 20s. So child marriage is killing girls. Let us just say it like it is. Infants born of child brides are 50 percent more likely to be still-born or die within the first few weeks of life. Child brides are at a much higher risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, and the economic consequences are equally clear. Girls that are forced to marry are more likely to be forced out of school. A single year of primary

school can increase a woman's wages later in life up to 20 percent, and secondary school can increase a woman's future wages by up to 25 percent. This means that she has a chance to live a life.

And child marriage is closely linked with violence and instability in households and at a national level. Girls who marry before 18 are far more likely to experience physical and sexual abuse than their unmarried peers, and they are more likely to believe that a man is justified in abusing his wife than women who marry later. So they are in the situation, taking this abuse, just taking it, just taking it.

The vast majority of the 25 countries that have the highest rates of child marriage are also classified as fragile states, extremely prone to war or natural disasters. By exacerbating poverty, illiteracy and poor health, child marriage contributes to a country's insecurity over the long term.

So given the breadth of the problem, its severe consequences, it is clear we can and have to do more, and I hope that we can all—Senator Gardner, you, and Senator Rubio, myself and others—can speak with Senator Corker and Senator Cardin. Maybe we can take that bill off the desk and get it done before we leave here.

But I do want to thank so much all of our witnesses, both from our State Department and also our non-profits, our witnesses, for adding some light on a very dark subject. What I was going to say is I have a bill on the floor with Senator Inhofe, so I am going to stay here as long as I possibly can before I get called down to the floor. But my heart is here, and this is an issue I will continue to work on whether I am here or I am not here.

With that, I yield back.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

So we are going to begin with our first panel, Ambassador Cathy Russell and Assistant Secretary Richard for the State Department. Thank you for being here. Thank you for your testimony.

Ambassador Russell.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE CATHERINE M. RUSSELL,
AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE, GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES, U.S. DE-
PARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ambassador RUSSELL. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is nice to be back before this committee. Senator Boxer, thank you so much for your continued leadership on this. Senator Gardner, it is nice to see you as well.

Every 60 seconds, an average of 27 girls under the age of 18 are married around the world. That means that over the course of this hearing alone, 400 girls will get married someplace in the world. As child brides and likely child mothers, these girls often drop out of school, their economic opportunities are limited, and they have an increased risk, as Senator Boxer just said, of very serious health concerns from violence and sexually transmitted disease, especially HIV/AIDS.

This does not bode well for U.S. foreign policy objectives. The United States is working so hard to increase the participation of women across the board, including in the formal workforce, because we know that women's full participation is good for women, it is

also good for their families, and it is really important for their countries and the stability of their countries.

But child marriage is a major barrier to that participation. It strips girls of their ability to learn and contribute to their societies and their economies. In fact, this issue does the exact opposite of what we would like to see around the world. Married girls are less likely to send their own children to school and to get them immunized. That means that instead of advancing prosperity, this practice fuels cycles of poverty that we are trying to address.

When you consider that child marriage is a reality for more than 700 million women and girls alive today, it is clear this issue matters to policymakers, to development practitioners, and to foreign policy experts alike. In short, if our goal is to promote peace, security, and prosperity in countries around the world by empowering women, then ending child marriage is an absolute imperative.

In order for us to tackle this problem, it is important to understand why it happens in the first place. Traditional gender roles, poverty, violence and insecurity all fuel this practice, and each of these drivers, whether it is economic, cultural, or social, can be made worse by state fragility, conflict, and humanitarian emergencies. As my colleague, Assistant Secretary Richard, will go into this in a little bit more detail, I would like to underline the point that the problem of child marriage is often exacerbated by armed conflict and instability.

In conflict settings, families may view marriage as a way to keep their daughter safe as in the example, Mr. Chairman, that you talked about, or to lessen economic distress, and we see that violent actors, including rebel or insurgent groups, can force women and girls into marriage. For terrorist groups like Da'esh and Boko Haram, child marriage is a depraved tactic. They use it to terrorize and control entire populations and to recruit new fighters.

Reports indicate that Da'esh has abducted more than 3,000 women and girls, including those from Iraq's religious community of Yazidis and other minority groups. Girls as young as 12 or 13 have been forced to marry violent extremists or sold to the highest bidder, sometimes repeatedly, like cattle at an auction. And in Nigeria, more than 200 schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in Chibok are still missing.

Which brings us to the question of how we can end this harmful practice once and for all. The fact is, there is no single driver of child marriage, and that means there is no single solution, no silver bullet that can address this issue once and for all. It is why the United States takes a holistic approach to address the range of challenges that influence this issue, from health and safety to education and economic opportunity, to the rights of women and girls around the world.

The policy foundation of this work is strong. Child marriage is addressed in the three interagency policies that we can talk about today, and that includes the first-ever strategy on adolescent girls that Senator Durbin referred to earlier and that we discussed in the previous hearing. That strategy was made possible by the strong support of civil society and by members of Congress, and we are very proud that other agencies, including USAID, the Peace

Corps, Millennium Challenge Corporation, as well as PEPFAR, are an important part of this effort.

These agencies are also part of the Let Girls Learn initiative, because while there is no simple answer, we do know and we believe strongly that the single most important thing we can do is keep girls in quality education for as long as possible. Under this initiative, President Obama launched a Challenge Fund to design new holistic programs for adolescent girls. These programs will be created, funded, tested and implemented by the USAID and the State Department, in partnership with a full spectrum of stakeholders in select focus countries. Again, I would like to thank members of the committee for their support of this effort.

We are starting in Malawi and Tanzania, and the other day the President announced that we would also take this approach in Nepal and Laos. This initiative is an opportunity to bring the full weight of the U.S. Government to bear on the issue of adolescent girls and to do it in a way that is smart, comprehensive, and coordinated.

But I do want to emphasize that our efforts are also community focused, because we will not adequately address this challenge without partnering on the local level with political and tribal leaders, families and, most importantly, the girls themselves.

Earlier this year I met a young filmmaker named Tinda Daniel from Ethiopia, which is a country with one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. Tinda created an animated series that shows strong men in respectful relationships with women. She is using art to combat gender-based violence, and she is not alone. She is part of a growing movement of young people who are rewriting their own story of their generation. They are working so that young men are seen as more than perpetrators of violence, and young women are seen as more than victims.

That is the kind of future we can create when everyone, girls and boys, men and women, have the freedom, the rights, and the tools they need to reach their full potential. The State Department is committed to making this a reality for girls around the world because we know that when these girls are empowered, their communities are safer, their economies are stronger, and their countries are more likely to reach their full potential.

So thank you again very much for your leadership on this issue. It is critical to our efforts, and we really very much appreciate it and look forward to the conversation this morning.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Russell follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. CATHERINE M. RUSSELL

Good morning Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer, Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify today on this critical issue of child, early and forced marriage. It is a pleasure to be here with you again after our last session in June on girls education globally, and it is an honor to be asked to speak on an issue that is central to our efforts to empower women globally.

SCALE AND SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) is a widespread, global phenomenon, with one in three girls worldwide married before the age of 18, one in nine married before the age of 15, and some girls married as young as 8- or 9-years old. Child, early and forced marriage disproportionately affects girls: approximately 156 million men currently alive were married before the age of 18, as compared to approxi-

mately 720 million women—a figure equivalent to 10 percent of the world’s population, with an additional 15 million married each year. Girls are also more likely than boys to be married to significantly older spouses—especially in marriages involving girls under 15 and in polygynous marriages where an adolescent girl may be a second or third wife.

The persistence and prevalence of this practice is one of the key human rights, security, and development crises of our time because the systemic impact of child, early and forced marriage is dramatic and far reaching. Through the Sustainable Development Goals, over 190 governments share the view that ending harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation and cutting, is essential for advancing gender equality globally.

CONSEQUENCES

CEFM forces a girl into adulthood and motherhood before she is physically and mentally mature and before she completes her education, limiting her future options, depriving her of the chance to reach her full potential, and preventing her from contributing fully to her family and community.

Reduced Educational Attainment

In almost every context where it occurs, CEFM has a strong negative correlation with educational attainment and political participation. In line with social norms portraying marriage and school attendance as incompatible, parents may pressure girls to discontinue their educations. At the same time, pregnancy and expected domestic responsibilities also present formidable challenges to pursuing an education. Schools may have policies that dictate that pregnant girls or young mothers be expelled, and even absent such policies, pregnant girls and mothers may face stigma and bullying by peers and teachers that cause them to drop out. Child brides not only face difficulty completing secondary school—they may also have trouble making the transition to secondary school, particularly if they enrolled in primary education late. In some areas, girls reach the median age of marriage in their society before they have even finished primary school.

Risks to Health and Wellness

CEFM has devastating health consequences as married adolescents are more likely to experience psychological, physical and sexual violence and exposure to sexually transmitted illnesses. Approximately 16 million adolescent girls aged 15–19 years old give birth each year, comprising about 11 percent of births globally. Early pregnancy and childbirth have severe consequences for adolescent girls as compared to young women, including an increased risk of miscarriage and complications during labor, obstetric fistula, and death. Despite progress in overall rates around the world, maternal mortality remains a leading cause of death among girls aged 15–19, taking the lives of nearly 70,000 girls each year. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than adult women.

Research in sub-Saharan Africa has shown that married girls have a 50 percent higher rate of HIV infection as compared to their unmarried, sexually active peers. Overall, sub-Saharan adolescent girls are two to six times more likely than adolescent boys to be HIV positive, because they are so often married to older, more sexually experienced men. Additionally, adolescent girls often lack access to healthcare or health information when they are married at an early age and become socially isolated within their husbands’ households.

All of these risks—abuse, HIV, early and frequent pregnancy, poverty, and isolation—may be intensified when there is a large age difference between a girl and her husband, a situation that is most common in countries with high rates of early marriage. Since older men are more likely to have had a number of sexual partners and to be HIV-positive, marrying a significantly older husband dramatically increases a girls’ risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Reduced Economic Potential

Early marriage locks a girl into traditional gender roles that limit development and access to a basic education, opportunity for employment in the formal economy, or other basic foundations for full citizenship. Child, early and forced marriage undermines economic productivity, perpetuate health risks for girls, and threaten sustainable growth and development. It hijacks a girl’s agency to decide her future and hinder individual growth and development while systematically holding her children back as well. The children of young mothers have higher rates of infant mortality and malnutrition and are less likely to be educated than children born to mothers older than 18. This is a costly and tragic cycle.

DRIVERS OF CEFM

While child, early and forced marriages can take place for a myriad of different reasons in different settings, the core drivers are usually economic and social, and often perpetuate, gender inequality. The practices can be rooted in systems that hold women and girls in subordinate roles and accord them less value than men and boys. Under these conditions, parents see limited roles for girls and little incentive to invest in their education.

Poverty

Child, early and forced marriage is rooted in poverty, displacement, or societal pressures. It is both a driver of and symptom of poverty and limited economic opportunities for women and girls. More than half of girls from the poorest families in the developing world are married as children. Lack of economic opportunity for women, ownership over assets, and economic mobility makes marriage the perceived safest choice for girls and their families. In communities where a dowry or 'bride price' is paid, it is often welcome income for poor families; in those where the bride's family pays the groom a dowry, they often have to pay less money if the bride is young and uneducated.

In Jordan, I met Syrian refugee women who simply could not pay their rent or feed their families. One woman told me that her 15-year-old daughter was receiving marriage proposals. She was refusing, but the pressure to relieve some of the family's burden was palpable. But the girls are not the only victims. Entire countries lose out on the productive potential of girls who are subjected to early and forced marriage, which weakens their economic output, cultural creativity, and political stability. Across that region, we have heard countless stories of girls married to ease pressure on strained family finances.

State Fragility and Conflict

State fragility, conflict, and humanitarian emergencies exacerbate drivers of CEFM by aggravating economic insecurity, eroding social safety networks, and limiting girls' freedom of movement and access to educational and economic opportunities. In such contexts, families may perceive marriage as a means to increase a daughter's safety, particularly from violent extremist groups and other combatants who often force girls into marriage; however, girls married under these circumstances are more vulnerable to violence from husbands and families and are unlikely to remain in school. Forced marriages are a pervasive feature of armed conflicts around the world, perpetrated by violent actors, including rebel or insurgent groups. Abduction and forcible marriage is a common tactic among non-state actors, often leading to sexual slavery and prolonged forced labor.

It is important that we understand how conflict exacerbates forced marriages. Last year in Jordan, I met Huda, a Sunni Muslim woman from Mosul. As a widow, Huda felt she had increasingly fewer options to save her sons and daughter from Da'esh's clutches. She decided to flee her home, selling everything to fund the dangerous trip from Iraq to Amman, Jordan. Huda is one of the many Iraqi women who told me how Da'esh makes life unlivable for women and girls. The situation is especially grim for minorities. Reports indicate that Da'esh has abducted more than three thousand women and girls, including those from Iraq's religious community of Yazidis and other minority groups. Girls as young as 12 or 13 have been forced to marry violent extremists or sold to the highest bidder—like cattle at an auction. These are young girls, mothers, and sisters facing imminent rape, trafficking, and forced marriage. Through emergency assistance programs, we have been able to help provide medical, psycho-social, and livelihood support for over 150 women and girls who survived Da'esh captivity. However, there are still thousands of girls that are held captive and will need assistance.

It is important that we speak about Huda, and her Iraqi sisters. We must not accept such stories as casualties of a war thousands of miles away and beyond our consciousness. In the situation I described, child, early and forced marriage is, plain and simple, an aspect of terror, a horrific violation of human rights with a lifetime of consequences. It is a tactic of terrorist groups like Da'esh and Boko Haram to control entire populations and to recruit new fighters. And it must be stopped. As Secretary of State John Kerry and others have said, preventing this kind of brutalization of women and girls in conflict zones preserves our common humanity. It also protects the national security interests of the United States and our allies. We must come together to ensure we end it.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

Women and girls around the world are leading the charge in their communities to take a stand to change the harmful practice of child, early and forced marriage. Recently, I joined Secretary Kerry in Nigeria. We spent a morning with a group of adolescent girls benefiting from STEM programs and the efforts of organizations devoted to empowering adolescent girls and changing their families' perspectives about the value of girls' education. In Nigeria, I met Amina. She is one of those rare girls who completed 12 years of schooling. She told me that girls drop out of school "after a certain age to move to their husband's house." She told me that girls are generally married by the age of 13, and they usually immediately start having children. Amina's life has been different because her parents prioritized her education, rather than her marriage.

Fortunately, we are seeing effective efforts to confront and end this practice around the world in even the most remote villages where early and forced marriages are the norm. One such leader is Memory Banda, a young woman from Malawi. In Memory's community, it's not unusual for girls to get married and have children at very young ages. But Memory refused to get married. Instead, she organized literacy classes for other girls. She got involved in local advocacy. And she went to college. Her story is more than inspiring. It's also a reminder that girls around the world are not asking for our pity. They are asking for our partnership. And when we partner with them, we will be successful. Memory is proof of that: thanks to her efforts, and the work of other activists in Malawi, Malawi has adopted laws against early marriage.

That's not to say that our work in Malawi is done. While commendable, Malawi, like many other similarly-situated countries, has difficulty enforcing these laws. As of 2010, legal prohibitions against child, early and forced marriage were in effect in 158 countries, and 146 of those granted exemptions in the case of parental consent. In many countries, existing laws are weakly enforced, especially when they conflict with local customs. For this reason, I was impressed by the efforts of Malawi's "child marriage terminator" senior chief Theresa Kachindamoto. Chief Kachindamoto has banned CEFM and told the chiefs under her that they must also stop all sexual initiation rituals, like sexual cleansings, or she will dismiss them. During her tenure, she has annulled some 850 marriages. Her efforts are testament to the fact that ending CEFM requires a multi-faceted approach.

U.S. GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO ADDRESS CEFM

The United States is taking a whole-of-government approach to addressing CEFM and has undertaken several key actions to combat this practice. The United States has co-sponsored resolutions on ending CEFM at the U.N. Human Rights Council and in the U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee. In 2012, the State Department began including reporting on the minimum age of marriage and the rate of marriage under the age of 18 in its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and adopted new guidance and training for consular officers to assist U.S. citizens living abroad who are forced into marriages. That same year, USAID released *Ending Child Marriage and Meeting the Needs of Married Children: The USAID Vision for Action*, which set goals to mobilize communities to shift norms that perpetuate CEFM, address the unique needs of married children, and cultivate partnerships with host governments and the private sector.

The U.S. Government addresses child, early and forced marriage through three core interagency policies.

- The U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (2011) commits the USG to strengthen efforts to prevent and protect women and children from harm, exploitation, discrimination, and abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking in persons. By ensuring that women's perspectives and considerations of gender dynamics are woven into the DNA of how the United States approaches peace processes, conflict prevention, the protection of civilians, and humanitarian assistance, the National Action Plan affirms that matters of gender equality are fundamental to our national security interests. Importantly, the Plan recognizes that the protection and empowerment of girls is part of a comprehensive approach to preventing and responding to conflict.
- The U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Response to Gender-based Violence Globally (2012) identifies CEFM as a form of gender-based violence and emphasizes the need for increased programming to address the practice in countries where it is most prevalent. The strategy also calls on U.S. agencies to address root causes of violence as a means to raising the value of girls while developing best practices, programs, and policies.

- To address the range of challenges facing adolescent girls, Secretary Kerry launched the interagency U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls in March 2014. Bringing together the efforts of the Department of State, USAID, the Peace Corps and The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MMC), the goal of the strategy is to ensure adolescent girls are educated, healthy, socially and economically empowered, and free from violence and discrimination. The United States is the first country in the world to develop a strategy focused on the protection and advancement of adolescent girls globally, and addressing child, early, and forced marriage will be a central focus of U.S. government efforts to implement this strategy. The Department of State has prioritized addressing child, early and forced marriage as one of the three key objectives specified in its implementation plan.

INTERAGENCY PROGRAMS

These policies are being implemented through a range of initiatives and programs. In particular, Let Girls Learn—a presidential initiative championed by the First Lady—is a central part of the United States’ implementation of the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. In July 2015, President Obama announced the Let Girls Learn Challenge Fund to design new, holistic programs that address the range of challenges preventing adolescent girls from attaining a quality education that empowers them to reach their full potential.

Malawi and Tanzania were selected in 2015 as the first two focus countries under the Let Girls Learn Challenge Fund. In these countries, USAID and the Department of State are working with an array of USG agencies, multilateral and bilateral partners, and civil society and the private sector to co-create, co-fund, pilot, and implement innovative programs through a multi-sectoral approach. Nepal and Laos were also just recently announced as additional countries for the USG to engage with as well.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE PROGRAMS

While the U.S. Government has many programs that address child, early and forced marriage through economic empowerment, access to health, educational programs and legal reform, the Department of State also has programs aimed at understanding and responding to child, early and forced marriage.

- In March 2016, Secretary Kerry announced \$7 million in programming to empower adolescent girls in Afghanistan, where the Department of State will fund efforts to change perceptions about child, early and forced marriage at the district and community level through grants for girls to go to school and support for counseling, networks for girls, and training on life and vocational skills.
- Through the Global Women Peace and Security Initiative, the Gender Based Violence Initiative, and the “Voices Against Violence” global program, the Department provides emergency assistance to support survivors of extreme forms of GBV and harmful traditional practices. We have been able to provide funds for girls who were threatened with forced marriage, through small, short-term emergency assistance funding for expenses including medical expenses, psychosocial support or counseling, emergency shelter or other safe accommodation, relocation expenses, livelihood and dependent support, and legal assistance. The program is meant to provide assistance to those in urgent situations with little to no alternatives for support.
- Through our Voices Against Violence program, we will engage with actors who have influence over the community’s attitudes and behavior, this includes judges from civil and religious courts, and grassroots organizations on the ground to educate families. By working with local experts, advocates, and stakeholders, we will create meaningful, long-term changes.
- The Department is also supporting a 3-year, \$5 million collaborative effort with USAID and UNICEF aimed at reducing the prevalence of school-related gender-based violence and establishing child and adolescent-friendly procedures to respond to incidents of GBV when they occur. Through training, mapping of services for GBV victims, advocacy and awareness raising activities, school actors are gaining knowledge of the impact of GBV, including on early marriage and its legal and social consequences. This project is developing a systematic reporting and referral mechanism to monitor and respond to incidents of school-related GBV.

USAID Programs

USAID invests in both research to expand our knowledge on effective interventions to prevent CEFM and programs to address the needs of married adolescents

in regions where the practice is most prevalent. Guided by rigorous project evaluations and the latest research findings, USAID's interventions include promoting girls' education, supporting married children, strengthening the enactment and enforcement of laws and policies that delay marriage, and building community outreach efforts to shift attitudes that perpetuate the practice. In FY 2015, USAID doubled its investment to prevent CEFM and support married children, building on decades of engagement on these issues, including addressing the needs of more than 50 million girls and boys who are already married but have limited access to education, health services and economic opportunities.

- The USAID Vision for Action to Ending Child Marriage & Meeting the Needs of Married Children provided health care and access to education to married children and adolescents and educated students, teachers, parents, and community leaders, through programs including the Safe Schools program in Nepal, focusing on the importance of delaying marriage and the harmful effects of CEFM.
- USAID also conducted research to study the effectiveness of programs to delay child, early, and forced marriage in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Burkina Faso. Based on the findings of this research, the programs were later expanded to additional high-prevalence regions. Data on the impact of programs in Tanzania and Ethiopia data was shared through a global dissemination of results (available here: <http://www.popcouncil.org/research/building-an-evidence-base-to-delay-marriage-in-sub-saharan-africa>) in the fall of 2015.
- In Bangladesh, the Protecting Human Rights program supports the development and momentum on amendments from the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (MOWCA). A divisional level workshop on child marriage was held and one immediate outcome was the announcement of an annual national day on prevention of child marriage, to be observed every 29th of September in Bangladesh.
- In addition, in September 2015 USAID released a resource guide on preventing and responding to CEFM. This resource guide provides information on how partners and USAID sectors, missions, and staff can integrate CEFM prevention and response into their programming. USAID will continue to work in partnership with lawmakers, international organizations, the private sector, and change agents at the national, local, and community levels to address the practice of CEFM

CONCLUSION

While the statistics can seem grim, in every country I travel to, I meet innovative, resilient women, men and youth who are working hard to lead their countries toward gender equality and away from harmful practices like child, early and forced marriage. They know that with their hard work and community building, change will come in their countries. It is the tenacity of these individuals that keep us going, and I see it as key part of my job to raise up these leaders. As a matter of fact, just yesterday, we learned that Nadia Murad, Iraq's Nobel Peace Prize Nominee who is an outspoken survivor of Dae'esh, has just been named as a 2016 U.N. Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking. Her appointment will take place on September 16th, the International Day of Peace, at U.N. Headquarters in New York. Nadia has bravely testified before the U.N. Security Council, U.S. Congress, U.K. Parliament, and other important international forums as a survivor of Da'esh violence and trafficking. She is just one example of the kind of grass-roots strength and will that inspires me to keep pressing forward every day.

On behalf of the State Department and the Office of Global Women's Issues, I'd like to thank the committee for their leadership in shedding light on this global economic, development, and human rights issue.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.
Secretary Richard.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ANNE RICHARD, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF POPULATION REFUGEES AND MIGRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you, Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer, and other members of the committee for convening this im-

portant hearing on the plight of millions of girls around the world who are subjected to early and forced marriage.

I just want to say, Senator Rubio, Senator Boxer, Senator Gardner, and also for Senator Durbin, we are very well aware how busy and compressed the Senate schedule is, and it is so heartening for all of us that you are carving out time to talk about this issue right now. It really just speaks volumes about how much you care, and it really is a morale boost for us. So, thank you very much.

Ambassador Russell has outlined the scope of the problem. I want to focus my remarks on early and forced marriage among people who are refugees, internally displaced or stateless.

As you know, my bureau aids refugees and others uprooted by conflicts and crises. Thanks to the U.S. Congress, we are funded to provide assistance around the world in hot spots and crisis zones to bring relief to people who suffer. And as part of this, we see time and time again how these emergencies exacerbate the threat of early and forced marriage, not only in the war zones but also, unfortunately, in the places where families seek safety and take refuge.

Boko Haram and ISIL outrage the world by enslaving girls and forcing them into marriage. But these are not the only places where abuses are being perpetrated. Tragedies also unfold every day around the globe, as combatants in conflicts use attacks on women and girls to terrorize, subjugate, and scatter innocent civilians.

Families forced to flee may splinter. Some may lose members through death or separation, including losing adult men who are traditional heads of the household. Families also lose their livelihoods, their dignity, and their legal and social status. Instead of being able to work, they must rely on aid. Many find themselves living in poverty, in the close quarters of slums or tents, feeling adrift, uncertain about their fate and understandably fearful for their future. Having escaped war, at this point they ought to be able to breathe a sigh of relief and resume normal life. But life in exile is not normal and, regrettably, it is not always safe.

So in the chaotic background to these situations, parents may feel that they must do whatever it takes to safeguard their daughters' reputations and their family's honor, and families may be afraid of what will happen to their young unmarried daughters as they flee and find themselves in these new, unfamiliar environments. So early and forced marriage becomes a so-called "negative coping strategy."

Syrian refugees in Jordan point to worries over safety and sexual harassment as reasons for arranging marriages for their young daughters. Some parents also hope marrying a local man will help them stay in the host country legally.

Families marry off daughters because they are running out of money. In some cultures, families see their daughters as a burden, one that grows heavier when there are no opportunities for further education or work. That is especially true when the family is struggling to put food on the table. And some families see early and forced marriage as preferable to other alternatives open to girls with no other source of income.

For all these reasons, more girls are forced into marriage. After 2 years in exile in Jordan, the rate of child marriages among Syrian girls there was twice the pre-war Syrian average. Before the war, about 13 percent of Syrian girls under 18 were married. But by 2013, the share of married girls among refugee families jumped to 1 in 4. And nearly half of those girls married men at least a decade older than they are.

Even though parents may think they are shielding their daughters from abuse and sexual assault, early and forced marriage can have the opposite effect. Girls married young, especially those married to much older men, are more likely to suffer physical and emotional abuse and sexual violence than unmarried girls.

I am conscious of the time, so I trust you will put my written remarks into the record. What it goes on to talk about is that it is physically dangerous for girls to become young mothers. It is dangerous for their own bodies, and it is not good for the health of their babies. This, in a way, is taking the scourge of child marriage and passing it on to another generation, and there is a similar passage to the next generation that happens in terms of legal documentation, statelessness. If a girl is too young to be married, if legally she should not be married, if she is living in an uncertain situation, her baby may not get registered. It may not have a birth certificate, and this can provide problems, then, for the rest of their lives.

Then our testimony goes on to talk about the remedies, how we need to strengthen laws against early and forced marriage, how we have to make it easier to document marriages and births, how the United States is cosponsoring, did cosponsor at the U.N. Human Rights Council a resolution on the right to a nationality, and particularly women's equal nationality rights, which is so important in terms of helping women around the world.

We are also supporting UNHCR's Global Campaign to End Statelessness within the next decade. Cathy has already mentioned the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, and we are certainly putting a big focus all year this year on trying to get more girls educated, more kids in school generally, more refugee children in school, and especially refugee girls.

I would love to also draw your attention to the Safe From the Start initiative that was launched around this time of year in 2013. This is the third year now that it has existed, and it is not just to respond to bad things happening to women and girls overseas but to prevent them from happening in the first place. This is where U.S. leadership has the potential to really make a big difference.

Then I have a couple of examples in here from overseas.

Next week at the U.N. General Assembly, we will be doing a number of things that are very related to this. One is the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence and Emergencies. There is an annual meeting that will be held. It will be chaired by Sweden this year, but in the past it has been chaired by the U.S., and we are very much a partner with the Swedes in doing this.

Also, the President has organized and will be holding a Leaders Summit on Refugees. A piece of that is to encourage countries that host refugees to allow more children to go to school and to allow

more countries to permit refugees to work. Both of those are potential solutions to this problem of refugees feeling they have no alternative but to marry off their daughters.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Richard follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE ANNE C. RICHARD

Thank you Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer and other members of the committee, for convening this important hearing on the plight of millions of girls around the world who are subjected to early and forced marriage, and thank you for inviting me to testify.

Ambassador Russell has outlined the scope of the problem. I want to focus my remarks on early and forced marriage among people who are refugees, internally displaced or stateless.

My bureau aids refugees and others uprooted by conflicts and crises, and we see, time and time again, how these emergencies exacerbate the threat of early and forced marriage—not only in warzones but also in places where families seek safety and take refuge.

EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE AMONG UPROOTED PEOPLE

Boko Haram and ISIL outrage the world by enslaving girls and forcing them into marriage. But these are not the only places where abuses are being perpetrated. Tragedies also unfold every day around the globe, as combatants in conflicts use attacks on women and girls to terrorize, subjugate, and scatter innocent civilians.

Families forced to flee may splinter. Some lose members through death or separation, including adult men who are traditional heads of the household. Families also lose their livelihoods, their dignity and their legal and social status. Instead of being able to work, they must rely on aid. Many find themselves living in poverty, in the close quarters of slums or tents, feeling adrift, uncertain about their fate and fearful for their future. Having escaped war, at this point they ought to be able to breathe a sigh of relief and resume normal life. But life in exile is not normal and, regrettably, is not always safe.

Ambassador Russell described the tangle of deeply rooted beliefs, traditions, and problems that can lead to early marriage. These include poverty, pervasive discrimination, the absence of opportunities and choices, and the misconception that early marriage will keep girls safe. Parents may feel they must do whatever it takes to safeguard their daughters' reputations and their family's honor.

Crises and conflicts can make these fears and dilemmas more urgent and make the lives of girls more precarious. Families may be afraid of what will happen to their young, unmarried daughters as they flee and find themselves in new, unfamiliar environments. Early and forced marriage becomes a so-called "negative coping strategy."

Syrian refugees in Jordan point to worries over safety and sexual harassment as reasons for arranging marriages for young daughters. Some parents also hope marrying a local man will help them stay in the host country legally.

Families marry off daughters because they are running out of money. In some cultures, families see their daughters as a burden, one that grows heavier when there are no opportunities for further education or work. That is especially true when the family is struggling to put food on the table.

And some families see early and forced marriage as preferable to other alternatives open to girls with no other source of income.

For all these reasons, more girls are forced into marriage. After 2 years in exile in Jordan, the rate of child marriages among Syrian girls there was twice the pre-war Syrian average. Before the war, about 13 percent of Syrian girls under 18 were married. But by 2013, the share of married girls among refugee families jumped to one in four. Nearly half of these girls married men at least a decade older than they are.

Even though parents may think they are shielding their daughters from abuse and sexual assault, early and forced marriage can have the opposite effect. Girls married young, especially those married to much older men, are more likely to suffer physical and emotional abuse and sexual violence than unmarried girls.

They are also far more likely to die in childbirth than older women, and to develop severe complications like obstetric fistula. I have seen how devastating this can be.

In Burkina Faso I visited a hospital supported by the United Nations Population Fund and spoke with women who had developed obstetric fistula because they gave

birth before their bodies were ready. Some had suffered for decades, rejected by their families and ostracized by their communities, before learning that hospitals like this one can repair fistulas. They were there recovering from surgery.

The perils of early and forced marriage and child-bearing cross generations. Babies born of under-aged mothers suffer higher rates of infant mortality, prematurity, low birthweight and malnutrition.

Another risk is that these children will be born—and spend their entire lives—stateless, because underage marriages may not be legal, so children’s births cannot be registered. In 27 countries around the world, discriminatory laws prohibit women and girls from passing their citizenship to their children, and strip these children of legal rights and protections they will need in life, including the right to attend school, get medical care, work legally or own property. Stateless people are more vulnerable to trafficking, sexual and physical violence, exploitation, forced displacement, and other abuses—such as early and forced marriage.

REMEDIES

Let’s now discuss possible remedies. Strengthening laws against early and forced marriage could help. Most nations prohibit marriage below a certain age. But awareness of these laws is limited and enforcement is spotty—especially when laws clash with prevailing customs. Violations against displaced girls can be especially hard to address through legal means.

One solution is to make it easier to document marriages and births. Universal birth registration can reveal a girls’ age and help enforce laws against underage marriage, and it can prevent statelessness among children. At the most recent session in June, the United States cosponsored a U.N. Human Rights Council resolution “The Right to a Nationality: Women’s Equal Nationality Rights in Law and in Practice” with more than 100 cosponsors including all African states.¹ This resolution galvanized international support for granting equal nationality rights to women and addressing the issue of statelessness. The United States is also supporting UNHCR’s global campaign to end statelessness within the next decade.

We also need to change incentives, attitudes and the value placed on girls. Keeping girls in school is key. Girls with no education are up to six times more likely to marry as children than girls who have received secondary education. In sub-Saharan Africa, 66% of women with no education were married before age 18 compared to only 13% of those with secondary education.

The “U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls,” launched by Secretary Kerry this past March, will strive to make education safe, free, and compulsory throughout the world, and keep girls enrolled in school, even if they are married and have children. It also aims to boost the numbers of adolescent girls who benefit from comprehensive health services and education.

Curbing gender-based violence in crises and conflicts can also discourage families from resorting to early and forced marriage. This is the focus of an initiative we launched in 2013 called Safe from the Start. Under it, we are channeling or have channeled approximately \$55 million to programs designed both to help survivors and to prevent attacks from happening in the first place.

We have provided new staff and training so that aid workers can identify risk factors and take countermeasures, make camps physically safer, provide medical treatment, legal counseling and psycho-social services, and help vulnerable women and girls earn money to support themselves. The initiative also supports education and awareness raising programs and wellness centers—safe spaces in refugee camps—for women and girls.

At Kenya’s Kakuma refugee camp, where early and forced marriage is a stubborn problem, girls get counseling and support. Outreach workers go door to door and organize community gatherings to raise awareness about the rights of women and girls.

In Nigeria and Uganda aid workers also distribute leaflets, put up billboards about the need to prevent forced marriages and let girls go to school. Aid workers say it is making a difference. Mothers and girls are coming forward to report that they, their daughters, or friends are being pressured into early forced marriage and want help to stop it.

Preventing early and forced marriage and other forms of gender-based violence is a focus of our diplomacy as well as the humanitarian assistance we provide through U.N. agencies and other international and non-governmental organizations. We have worked hard to rally support for the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, a unique initiative to mobilize and coordinate efforts to strengthen protection for women and girls caught up in emergencies. As the Call to Action lead in 2015, the United States created a roadmap that outlined concrete

and meaningful steps all concerned governments and humanitarians can take over the next 5 years to do a better job of keeping women and girls safe and holding one another accountable.

When more girls have the chance to make their own, informed choices and reach their full potential, the world will be a better place, not just for them but for all of us.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Notes

¹ A/HRC/32/L.12

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

Let me, Secretary Richard, begin by asking kind of a big-picture question. If you look at the list, the top five—India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Brazil and Mexico—I know that in the top 10, 9 of the 10 are viewed as fragile states. But nonetheless, if you look at this list, the top five, they have state entities. When you interact with your counterparts in India or in Mexico or in Brazil or in some of these other countries, at the government-to-government level, what is their view generally of this issue? Is it we know we have a problem but we have so many other problems we have to deal with? Or is it more along the lines of this is our culture and our society, this is how things work over here, and you guys cannot impose some of your views on us because this is the way we do it in this society? What is the government-to-government—

Ms. RICHARD. I think when we talk diplomat to diplomat, there is general agreement that this is not in the best interest of girls. The problem is that they are embarrassed that this is happening in their own countries, and also it is happening to people who are not in the elites of society. They are people who are poor people or displaced people, as we just focused on.

What helps is when we raise the issue because that puts it on the agenda of national security foreign policy concerns that the U.S. cares about.

Senator RUBIO. But beyond being embarrassed, is your sense that it is a priority for these governments? Is it something that, all things being equal, it is a priority for them or—

Ms. RICHARD. I suspect that what you said is correct, that for some of these governments they have such a long list of issues that while this is on the list, it is not at the top. By our raising it, though, it does certainly push it up the priority list. It gets it much more attention than were we not to raise it.

We also are making it a priority by raising it in these international conferences. I know mentioning international conferences probably sounds deadly dull, but what we do is, at the World Humanitarian Summit, at a child protection conference I attended in the UAE, for example, at the U.N. General Assembly meetings next week, we show up at very senior levels and we bring attention to these issues, and we engage with very senior levels of these other governments. So it becomes part of the conversation, and we get across how much we care, and then we back it up by providing funds to make a difference.

So I think the U.S. has a very smart approach on this.

Senator RUBIO. I do not want to pick on any one country in particular, but two of these five countries are in the Western Hemisphere, which is also the overview of this committee. In Mexico and

Brazil, is a marriage between a 14-year-old and a 30-year-old legal under their laws?

Perhaps Ambassador Russell—

Ambassador RUSSELL. I am happy to respond to that. I think, just in terms of the way we approach it, we try to put it in a broader conversation, which is to say that almost every country—and I have just found that in the course of my work, that the most successful approach for us is to talk about how it is in their interest to do things that we are encouraging the countries to do. They are not really so excited when I come in and say, you know, you should not do this, you should not do that. Sometimes I have to do that. But what I talk about generally is that all countries will be stronger if women are able to participate. It is just a fundamental principle, and it is the driving force for our work. It is why it is a State Department issue, because we think these countries—we know they will be more economically secure, and we believe that they will be more stable.

Part of the trick about this is how do women participate when girls are falling off in really alarming numbers. So what we talk about is, look, this is really in your interest to figure out a way to try to address these issues more aggressively, and we also put it in the context of the sustainable development goals, where if all of these countries are pushing to develop more fully, how do they do that.

Early and forced marriage is a specific target under the goals, under Goal 5, which is the gender goal, and it is because there is a recognition that child marriage, FGM, that these are practices that hold girls back. If we want them to participate, they need to be able to do that—

Senator RUBIO. I guess just to get back to the point I am making about the Western Hemisphere, if you have a 45-year-old man married to a 15-year-old in Brazil or in Mexico, I do not know whether that is even legal under their laws, but that person tries to travel to the United States with his 14- or 15-year-old wife, do our laws allow them—do we recognize them when they come in on a visa as married?

That is why I am trying to understand the legal status of it in those countries, because they stand out only because—I am not minimizing the tragedy of displaced communities and some of the other countries that are mentioned in this list, and I am not saying there are not severe poverty issues in both Brazil and in Mexico. But I think it is startling that two of the five countries in the top list here are in our hemisphere, and they do not have massive—they do not have the same issues as we have seen in the Middle East.

So either these marriages are being recognized by their laws, and ultimately when they come to us and say we want to come into your country as tourists on a visa, and I am here with my 14-year-old or 15-year-old wife, what is our—

Ambassador RUSSELL. We can follow up—and I am sorry that I do not know the answer to that—with Consular Affairs, how they treat that issue in particular. I know that there is a lot of concern about American citizens going abroad and getting married, and our Consular folks are being trained on that and have worked very

closely, actually, with some of the witnesses that you have here today on civil society to think about how we can do a better job making sure that they are looking for that, of Americans who are going back to their home countries, typically, and getting married and coming back.

But as to how we would handle that coming in, I honestly do not know the answer to that. But we can get that and get back to you on it.

Ms. RICHARD. One step removed from the border, I can talk about how we are engaging now very productively with Mexico and the UNHCR to make sure that any children coming up from Central America through Mexico are treated humanely, that their cases are quickly analyzed, that Mexico add asylum experts to determine what is going on with these children that they are walking alone through Mexico. Are they safe? Are they being trafficked? Have they been abused? Are they in peril? Because children should not be—I cannot talk directly to the situation of child marriage among Mexicans, but a piece of this, which is to look at the migration flows through Mexico, we are doing a lot more than we have, and it shows the importance of having a good relationship with Mexico so that we can be encouraging, supporting, prompting through this dialogue that is partly bilateral and partly with UNHCR and other government—

Senator RUBIO. Yes. My curiosity about Mexico and Brazil is basically I do not know how much of that is due to people who are from Mexico and how much of it is due to transitory populations that are coming through for multiple reasons. I am really curious about that aspect of it. Again, I am just envisioning a young girl who has just entered the U.S. with her husband and decides this is not a real marriage, I wish I could come in. I am curious, do we help her get out of that situation, and is there an asylum status for someone like that, trapped in a marriage of that nature?

We can go into depth. I know the ranking member is ready to go, so I wanted to let her—

Ms. RICHARD. And we will follow up with you, Senator, on that question. Thanks.

Senator BOXER. I am going to follow up with this, just pose it a little differently. Suppose a child came in running away from this abusive marriage, 15, winds up—either comes from Mexico, Brazil, or any of these countries that allow this. This is an important question, following up to my friend's question, which is also important, which is I would assume if a marriage is legal in another country, I would assume we recognize it here. I cannot be sure about that.

But if the woman ran away from her husband and she comes in—woman, girl, child—and she winds up in one of these places, I say to Ambassador Richard, would that be a reason for asylum? I would assume it is. And if it is not, we ought to do something about that.

Ms. RICHARD. You know, one of the rationales, one of the legal reasons to become a refugee, which is part of international conventions but also there are U.S. laws based on this, is that you are fleeing oppression or persecution. One reason for it is called membership in a social group. So it really is up to asylum judges in the U.S. I am getting out of my lane on this. We will have to talk to

DHS about it. But I think a case could be made—a case is certainly made that a form of gender-based violence is child marriage.

So we can say that girls showing up at the border who have been forced into early marriage have suffered from gender-based violence and that that should be taken into consideration when they make a claim for asylum, and would be a rationale for granting them asylum.

Senator BOXER. Well, I would like to see an even stronger statement, because if a girl runs away from a 50-year-old husband, she is 15 or 14 or 16, I agree with you completely, it is gender-based violence. It is a violation of her being. So could you get back to us with a little bit more specificity? It should be just clear to me, and I think I speak for everyone on the panel, a child running away from this kind of a marriage. So, thank you for that.

South Asia has the highest prevalence of child marriage out of any region in the world. In Bangladesh, 52 percent of girls—52 percent of girls—are married by their 18th birthday, and 18 percent by the age of 15. In India, 47 percent of girls are married as children. In Nepal and Afghanistan, more than a third are married before the age of 18.

So in September 2014, the cabinet of Bangladesh approved language in the draft Child Marriage Restrain Act of 2014 to lower the minimum age, to lower the minimum age of marriage—this gets to the Chairman's point—from 18 to 16. This has gone in the wrong direction, 18 to 16, a major step backwards in our efforts to end child marriage.

How is the U.S. Government working with the government of Bangladesh? What have we done, Ambassador? What actions are we taking? What is it? Have we had an official response to that? I would like to know your answer.

Ambassador RUSSELL. Thank you, Senator. It has been an ongoing discussion with Bangladesh. I have traveled there. I talked to the government when I was there. We had a U.S.-Bangladesh dialogue in June where the government reaffirmed that they would not try to reduce the legal age from 18 again. So as of right now, we are in a position where they have been very clear. They stated on the record in the course of this dialogue that we held at the State Department. But I think it is a broader—

Senator BOXER. Did you say they did not do it, or they did—

Ambassador RUSSELL. They did not. They have said that they will not change the law from 18 to 16. This has been an issue that has been churning—

Senator BOXER. Good.

Ambassador RUSSELL. So we are good for now, but I will say this. I think it is something that we really have to stay on top of. Our diplomats there are certainly aware of it. They have a really strong civil society there that is very, very active and very engaged on this issue. I met with them when I was there. So I think for now we are in a good place, but I think you are really pointing to an important point, which is the notion that any country would even consider this is something that is very disturbing for us.

Senator BOXER. Right.

Ambassador RUSSELL. And in that region in particular, we have got to really stay on it as much as we can because the numbers

are so huge, and when we see that girls are really not doing well and falling out of school in alarming numbers, that is where we are trying to say you have got to keep these girls in school and avoid this problem from the outset.

Senator BOXER. Well, Mr. Chairman, maybe we could work together with our committee in a bipartisan way, either write a letter to the ambassador from Bangladesh, have a meeting and just say please, this would not be looked on favorably. It is a step way backwards.

But I have other questions. May I submit them to the record?

Senator RUBIO. Absolutely.

Senator BOXER. Thank you very much.

Ambassador RUSSELL. Your leadership helps, and the more attention on all of these issues that you all bring to this, when you remind ambassadors, when you remind other people who work in the Government of the United States that these issues are important, that helps tremendously, and that these issues are interconnected, and that Bangladesh, they will never move into the world they want to be in if they do not take care of their girls and make sure that they get educated and that they are not getting married early. It is a simple reality. The more they hear that, not just from the gender person but from leaders in our country, the better off we all are.

Senator BOXER. And for men and women combined.

Ambassador RUSSELL. Yes.

Senator BOXER. And I think from both parties here.

Ambassador RUSSELL. Absolutely.

Senator BOXER. It is rare that we can find these sweet spots. We do it once in a while, and we can do it on this one. So maybe the Chairman and I—and I am so appreciative that Senator Gardner is here—we can move forward.

I would just close my comments—and then I am going to run to the floor—with this. Bernard Lewis, who is known as a very conservative historian, has said without equivocation what we have all said here in our own words, and he said this 20 years ago, that if you could try to find the one silver bullet that could help us in the world to bring more prosperity, it is the way countries treat their girls and women, because all of that talent or potential talent and brains and everything that women bring—I have always argued that women are not better, we are equal. So to keep us out of the thing, out of these governments and force us into these situations, it is really a crime against humanity and, I think, a crime against God.

So I am hopeful before I leave—and we have this partnership in the subcommittee—that maybe we can do something with Bangladesh, we can write some letters to the Administration about how they treat these children when they either escape a marriage or come with a husband. I think that is helpful. And anything we can do to help what you are doing.

I know it is a lonely deal there because, as our Chairman said, there are so many issues that are on the agenda for America, including getting these countries to turn against terror and getting them to a place where they can trade. They are so important. But, at the same time, I think we all believe this is just as important.

So thank you so much, and again I thank our witnesses that will come, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

I am going to just add to that that the humanitarian, moral aspect to this I think is clear for everyone to see, and I think what you are alluding to is the deeper argument that the fact that nine out of these ten states that are on this list are unstable is probably the cause of it, but it is also the result of it.

You are basically saying that this is a country where over half your population, unless they come from a wealthy family that can position them for success, is never going to be a part of civil society, is never going to be a part of government, is never going to be a part of your economy. They are not going to be innovators, they are not going to be producers, and their only hope is to get married to somebody who will take care of them. It goes deeper into this argument that they are a burden on the family's finances, so let us figure out a way to move our girls as young as possible into the care of someone else.

I mean, it is interrelated with the fact that a lot of these countries fail, both economically and geopolitically. In fact, I do not know of any advanced economy in the world that is successful marginalizing over half its population. It just does not work. And it is actually more than half because even among men in those countries, if they do not come from the right families and with the right education, they too are marginalized. So you add that together, that could be 80 percent of your population, or more. But certainly over 50 percent.

So these things are interrelated.

I do want to get to Senator Gardner's questions.

Senator GARDNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Senator Boxer, for your words today. I have two daughters, a challenge that we have to address, two daughters. One of them is 12. I dropped her off at the volleyball game just this past weekend, and to think that not everybody is going to—it is just an incredible crisis that we have to address. This is just overwhelming when you think about what is happening to so many girls, women around the world.

Ambassador Russell, I think you note that the 720 million women figure is equivalent to 10 percent of the world's population, 15 million married each year. In your testimony you stated that. That is just a stunning figure.

I would also like to receive the information that you provide to Senator Boxer and Chairman Rubio about this gender-based violence issue and the determination, the criteria that is being used, perhaps in a refugee status of some kind. Is that a uniform standard? Is it across everyone? Do they weigh it the same? Is it just sort of a subjective factor? Is it a contributing factor? How does this equate? I would be very interested in receiving that information as well.

I wanted to step back a little bit. The testimony talks about programs. It talks about partnerships and where you are working with other nations. Could you maybe give us a case study, so to speak, of a nation where, from start to finish, that had a significant problem, walk through some of the programs that you have worked

through and then state where it is today? I do not care if it is Secretary Richard or Ambassador Russell, but just give us a study of how we have been effective and what it was that was a common theme between taking that effectiveness and being able to apply it in other places where we have not quite had the results yet.

Ambassador RUSSELL. What I would like to do is talk a little bit about how—I cannot point to a country where it has been perfect. There is no such thing. What we have learned through the course of our work is that the key is to try to address these issues in a comprehensive way. It sounds sort of intuitively right, and it sounds easy, but it is really difficult. It is very challenging. And where we are doing it now, where we have started is in Malawi, which is a very interesting country.

It is poor. We went through a long analysis with USAID to try to figure out where was the best place to try this comprehensive approach. So we are starting there. They have a lot of work to do. A lot of girls get married early. The country is desperately poor, and they do not have mandatory secondary education.

So the challenge is how do we help them move forward, and I think it is an important point that the United States is not in a position to fix any of these problems or any of these countries. We really cannot do it. What we try to do is find countries, find people in these countries who are working on behalf of women and girls who understand the interconnectedness of this issue and are working to try to address it, and we try to support them.

I think Malawi is going to be a really good example of the United States—so it is USAID, PEPFAR, State Department. We are working with MCC. We are working with Peace Corps. Now we have USDA working with us. Department of Labor is talking with us about what they do. We are also working with our bilateral partners and with our multilateral partners and saying, okay, this is the scope of the problem, and let us see if we can coordinate and work better so at the end of the day you cannot really address child marriage in a vacuum. It does not exist in a vacuum. It exists in a circumstance where girls are not valued. That is basically the problem. Girls and women are not seen as valuable members of society who should be able to finish school and participate in the economy. They are just not.

So how do we try to lift them up, lift up the way they are perceived in the society? It takes a lot of effort. We as an international community—this is not just the United States—have not really been able to do this as effectively in the past as we would like to do. You can certainly point to developed countries where, as the Chairman said, women are treated better in those countries generally. We know if we can lift up women and girls, have them participate fully, they will add to their societies, they will make them better.

How do we figure out how to do that? I think the most important thing is to try to get them, keep them in school, in a quality education, try to protect them from violence, try to move them to a point where they can participate in the economy and participate in the civic life of their country. So, for example, they can run for office. The more women leaders we get in these countries, the better.

It is not something you can do piecemeal. I believe this strongly. We are testing the proposition; we will see. But to me, it is the only thing that really makes sense. We are kind of bending the frame of this a little bit, because it is not really the way we have worked in the past.

Senator GARDNER. Thanks. And just going back to the first issue that we talked about, do we track the numbers of people who come into the United States seeking some asylum status or refugee status, trying to get away from the situation of forced marriage? Is that something that we track?

Ms. RICHARD. We track asylum seekers in the U.S. That is DHS.

Senator GARDNER. In terms of this particular—

Ms. RICHARD. And we track the number of refugees that arrive. But I do not know if we track these subsets.

Ambassador RUSSELL. We track people who make gender-based violence claims. We consider early and forced marriage a form of gender-based violence. Whether that is pieced out, I do not know. DHS would know that.

Ms. RICHARD. But I would like to know the answer, and I am embarrassed I do not have it for you today, so we will get that.

Senator GARDNER. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RUBIO. And my final question for the panel—and we have a second panel waiting, and you have been generous with your time, both of you have—is, and I think you alluded a little bit to it in your answer to Senator Gardner's questions, what is the best thing we are doing right now? If we were to say this is the one place where we really need to be involved in terms of turning this around, my sense is the programs that create an alternative to child marriage for girls growing up and young women growing up in economically challenged or displaced families, but where could we best get results that would help us toward this goal of wiping this out in a generation?

Ms. RICHARD. You know, what we are doing that I think will get good results is that we are working with strong support at the community level in these countries to change the acceptance of child marriage, and we support programs where there is a lot of talking to young people and talking to men and talking to boys, backed up by education for girls. So that is very much at the grassroots level.

And at the diplomatic level, we are very much—I do not know how to diplomatically say “in your face.” We are very much pushing and encouraging and making issues around empowerment of women and prevention of gender-based violence, including early and forced marriage, part of our platform of discussions. We are not doing it once. We keep coming back and doing it over and over and over again.

I do not know what diplomats think when they see us coming, and our boss, and he is going to talk about these issues. They probably want to run and hide. But, yes, we keep coming back and talking about them.

I just wanted to mention on Bangladesh specifically, we have a very close relationship, working relationship, with the foreign secretary of Bangladesh on migration issues and on, because of the Rohingya, refugees coming across, and because so many poor

Bangladeshis leave. So it is very easy. Next week I promise I will raise this issue with him. Thank you.

Senator RUBIO. Well, I want to thank you both for—oh, did you have an answer?

Ambassador RUSSELL. I was just going to say one quick thing, which is I think when you look broadly at child marriage, what we see in these conflict settings is an exacerbated situation. In a way, it has to be treated somewhat differently, right? It is such a crisis, and in any crisis, whatever is happening is going to get worse. We see increased rates of domestic violence. We see increased early and forced marriage for different reasons, and sometimes parents literally will say, look, I am trying to protect my daughter. I do not want her out wandering around. She is vulnerable to other men, so we want to get her married so somebody is taking care of her and she is protected.

So I think, in a way, these conflict settings bring up a discrete set of issues. From our perspective, just stepping back more broadly, if you ask me one thing to do, I think it is to try to keep these girls in school. If we can do that, which is very challenging, and the relationship of why they drop out of school and get married is complicated. Sometimes they drop out of school to get married. Sometimes they drop out of school and they get married. But regardless, if we can keep them in a quality education where we can talk to them about your value and make sure their parents understand that they will contribute to their families and their communities if they have the opportunities, I think over time that is how we are going to address it.

Having said that, these numbers are alarming, as you say, and even though the numbers of child marriages are declining around the world, when you look at the population coming up, we are going to barely be treading water unless we get ahead of this, and I think we have got to work with other countries to encourage them to do more, and I think we have got to do this work which we are trying to do at the State Department, which I am grateful again for your support, of really trying to address these issues that women and girls face in a more comprehensive way.

I think at the end of the day, it is the only way we are really going to solve the problem. But thank you very much for your attention.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you for your work and for your time here today, and for your testimony.

We are now going to move to our second panel.

As they are transitioning here, join me in welcoming Ms. Lakshmi Sundaram, the Executive Director of Girls Not Brides; and Dr. Suzanne Petroni, who is the Senior Director for Global Health, Youth and Development at the International Center for Research on Women.

Dr. Petroni, are you ready?

**STATEMENT OF SUZANNE PETRONI, PH.D., SENIOR DIRECTOR,
GLOBAL HEALTH, YOUTH AND DEVELOPMENT, INTER-
NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN, WASH-
INGTON, DC**

Dr. PETRONI. Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer—I wish you were here—and esteemed members of the committee, thank you so much for the opportunity to provide testimony on the human rights abuse that is child marriage.

My organization, the International Center for Research on Women, has been building the evidence base regarding child marriage for the better part of two decades now, and during that time we have worked to raise awareness of this important issue across the globe. We have also worked with so many in the U.S. Government, including Ambassador Russell and Assistant Secretary Richard, to expand evidence-based policies and programs to prevent this harmful practice. So I am so proud to testify before you today along with such committed advocates, and thank you for continuing to advance this cause.

You have already heard today that we know quite a lot about child marriage, but we are still learning. So I would like to speak today on some of the emerging evidence that ICRW is generating on the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to ending the practice.

Nearly everywhere where child marriage is prevalent, social and community norms around sexuality and around gender play a tremendous role. Where girls are valued only for their positions as wives and mothers; where viable economic opportunities are available only to men; where even talking to men and boys, aside from your brothers or fathers, is forbidden; where girls, but not boys, are taken out of school to help with household chores because girls' education is seen as having no value; child marriage will continue. So gender inequality in itself is a significant driver of child marriage, wherever it happens.

Now, much of the early evidence that we have on child marriage came from India, Bangladesh and Ethiopia. These are places where parents or community leaders were—and still are, in many cases—the main decision-makers around marriage. Girls in these contexts are often taken out of school and married off by an adult, and often to an adult. In contexts like these, targeting these decision-makers and shifting social norms regarding the value of the girl, some of the solutions that you have heard already today, are of utmost importance.

But we now have more evidence from different contexts, including evidence that my organization is releasing today from Kenya and Zambia, where girls are forced to drop out of school not because of marriage but because the practical costs of attending school outweigh the bleak economic prospects that girls and young women have for their futures. And once they are out of school, girls may be forced to marry either because it is socially unacceptable to be an out-of-school, unmarried girl, or because marriage may be their only means of financial support.

We also know from ICRW's research in sub-Saharan Africa and from the work of Promundo in Latin America, and Tahirih Justice Center in the United States, that many girls are dropping out of

school and becoming child brides because they become pregnant, and this is seen as something incompatible with formal education in many contexts.

So, while understanding the different drivers of child marriage is important in helping us identify the most appropriate solutions, our research has shown there are some solutions, and I am glad that after talking about the challenges, that we are able to think about some solutions. You can find more about these solutions in ICRW's report called Solutions to End Child Marriage.

But, in short, they include empowering girls with information, skills and support networks; educating and engaging parents and community members; enhancing girls' access to quality formal education, as we have just discussed; providing economic support and incentives to girls and their families; and lastly, encouraging supportive laws and policies and their implementation; and again, interventions that use several of these approaches are most effective.

Given our very latest research findings, I would add to these solutions that providing adolescents with education about their bodies and their rights, starting with basic information about fertility and pregnancy, can also be an important solution to curtailing both teen pregnancy and child marriage.

I would like to close by making a few recommendations for your consideration.

First, it cannot be assumed that child marriage will adequately be addressed as part of the increasing and very worthy efforts to advance the broader health, rights, education and welfare of adolescent girls. We need to ensure that child marriage prevention receives the dedicated attention it deserves.

So I recommend the Senate consider commissioning a report by the Administration that details where, how, and how much the Administration is investing in child marriage prevention. And once we have that information, let us commit to doubling these efforts. It may sound like a lot, but I think you may find that the U.S. is still behind other countries when even that is added.

Second, do not let married girls get lost in the shuffle. There are 15 million girls who marry each year. They are among the neediest and hardest to reach individuals in the world. So even as we work to better understand their needs, we can provide them with education, life skills, and appropriate health care.

Third, support research to better understand what will work to end child marriage in some of the under-studied regions like the Western Hemisphere, where child marriage rates are high but attention to these issues is still low.

And finally, continue to support girls' empowerment and rights. We cannot overcome this challenge without ensuring that girls have viable alternatives to marriage, that they know their rights and are equipped to advocate for them.

Mr. Chairman, I know of no other government in the world that has articulated as solid a commitment to advancing the rights of adolescent girls as the U.S. has this year, and there is no stronger foundation on which to build truly transformative change. So as we move into a new administration in the coming months, it will be

incumbent upon Congress to ensure that we build on this foundation and advance the welfare of girls worldwide.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Petroni follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. SUZANNE PETRONI

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer, and esteemed members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on the important issue of protecting girls around the world from the pernicious—yet not insurmountable—human rights abuse of child marriage.

Our colleagues from the State Department provided an excellent summary of U.S. efforts to empower girls around the world and to protect them from numerous rights abuses, including child marriage. My organization, the International Center for Research on Women—ICRW—has been building the evidence base regarding child marriage for the better part of two decades. During that time, we have worked to raise awareness of this important issue across the globe, and we have worked with so many in the U.S. government—including Ambassador Russell, Assistant Secretary Richard, Senator Collins, Senator Durbin and Senator Boxer—among others, to expand evidence-based policies and programs to prevent this harmful practice. So I testify before you today with no small amount of pride that our government is now leading the world in prioritizing girls in its foreign policy and development assistance. For that I commend you and your colleagues like Senator Durbin, who have been tireless advocates for girls around the world.

You have also just received an excellent overview of the practice of child marriage from our good colleague Lakshmi Sundaram, who sits at the secretariat of the Girls Not Brides global partnership, of which ICRW co-chairs the U.S. National Partnership, Girls Not Brides U.S.A. I could not agree more with her recommendations as to what should be next for U.S. leadership on this issue.

I'll focus my brief remarks today on some of the emerging evidence ICRW is generating that we hope will shed more light on not just the drivers and consequences of child marriage, but also on solutions that can unlock real and sustainable progress, so that we can end this practice within a generation. As harmful as this challenge is, it is not without solutions.

UNDERSTANDING STRUCTURAL DRIVERS AND ROOT CAUSES

While there are some common underlying factors, the drivers of child marriage are different from region to region, country to country, and even girl to girl. Indeed, as we learn more about the practice, we learn more about the diverse, and often complex, drivers of it, both across and within countries. And understanding these drivers is critical if we are to develop solutions to end the practice.

In nearly all contexts where child marriage is prevalent, social and community norms around sexuality and gender play a tremendous role. Where girls are valued only for their roles as wives and mothers; where viable economic opportunities are available only to men, but not women; where having sex outside of marriage—or even talking to men other than your brother or father—is forbidden; where girls, but not boys, are taken out of school to help with household chores because girls' education is seen as having no value; child marriage will continue. Gender inequality is, in itself, a significant driver of child marriage, no matter where it happens.

Much of the early evidence we had on child marriage came from India, Bangladesh and Ethiopia, where parents or community leaders were—and still are, in many cases—the main decision-makers around girls' marriage. Girls here are often taken out of school and married off by an adult, often to an adult, often an adult they may not even know. In contexts like these, targeting these decision-makers and shifting social norms regarding the value of the girl—solutions that you've heard already today—are of utmost importance.

But we now have more evidence from contexts where girls are forced to drop out of school, not because of marriage, but because the practical costs of attending school outweigh the bleak economic opportunities that girls and young women have in their communities. And once out of school, girls may be forced to marry, either because it is socially unacceptable to be an out-of-school, unmarried adolescent, or because marriage may be their only means of financial support.

We also know—from our recent research in Senegal, Uganda, Kenya and Zambia, and that of groups like Promundo in Latin America, and Tahirih Justice Center in the United States—that many girls are dropping out of school and becoming child brides because they become pregnant, something that is seen as incompatible with formal education in many contexts.

So, while it may add a great deal of complexity to the issue, it is vital that we understand the different circumstances that contribute to child marriage, so that we may implement the most appropriate solutions to it. That said, there are some broad solutions that can be implemented across contexts.

One of the most important pieces of research ICRW has produced on this issue is our Solutions to End Child Marriage paper. This was a systematic review, in which we reviewed more than 150 programs to determine what works best to end child marriage. We identified five commonly employed solutions, which are also reflected in the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls that you heard about earlier today. These are:

I. First, empower girls with information, skills and support networks. Having girls learn basic skills like literacy and numeracy, how to communicate and negotiate, to stay healthy, to solve problems, and to earn and manage money, can help girls can become more knowledgeable and self-confident. Engaging with peers and mentors can also help alleviate the social and economic isolation many girls experience.

II. Second, educate and rally parents and community members. As you've heard, these adults are often the ones responsible for deciding when and whom a girl marries. We have seen powerful examples of how educating these key stakeholders about how child marriage impacts a girl's health and future can spark significant change.

III. Third, enhance girls' access to quality formal education. Girls with no education are three times as likely to marry before 18 as those with secondary or higher education. Providing incentives—such as uniforms or scholarships—or the necessary skills and support for girls to enroll and remain in school can help delay marriage. Programs aimed at improving the safety and girl-friendliness of schools, strengthening school curricula and making school lessons relevant to girls' lives also are effective. When girls are in school, they are also less likely to be seen as ready for marriage, and they can develop social networks and skills that allow them to advocate for themselves and their futures.

IV. Fourth, provide economic support and incentives to girls and their families. Some parents may see a short term financial benefit from marrying their daughter early, by gaining a bride price, lowering the price of dowry or simply having one less mouth to feed. And some girls may find themselves without any financial support from their families, and thus turn to boyfriends and potential husbands. Providing a girl or her family with a loan or an opportunity to learn an income-generating skill, can provide economic relief for struggling families. And daughters who learn skills that enable them to earn an income in the future may be seen as adding more value to the family.

V. Lastly, encourage supportive laws and policies—and, importantly, their implementation. Many countries with high rates of child marriage have legislation on the books to prohibit the practice. Advocating for the implementation of such laws, and raising awareness about them among government officials and community leaders and members, can help strengthen and/or better enforce existing initiatives around girls' rights. Where such legislation is not on the books, advocating for legal and policy reform is a critical first step. We know that while laws themselves can't solve the problem, they are a necessary part of the solution.

I should note that the most effective approaches are those that employ several of these strategies, often in combination with others. And we also know that siloed interventions do not always work. Recent research conducted by ICRW, and funded by USAID, for example, demonstrates this very point. In a rigorous evaluation, we found that a large-scale conditional cash transfer program that was intended to delay marriage in India did not work, largely because there was no corresponding effort to educate families, communities or girls on the value of girls as their own, independent beings, endowed with rights to choose if, when and whom to marry. The intervention was thus perceived by many as the government defraying the economic burden that having girls placed on poor families. In many cases, that money was even used for the girl's dowry as soon as she turned 18.

New research we recently conducted in Zambia and Kenya—the findings of which we are actually publishing today, and which reflect some of our other recent research in sub-Saharan Africa—indicates that the main drivers of marriage in these contexts are school dropout and early pregnancy. So here, interventions to delay marriage would need to target both of these drivers. In particular, providing adolescents with sexuality education—starting with basic information about fertility and pregnancy, as well as youth-friendly reproductive health services, can also be important solutions to curtailing both adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I would like to close with a word about the importance of U.S. leadership in ending child marriage.

While we all recognize the harms that child marriage does to girls, we should also understand that child marriage is also actively undermining American investments in broader goals of global health, education, democracy and governance, and so much more.

ICRW is currently engaged in a multi-year, global research project, in partnership with the World Bank, in which we are calculating the economic impacts of child marriage. While the research is ongoing, our initial findings show that, in addition to the harmful effects on girls' health, education, rights, and wellbeing that we've heard about today, the economic costs of child marriage, from the individual to the national levels are very significant. In Niger, which has the highest child marriage rates in the world, for example, eliminating child marriage today would translate into savings and benefits of about \$25 billion by the year 2030, if we consider just the education sector. The cumulative savings to governments and societies will likely be in the trillions of dollars. There's much more to this study, and if you invite me back in about six months, I'll be able to tell you more.

For now, however, we have sufficient evidence to confidently recommend the following:

1. It cannot be assumed that child marriage will be adequately addressed as part of the increasing and very worthy efforts to advance the broader health, education and welfare of adolescent girls. To ensure that child marriage prevention receives the dedicated attention it deserves, I recommend the Senate commission a report that details where, how, and how much the Administration is currently investing in ending child marriage. Once we have that information, let's double these efforts. Even then, I suspect the U.S. may still find itself well behind many other countries in addressing this issue. But it would be a good start.

2. Don't let married girls get lost in the shuffle. We critically need robust investments to delay the age of marriage. But at the same time, those 15 million girls who still marry each year are among the neediest and hardest to reach individuals in the world. Even as we work to more fully understand their needs, we know that they should be provided with educational opportunities and with critical health care services, including youth-friendly family planning, maternal health, HIV screening and treatment, and mental health care.

3. Continue to invest in research to better understand what will work to prevent child marriage in regions where we don't know as much—starting with the Western Hemisphere and the Middle East and North Africa, where child marriage rates are high, but attention to and funding to combat the challenge are low. Let us also implement and evaluate new interventions, so that we can develop scalable models that are most effective across different contexts.

4. Finally, continue and expand the growing emphasis on girls' rights and empowerment. As the research demonstrates, we cannot end this problem without ensuring that girls have viable alternatives to marriage, know their rights and are equipped to negotiate them with the gatekeepers of their lives: parents, teachers, community and religious elders.

I know of no government in the world that has articulated as solid a commitment to girls in their foreign policy as the United States has this year. There is no stronger foundation on which to build truly transformative change. As we move toward a new Administration, it will be incumbent upon Congress to ensure that we build on this foundation and continue to advance opportunities for adolescent girls around the globe. Thank you for your leadership in this regard.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

Ms. Sundaram.

**STATEMENT OF LAKSHMI SUNDARAM, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, GIRLS NOT BRIDES, LONDON, UK**

Ms. SUNDARAM. Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer, and esteemed members of the committee, thank you so much for the invitation to provide testimony today. I am Lakshmi Sundaram, and I am the Executive Director of Girls Not Brides, The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage. We are a global civil society partnership bringing together over 600 organizations, working in 80

countries, dedicated to ending child marriage. Our members are diverse. They range from tiny community groups to some of the large international NGOs that you will have heard from before. And we are represented here in the United States by our U.S. national partnership, Girls Not Brides USA. I would urge you to consider their excellent testimony that they have submitted for the record which contains a comprehensive view of U.S. efforts on this issue to date, and recommendations for future action.

Now, for those in the room who are married, I want you to think back to your wedding day. Hopefully, it was a day of joy and love and promise. Hopefully, it was a day that opened up new horizons and opportunities.

For the 15 million girls around the world who are married every year, their wedding day represents a closing down of horizons. As you said, Chairman Rubio, child marriage is not linked to any specific region, tradition, or religion. It happens all over the world. You mentioned Brazil and Mexico as being two of the countries with the greatest number of child brides. Other countries that you may find surprising are Indonesia and Nigeria.

I would like to spend a few minutes to talk about why it happens, and it is important to remember as we discuss child marriage that the vast majority of parents love their daughters and want to do what is best for them.

But most fundamentally, child marriage happens to girls because they are girls, because girls have less value than boys in society, and there is an out-sized value that is placed on their virginity.

Child marriage is linked to poverty. Parents may feel that giving a daughter in marriage will reduce family expenses, and in some communities there may even be a financial transaction involved, like a dowry or a bride price.

Many parents marry off their daughters young in areas where girls are at high risk of physical and sexual assault, as you heard earlier. Parents see marriage as a way of ensuring their daughters are protected without necessarily thinking about the significant violence that they will encounter within marriage.

And why should we tackle child marriage? We should because ensuring girls have the right to choose if, when, and whom to marry can create long-term change for girls themselves, their families, and their countries.

But what is more, child marriage is at the heart of many of the challenges we want to overcome as an international community. Think about it. Our efforts to reduce child and maternal mortality will be hindered as long as girls are giving birth as children. Our efforts to ensure every child can finish school are undermined when girls have to leave to get married. Our efforts to end violence against women are held back as long as so many girls are trapped in marriages where they have no voice.

As my colleague Dr. Petroni said, we now know what it will take to end child marriage. It will take working with girls themselves to ensure that they know and are able to exercise their rights. It means changing community attitudes that devalue girls and hold them back, including by engaging with parents, boys, Christian, Muslim, Hindu priests, and traditional leaders as well. It means ensuring that we have education, health, and legal services that

are available, high-quality and accessible to girls, both through government and civil society. And it also means ensuring that we have a supportive policy and legal framework in place.

We have seen some amazing progress over the last few years. For example, in the international arena, ending child marriage was included as a global development priority in the Global Goals for Sustainable Development. And we have seen a number of countries take leadership and strengthen their legal frameworks and develop national action plans to end child marriage.

But this is not a problem that we can legislate our way out of. We need far, far more investments in programs as well. In this country, as has been mentioned before, we saw the launch earlier in the year of the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. This strategy enshrines a commitment to girls' rights in U.S. foreign policy and assistance, bringing much-needed attention and, I hope, resources to the diverse and urgent needs of adolescent girls, including the right to choose if, when, and whom to marry.

The U.S. is poised to be a leader in the fight to end child marriage and has already done so much towards this end, but I urge you to escalate this work to improve the lives of adolescent girls globally. So to that end, Chairman Rubio, if I may, I would like to respectfully make a few recommendations for some initial measures that you can take.

First, please use the powers of Congress, of the purse, and of oversight to make sure the Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls is robustly institutionalized and implemented. Do not let child marriage get lost in larger efforts to promote girls' health and education. Mandate regular progress reporting so that Congress and civil society know exactly what is being done to end child marriage and meet the needs of married girls, how successful these efforts have been, and where more investment is needed.

And show your full support for this issue on the international stage by investing fully in achieving the target to end child marriage under the Sustainable Development Goals.

Chairman Rubio, one of the most motivating things for me in my work is hearing the stories of girls who have actually been able to avoid marriage and are now fulfilling their potential and doing amazing things around the world. I do hope that you will join us in creating that positive world for girls all over the world.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Sundaram follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LAKSHMI SUNDARAM

Chairman Rubio, Senator Boxer, and esteemed members of the committee; thank you for the invitation to provide testimony today. I am delighted that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has decided to hold a hearing on the important issue of child marriage. As the Chairman alluded, I am Lakshmi Sundaram and I am the Executive Director of Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage. We are a global civil society partnership bringing together over 600 organisations from 80 countries dedicated to ending child marriage in our lifetime. Our members range from tiny community groups to large international NGOs, and include amazing organisations you have heard from before, such as the Kakenya Center for Excellence or World Vision. We are represented in the United States by our U.S. National Partnership, Girls Not Brides U.S.A.—who is here today and has been a tireless leader working with Congress and the Executive Branch to develop and cement U.S. leadership to end child marriage. The efforts of Senator Durbin and other champions merit recognition in that regard. And so before I begin my tes-

timony I would like to commend to you the testimony that was submitted for the record by our U.S. National Partnership, which contains a comprehensive view of U.S. efforts on this issue to date and recommendations for future action, many of which I will highlight for you today.

But first, for those of you who are married, I want you to think back to your wedding day. Hopefully, it was a day of joy and love and promise. Hopefully, it was a day that opened up new horizons and opportunities.

For millions of girls around the world, their wedding day is the opposite. Rather than a joyous event, marriage is linked to dropping out of school and focusing on children and household chores; it represents a closing down of horizons.

HOW MANY GIRLS ARE AFFECTED?

- Approximately 15 million girls are married every year before they reach 18 years.¹ That is, approximately 41,000 every day, or one girl every two seconds.
- In the developing world, 1 in 3 girls is married by age 18, and 1 in 9 is married by age 15, some as young as eight or nine.² And, while we lack reliable data for developed countries, we know that the practice happens there too, including in the U.S.
- If there is no reduction in the practice, 1.2 billion women will have married as children by 2050—that's the equivalent of the entire population of India. These girls and women face distinct challenges and need assistance so they, their children and communities can thrive.
- Child marriage affects boys too, but the overwhelming majority of those who marry as children are girls, reflecting the roots of gender inequality that drive the practice. It is therefore fitting that this hearing is convened in the subcommittee tasked with global women's issues.

WHERE DOES IT HAPPEN?

- Child marriage is not linked to any specific region, tradition, or religion. It happens all over the world. You might be surprised to hear that, of the top ten countries with the highest absolute number of girls married before 15, four are in Africa, three in South Asia, one in East Asia/Pacific and two in Latin America.
- 45% of girls under age 18 are married in South Asia; 40% in sub-Saharan Africa; 29% in Latin America and the Caribbean; 18% in the Middle East and North Africa; and in Europe and North America too.³

WHAT IS THE IMPACT, AND WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?

When a girl becomes a bride, the consequences are lifelong and devastating—for the girl, for her family and, indeed, for her nation. My colleague Dr. Suzanne Petroni will walk you through some of those macro-level impacts in her testimony. Child marriage is a gross human rights violation that deprives girls of their rights to health, education, freedom from violence and the right to choose if, when and whom to marry.

Child marriage traps girls, their families and societies in a cycle of poverty, limits millions of girls from fulfilling their potential and leading happy, safe and productive lives. Child marriage spells disastrous effects for our shared goals of prosperity, maternal and child health, education and democracy. It means the end of school for girls, a lifetime of domestic servitude, increased risk of violence and sexually-transmitted infections like HIV, increased complications and even death in pregnancy and childbirth.

CHILD MARRIAGE IS LINKED TO MATERNAL AND CHILD MORTALITY AND MORBIDITY

- Countries with high rates of child marriage typically have high rates of maternal mortality. Investing in child marriage could dramatically improve the health outcomes of both mothers and babies.
- Child brides are under intense social pressure to prove their fertility, which makes them more likely to experience early and frequent pregnancies.⁴
- Early pregnancy endangers child brides' health because many become pregnant before their bodies can safely carry or deliver children.
- Complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the second leading cause of death in girls aged 15–19 globally.⁵
- Child marriage is a major driver of adolescent births: 95% of the world's births to adolescents occur in developing countries and 90% of these births are to girls who are already married.⁶

- Furthermore 65% of all cases of obstetric fistula occur in girls under the age of 18 resulting in long term physical, emotional and psychological consequences for girls who go untreated.⁷
- Early childbearing also increases the risks to newborns. In low and middle income countries, babies born to mothers under 20 years of age have a 50% higher risk of being stillborn or of dying within the first few weeks of life than those born to older women.

CHILD MARRIAGE UNDERMINES A CHILD'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION

- Child marriage often denies children of school age their right to the education they need for their personal development, their preparation for adulthood, and their ability to contribute to their family and community. Married girls who would like to continue schooling may be both practically and legally excluded from doing so.⁸
- There is a complicated causal relationship between child marriage and education, as child marriage is both a driver and consequence of poor educational attainment.
- Girls tend to drop out of school during the preparatory time before marriage, or shortly afterwards when their marital and domestic demands increase. For example, almost 30% of young women who left secondary school before completion in Chad and Nigeria cited early marriage as the main reason.⁹
- Girls with higher levels of schooling are less likely to marry as children. With half of the world's population under the age of 25, educating youth is crucial to ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future.

CHILD MARRIAGE IS LINKED TO POVERTY AND IMPACTS NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

- Child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries and is often concentrated among the poorest households. It is closely linked with low levels of economic development.
- Girls from poor families are nearly twice as likely to marry before 18 as girls from wealthier families, as marriage is often seen as a way to provide for a daughter's future.¹⁰ However, girls who marry young are more likely to be poor and remain poor.¹¹
- Girls who marry young do not receive the educational and economic opportunities that help lift them out of poverty and which are necessary to build a sustainable and prosperous future for their communities and countries.¹²

CHILD MARRIAGE IS LINKED TO VIOLENCE AND HIV INFECTION

- Child brides have little say in whether, when or whom they will marry. In many cases their husbands are much older.
- Girls who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to experience violence within marriage than girls who marry later.¹³
- Child marriage exposes girls to a high risk of violence often from their partners or their partners' families. The greater the age difference between girls and their husbands, the more likely they are to experience intimate partner violence.¹⁴
- Women exposed to intimate partner violence are one and a half times more likely to acquire HIV in regions with high HIV prevalence.

CHILD MARRIAGE INCREASES DURING HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND CONFLICTS

- Growing evidence shows that in times of humanitarian crisis, child marriage rates increase, with a disproportionate impact on girls.¹⁵ Yet adolescent girls continue to be left behind in humanitarian response efforts.
- Seven out of the ten countries with the highest child marriage rates are considered fragile states. We cannot ignore child marriage in such contexts.¹⁶
- Child marriage rates have increased in some crisis situations. While gender inequality is a root cause of child marriage in both stable and fragile contexts, often in times of crisis, families see child marriage as a way to cope with economic hardship exacerbated by crisis and to protect girls from increased violence. But in reality, it results in a range of harmful consequences.
- For example, in Syrian refugee communities in Jordan, the proportion of registered marriages for girls under 18 years has rapidly increased. Between 2011 and 2014, the rates of registered child marriages almost tripled, from 12% to just under 32%.¹⁷ Protection of family honour and control of girls' sexuality were major drivers of child marriage in this context.¹⁸

- Child marriage is not being adequately addressed in situations of crisis. It is a cross-cutting issue which requires coordinated action across all sectors from the earliest stage of crises. More research is needed to understand how different types of crises affect child marriage, how programmes which tackle child marriage can be adapted for these settings, and how child marriage can be integrated into humanitarian response efforts. However, research must support interventions to address child marriage, and the need for more research should not be used as an excuse for inaction.

What you may not know is why. Why, in the year 2016, do 15 million girls marry as children each year? It is important to remember that the vast majority of parents want to do what is best for their children. They love their daughters. There are many drivers of child marriage that vary significantly from one context to another:

- *First and foremost, gender inequality:* child marriage happens to girls because they are girls. Girls are accorded little value in many societies. They are second-class citizens or perhaps commodities to be bought, sold or exchanged in marriage. It is because girls have less value than boys in society, and outsize value is placed on her virginity.
- *Poverty:* Where poverty is acute, parents may feel that giving a daughter in marriage will reduce family expenses by ensuring they have one less person to feed, clothe and educate. In communities where a dowry or 'bride price' is paid, it is often welcome income for poor families.
- *Security:* Many parents marry off their daughters young because they feel it is in her best interest, often to ensure her safety in areas where girls are at high risk of physical or sexual assault. However, they do not realise the significant violence she will encounter within marriage.

WHY SHOULD WE TACKLE CHILD MARRIAGE?

Ensuring girls have the right to choose, if, when and whom to marry can create long term change for girls themselves, their families and their countries—and I'd argue it's one of the best returns on investment that you can hope for in your foreign assistance efforts.

What's more, child marriage is at the heart of many of the challenges we want to overcome as an international community. It is a barrier to achieving many development goals, including those on poverty eradication, nutrition, health, education, gender equality, economic growth and reduction of inequality.

Our efforts to reduce child and maternal mortality will be hindered as long as girls are giving birth as children. Our efforts to ensure every child can finish school undermined when in some communities more than 75% of girls have to leave to get married. Our efforts to end violence against women are held back as long as so many girls are trapped in marriages where they have no voice.

- Investing in delayed marriage and childbearing is recommended as a smart investment by the High Level Task Force for the International Conference on Population and Development, which will have "high pay offs for improved wellbeing and quality of life, poverty eradication, economic growth and sustainable development, with multiplier and inter-generational effects that will yield benefits for decades to come."¹⁹
- The World Bank has highlighted that "delays in marriage are strongly associated with greater education, higher earnings and health-seeking behaviour."²⁰

And addressing child marriage can be an entry point. It's also a way to address the more aspirational goal of ensuring equality for girls and women. By tackling child marriage, we are necessarily addressing the way that girls and women are viewed in society.

We can break this cycle, because when a girl is able to avoid marriage as a child she is less likely to marry off her own daughters as children.

SO, WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO END CHILD MARRIAGE?

In 2014, over 150 experts, organisations and researchers came together to develop a global Theory of Change on child marriage, which identified four areas where we should focus our efforts to accelerate change:

- Empower girls, and make them aware of—and able to exercise—their rights and alternatives to marriage through programmes that invest in girls.
- Work with traditional leaders, fathers, boys, communities to change the attitudes that devalue girls and hold them back. We have seen interesting programmes working with Christian priests, Muslim imams and Hindu clerics, as well as traditional leaders, where they are now champions for change.

- Provide services, like education, legal and health services, both through government and civil society.
- Enact and enforce effective laws and policies that put in place a minimum age of marriage at 18 and don't allow loopholes for traditional or customary laws, and make sure these laws are enforced.

WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

In the past few years, there has been unprecedented global action to end child marriage, notably:

- *New global and regional commitments:* Child marriage was included as a global development priority in target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Resolutions at the U.N. General Assembly and Human Rights Council have mobilised political support and strengthened the global normative framework. Other regional and intergovernmental bodies, including the African Union and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, have set out plans of action to end child marriage.
- *Strengthened legal and policy frameworks:* National strategies have been developed or are being developed in at least 14 countries. Many countries have also taken steps to strengthen their laws to address child marriage and put in place a minimum age of 18. I would encourage the U.S. to follow suit. Currently, in every American state, children under the age of 18 can marry.
- *But we cannot legislate our way out of this practice. Urgent and sustained investment is needed to support new programmes:* the number of programmes addressing child marriage has grown dramatically, with increased action from international NGOs, community based organisations and many others. UNICEF and UNFPA have launched a new Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage in 12 countries. Yet this represents just a fraction of what is needed. The U.S. has been a leader in many regards, although it is unclear how much money you have actually invested to end the practice and meet the needs of married girls.
- *Earlier this year Secretary of State John Kerry released the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls,* the first foreign policy in the world geared toward protecting the rights of, and providing pathways of opportunity for, adolescent girls. This strategy enshrines a commitment to girls' rights in U.S. foreign policy and assistance, bringing much-needed attention—and I hope, resources—to the diverse and urgent needs of adolescent girls, including the right to choose if, when and whom to marry. The release of this strategy marked the culmination of years of intense work by those in government and civil society, including Girls Not Brides U.S.A., to shape foreign policy and foreign assistance around the needs of girls. This is a great accomplishment.

But releasing a strategy and living the spirit of it are two different things. As much as we want to point to the strategy as an triumph in and of itself, the real, critical issue is how robustly it is institutionalized and implemented—and that is where Congress can help. I urge you to use your powers—of the purse, and of oversight—to ensure this important piece of foreign policy is not just words on paper, but truly directs the diplomatic and development might of the U.S. to transform girls' lives. I hope you will work with whoever comes into office next year to ensure that child brides and those at risk of marriage will not be left behind.

The U.S. is poised to be a leader in the fight to end child marriage and has already done so much toward this end, but I urge you to escalate this work to improve the lives of adolescent girls globally. Through U.S. foreign assistance, your leadership and influence both bilaterally and in multilateral arenas, and through the strength of Congressional action, I respectfully recommend the U.S. take three initial measures to end child marriage:

1. Ensure U.S. commitments to end child marriage are honoured by giving those efforts the full force of the U.S. government, in terms of policies, programmes and, of course, funding;
2. Don't let child marriage get lost in larger efforts to promote girls' health and education. Mandate regular progress reporting so that Congress and civil society know exactly what is being done to end child marriage and meet the needs of married girls, how successful those efforts have been, and where more investment is needed; and,
3. Show your full support for this issue on the international stage by investing fully in achieving the target to end child marriage under the Sustainable Development Goals.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Rubio, Senator Boxer and members of the committee, I thought I would end with a more personal story. It is the story of Laxmi Sargara, an 18 year-old girl from Rajasthan, India. Laxmi was married when she was just one year old, to a boy named Rakesh who himself was only three. She knew nothing of this betrothal until the moment, 17 years later, when her parents announced that the time had come to leave home and live with her husband. Laxmi was upset because this was not the future she wanted.

Laxmi's story stands out for me, not only because she has the same name as me, but because she did something remarkable. In what is thought to be the first case of its kind in India, Laxmi turned to the courts and had her marriage annulled. Laxmi is a disruptive woman who was brave enough to stand up against a centuries-old tradition, determined to build a brighter future for herself.

If I had been born in a different context, Laxmi's fate may have been mine. Indeed, child marriage may have been the future facing my own rambunctious two year old daughter. In the work that I do, I am grateful every day that I was spared the experiences of girls like Laxmi. And I hope we can work together to ensure that we end this practice for girls everywhere.

Thank you.

Notes

¹ UNICEF, *Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects*, 2014

² UNICEF, *Progress for Children: A report card on adolescents*, 2012

³ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children*, Table 9: Child Protection, 2015

⁴ Levine, R., Lloyd, C., Greene, M., & Grown, C., *Girls Count: A Global Investment and Action Agenda*, Center for Global Development, 2008

⁵ WHO, *Adolescent Pregnancy Fact Sheet*, No.364, September 2014

⁶ UNFPA, *Motherhood in Childhood*, 2013

⁷ WHO, *Fact Sheet, Why is giving special attention to adolescents important in achieving the millennium development goals?* 2008 available at; http://www.wiredhealthresources.net/resources/NA/WHO-FS_PregnancyAdolescent.pdf

⁸ UNICEF, *Early Marriage: Child Spouses*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2001

⁹ Lloyd and Mensch, 'Marriage and childbirth as factors in school exit: an analysis of DHS data from sub-Saharan Africa', *Population Studies*, 62(1): 1–13, 2008

¹⁰ International Center for Research on Women, *How to End Child Marriage: Action Strategies for Prevention and Protection*, 2007

¹¹ International Center for Research on Women, *Child Marriage Factsheets: Child Marriage and Poverty*, 2007

¹² IPPF and the Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women and Girls, *Ending child marriage: a guide for global policy action*, 2006; International Center for Research on Women, *Too Young to Wed: Education & Action towards Ending Child Marriage: Seeking Policy Solutions*, 2005

¹³ Kishor, S. & Johnson, K., *Profiling Domestic Violence—A Multi-Country Study*, ORC Macro, Calverton, Maryland, 2004

¹⁴ UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence against Children*, 2014

¹⁵ See *Girls Not Brides* list of useful resources on child marriage in humanitarian crises.

¹⁶ Niger, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, South Sudan, Guinea and Bangladesh are listed as fragile states as defined by OECD. See definition in *States of Fragility 2015: meeting post-2015 ambitions*. Revised edition, 2015.

¹⁷ UNICEF, *A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan*, 2014.

¹⁸ Op.cit. CARE U.K., *To Protect Her Honour: child marriage in emergencies, the fatal confusion between protecting girls and sexual violence*, 2015.

¹⁹ High Level Task Force for ICPD, 'Smart Investments for Financing the Post 2015 Development Agenda', January 2015, available at; <http://icpdtaskforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/FinancingBriefSmartInvestments2015.pdf>

²⁰ World Bank, *World Development Report, Gender Equality and Development*, 2012

Senator RUBIO. Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. It is why we are here today, to try to figure out the way forward both in our existing programs—I mean, the purpose of these hearings are three-fold. One, to call attention to the fact that this is happening. It gets lost in the broader stories about everything else that is going on in the world. The second is to look at what we are doing and make sure it is efficient in terms of dollars. And the third is are they actually programs that work.

So let me start out with the first part, a question for both of you. Part of the issue here in both your testimony and what I have

heard here today as well is the decision-makers in these cases are not the girls. The decision-makers are often either their families and/or the community or religious leaders.

Number one, how do you influence what programs—what is a realistic and positive way to influence better decision-making by families and religious leaders, and are there examples of programs that have been successful at doing that anywhere in the world?

Anyone can go first.

Dr. PETRONI. So, as I said, based on the evidence that we have seen in many contexts, you are absolutely right, it is the parents, it is religious leaders and community leaders who are driving that decision in the context where girls are not valued. There are some excellent examples out there where educating and rallying and engaging these adults have been successful once they understand the harms that child marriage can pose to the girl herself, as well as to their family and their community in terms of health outcomes, educational outcomes, economic outcomes. They can be very powerfully engaged in ending that practice.

So there are very good examples from Senegal, from India where adults are leading the charge, religious leaders are leading the charge, parents are leading the charge for girls' education against child marriage that we can certainly emulate and expand.

Senator RUBIO. But are those programs that happened internally that they took upon themselves, or did someone help prod them, move them, resource them?

Dr. PETRONI. I think there is a combination of factors. I mean, there are some parents, fathers of daughters like yourself, who recognize that their daughters have value beyond just being a wife and a mother; their daughters should be educated, their daughters should be engaged in communities. Look at Malala as a terrific example. Her father was and still is a tremendous leader in ensuring that she was able to continue her education.

At the same time, programs, including those supported by the U.S., have been very helpful in identifying for community leaders some of the challenges that can be faced if girls marry and helping parents to understand that there are alternatives.

So I think we have seen a combination of efforts, and we certainly have not seen enough at scale to make the type of change that we need to.

Ms. SUNDARAM. And if I could just add quickly to that, when we look at the membership of Girls Not Brides, a number of the organizations who we work with were set up either by former child brides or people who saw maybe their sister get married who are from the communities and who work directly with some of the decision-makers to help create that understanding of the negative impact.

One of the things that has actually led to the creation of Girls Not Brides was that many of these efforts were taking place in isolation, and we have been trying through our work to create a platform where people can learn from one another, because the types of discussions that you need to foster are often the same whether it is in rural Pakistan or rural Cameroon or in Brazil, and actually finding a way to share what works, how it needs to be done, how it can be scaled up, is incredibly important.

Senator RUBIO. Can I just ask, is this largely a rural phenomenon, or do you find it even in large urban areas? In terms of around the world, do you see it everywhere where there are these characteristics?

Ms. SUNDARAM. It really depends on the country. It definitely happens a lot in the rural areas, but it can also be seen very much as a coping mechanism in urban settings, particularly in areas where there is a high risk of violence to girls.

Senator RUBIO. The second question I have for both of you is along the lines of what I asked earlier, and that at the government end. We interact with a lot of these governments, and in many cases not just government but regional or local governments who have even more of an influence than the national government might have on an issue like this. I imagine, in my view or from what I have read, that they come in three strains. There are governments that actually think this is a priority and want to do something about it. There are governments who say this is a priority but it is not a priority for them in terms of action. And then there are those governments who, quite frankly, have accepted this as part of who they are, and even if some of them might be embarrassed by it, it is just not something they have time and interest, and maybe culturally think this is fine.

Is that an accurate characterization of the governments we are interacting with, to the extent we are talking about places that have governments? In some cases there might be some ungoverned spaces. But is this the experience we have had, depending on the country, that you get varying degrees of cooperation and/or hostility from governments?

Ms. SUNDARAM. Sure, yes. And actually, our members in a number of countries have come together to form national partnerships, just like in Girls Not Brides USA. There are Girls Not Brides Nepal or Girls Not Brides Zambia and in other countries.

But one thing that our members find a lot is that when they work with government and when they have a progressive government that is actually interested in addressing this issue, there is a lot of openness to creating a national strategy, a national action plan, but often these governments—take the case of Nepal that has developed a national action plan on child marriage—they do not have the resources to actually really implement that plan in any deep way because they have been facing so many other problems as well.

So even in governments where there is a huge will, they need increased support from foreign friends, and this is where I think the United States could really play an incredibly important role.

In some other countries, I think having the United States ask about what is going on within their country and how they are addressing child marriage is something that could also be incredibly helpful, because it highlights that talking about child marriage, talking about issues affecting girls is not just some nice-to-have thing in the ghetto of the women's ministry but is actually an issue that is of great interest to a foreign policy behemoth like the United States.

Dr. PETRONI. I can add that you heard from Ambassador Russell and Assistant Secretary Richard about the same point, that when

they do raise in diplomatic discussions this issue with governments, it helps to draw their attention to it.

We also have the State Department Human Rights Reports which now report on child marriage in each country, and that raises the level of diplomatic engagement and attention by governments to this issue.

One of the things that we are trying to do to get some of those governments that are not yet on board with this is to help them understand the economic impacts of child marriage. So ICRW is working in collaboration with the World Bank to do a rigorous assessment of the economic costs of the practice with the idea that we know the health-related costs, we know the human rights challenges, we know the education outcomes for child brides. That gets us only so far, unfortunately, with some of those governments that are not as attuned to the issue.

If we can share with them the economic impacts that the high prevalence of child marriage has not only at the level of the girl and the household but on up to the national level, and if we can help them understand that ending child marriage will save them literally billions and billions of dollars, that may help increase some of those finances that are needed to implement programs to end the practice.

Senator RUBIO. When I heard that and I did not have a chance to follow up, I understand how interacting with a diplomat from one of these countries, the diplomat might be embarrassed and say, yes, this is bad, because these diplomats travel the world, they are worldly and probably highly educated and exposed to the West and beyond the world. My concern is more those countries where, at the regional or local level, there really just is not a commitment, and really, quite frankly, an acceptance and/or perhaps even participation by some of these government officials in some of this. That is the point I am trying to drive. There are governments in the world who at least at the place where policy is truly driven and implemented, not discussed at an international forum but actually driven on the ground by the local police department, the local municipal authority and beyond, this is not only not an issue but, in fact, to them, this is none of our business, and this is the way things have been, and this is the way things are and so forth.

Is that a fact? There are places where at their regional, local, and perhaps even at the national level, the policymakers who are implementing these things do not view it—would look at this conversation here today and strongly disagree. Am I accurate in stating that? And, if so, are you comfortable telling us who some of these places are?

Ms. SUNDARAM. That is why just putting in place laws is not enough. It is not just a legislative fix. In a number of places there has been increasing amounts of work in working with a wide variety of actors. So parliamentarians, for instance, are getting together to really try and see what they can do to change the practice.

But it is also about working on educating police departments and local and regional decision-makers so that they also see their role within addressing the challenge. It cannot, as you say, just be at the national level. That interest in tackling the issue is something

that has to come down, and that is where it is really important to have that combination of local and national civil society pushing the decision-makers to really show this is not a concern that is coming from the outside, that is coming from the West, but that is really coming from the people who are most affected by it, with the enabling environment and the support that is coming from external countries.

We are seeing change in a number of countries where five years ago, it was completely taboo to talk about child marriage in any sort of national, regional, international context. Last year there was at the African Union a big summit of heads of state. Some of the countries have been vying with one another to see—it is almost like a little competition of who can actually put in place a national strategy, who is making commitments to address child marriage, but it is not enough. There is still a huge amount to be done, but even starting to get that change of mindset in the heads of government is something that is a really good step in the right direction.

Senator RUBIO. Just my view. I have known of and have seen cases of local governments and regional governments in parts of the world that will not investigate rape charges. They just will not do it. They ignore it. They laugh about it. They sometimes insinuate that it is not a big deal or perhaps it was not rape at all. If that is how they feel about that, getting them to prioritize and actually do something about child marriage at that level of government I would imagine is a heavy lift. And I am not arguing that we should not try or do something about it. But ultimately it goes back to the argument you made in that these programs are important. We want to make sure which are the ones that work. But there has got to be a change in government culture in these places and leadership culture to actually view this as something that is wrong, not just that it is the way things have been done for a thousand years and that is how we are going to keep doing it.

Dr. PETRONI. You are absolutely right on that point. This is a challenge I think Ambassador Russell said. There is no one single solution to this challenge. We have to tackle it at different levels and in different ways. Certainly, getting the engagement at the national level is critical, and we are doing that increasingly and seeing some amazing examples out there. I think you mentioned Nepal and Zambia. Those are two tremendous leaders at the national level, and they are using that leadership to then work down through the regional and community levels.

But at the same time, that engagement from the community on up is critical. So this is where the diplomacy and development connection is really important. We need the State Department to continue engaging at that high level, and we need USAID and other programs, the Peace Corps, Millennium Challenge Corporation, to work at the community level and to support those local organizations and local leaders who are willing to make change in various ways.

Senator RUBIO. Which brings me to my last point, and I hope that we can end on a high note here, and that is one of the best ways I think to achieve these goals, as you have argued, is to convince leaders that this is not just the right thing to do but that it is actually good for your country. So we would want to point to ex-

amples of places that have made these changes and as a result can point to economic progress, a more stable society, better governance, things that are good for everyone.

I think you just mentioned one or two, but could you just—let us just reiterate for the record the one or two countries, or more, hopefully, that are great examples in terms of the steps they have taken and the trajectory that they are on in terms of addressing this, and perhaps even eliminating child marriage in the context they are facing. Where is the good news?

Ms. SUNDARAM. There is good news in a number of places, but we are still very much at the early stage of this work. So in countries like, as we said, Nepal and Zambia, there has been a huge amount of work that has already started. We are seeing change in the lives of individual girls, but we still need that great expansion of work to see a nationwide change. In places like Ethiopia, we have seen programs that have been taken from addressing the needs of a few hundred girls to now addressing the needs of a few thousand girls. That is incredibly important, and that has had a huge impact, but it is still not enough to meet the scale of the problem.

So until we actually are able to massively scale up the work that is going on and that is showing promise, it is going to take a really long time to get to that answer of which country has been able to eliminate child marriage, because we know it can be done, and we have seen it happen in small pockets, but for it to happen at that nationwide scale we really need that massive increase in investment, in political support, and in policies.

Dr. PETRONI. I completely agree with Lakshmi. I would just add that this is a challenge that can be overcome, but it will take some time. We like to say—Girls Not Brides has this phrase that child marriage can be overcome within a generation. It will likely take that long. This is a practice that is deeply entrenched. It has existed for centuries, for millennia, and we have seen some tremendous examples of positive change—Nepal, Zambia, Ethiopia. In Malawi, the latest figures are looking very promising. The more investment, the more attention, the more focused attention on advancing the rights of girls that we have in these countries, the multi-layered approaches that we implement, and the diplomacy, the continued discussions can help us overcome this challenge.

Senator RUBIO. Well, I want to thank both of you for being a part of that, for your testimony, both oral and in writing, for your time, and for your work and advocacy on this.

The record on this hearing is going to remain open for 48 hours.

By the way, without objection, I want to submit for the record testimony provided by several other non-governmental organizations who are working on this issue.

Senator RUBIO. Again, I want to thank both of you for being involved. There might be some questions from members, even those who did not attend. To the extent possible, I ask that you get those, because this all becomes part of the record that could ultimately be in the future part of justifying or supporting legislation and/or correspondence on behalf of the Senate on this issue.

I hope we will be able to revisit this again in a few months as we get into the funding cycles once again and really hope to

incentivize resources towards not just spending so we can say we spent money on a line item called preventing child marriage but, in fact, on programs that are functioning and working that we can prove results, because it allows us to replicate that in other places and, quite frankly, convince our colleagues to continue to prioritize it.

So again, I thank you both for being a part of this.

And with that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:03 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR CATHY RUSSELL TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. Given that child marriage is a global issue which is prevalent even in our own Hemisphere, how does the U.S. handle cases in which a “married” couple applies for visas and one of the individuals is a minor? Do we recognize these unions as legal? Are U.S. consular officers given guidance in this regard? Are there channels whereby a girl can appeal for asylum or some other protected status should she find herself in this situation?

Answer. In the context of immigration law, the marriage law in the place of the marriage celebration determines marriage validity. If the marriage complies with and is recognized by the place of celebration’s law, then the U.S. Department of State typically deems the marriage valid for immigration purposes. However, there are exceptions. For example, for immigration purposes, the Department does not recognize marriages considered void under state law as contrary to public policy, such as polygamous or incestuous marriages, even if legal in the place of marriage celebration. In the case of a minor whose marriage is valid where it was celebrated, a consular officer refers to the law of the state in which the immigrant intends to reside to determine whether the marriage is considered void under state law as contrary to public policy. The legal minimum marriage age varies state by state. In cases where a consular officer suspects marriage invalidity for immigration purposes, the officer is instructed to contact the Department for guidance.

We provide beneficiaries of an immigrant visa based on marriage with the International Marriage Brokers Act (IMBRA) pamphlet, which includes information about domestic violence, immigrant spouses’ rights in the United States, and available resources for victims. The Bureau of Consular Affairs’ website, www.travel.state.gov, dedicates a page to forced marriage, which explains victims’ rights and provides links to advocates. Please contact the Department of Homeland Security for information on the availability of asylum or other protected status in these cases.

Question. Many NGOs who work on this issue note that while child marriage is viewed as one of the forms of gender-based violence, U.S. Government programming on the issue has been sporadic at best. What programs are the U.S. currently implementing, and how much are we currently spending per year, on programs designed *specifically* to address child marriage and in which countries?

Answer. The United States is taking a whole-of-government approach to addressing child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and has undertaken several key actions to combat this practice across a broad range of government agencies. The Department of State, USAID, the Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation joined together to release and implement the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls in March of 2016, and that strategy places a strong emphasis on addressing CEFM and other forms of gender-based violence, in addition to the efforts already underway to address CEFM under the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally and the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

The Department of State’s implementation plan for the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls Globally includes three specific objectives that the Department has prioritized, one of which is addressing CEFM. Enhancing and expanding comprehensive programs to empower adolescent girls is among the set of approaches that we are adopting in pursuit of this objective, along with diplomacy, public engagement, coordination, and integrating a focus on adolescent girls

throughout the Department's operating structure. The Department has a number of programs in place to address CEFM in conflict affected and fragile states:

- In November 2015, the White House announced that the Department would undertake a new \$1,500,000 effort in one or more of Syria's neighboring countries impacted by the Syrian refugee crisis to help prevent and respond to CEFM. Activities will focus on increasing awareness of the benefits of delaying marriage for both girls and their communities, countering the perception that CEFM is a way to protect girls, and underscoring the value of continuing access to education for adolescent girls. Efforts will also aim to reach already married girls with services, to support civil society organizations working to protect at-risk girls, and to broaden protection laws to support women and their children.
- In March 2016, Secretary Kerry announced \$7 million in programming to empower adolescent girls in Afghanistan, where the Department of State will fund efforts to change perceptions about CEFM at the district and community level through grants for girls to go to school and support for counseling, networks for girls, and training on life and vocational skills.
- Ensuring that girls stay in school and have continued access to quality education are two effective ways of preventing CEFM. The United States invests in education for refugees and host communities through humanitarian and development assistance to international and non-governmental organizations. As part of the Leader's Summit on Refugees, the United States provided nearly \$37 million to UNHCR and \$15 million to UNICEF to fill funding gaps for refugee education through the end of 2016 and to help reach our goal of one million more refugees in school.

USAID invests in both research to expand our knowledge on effective interventions to prevent CEFM and programs to address the needs of married adolescents in regions where the practice is most prevalent. Guided by rigorous project evaluations and the latest research findings, USAID's interventions include promoting girls' education, supporting married children, strengthening the enactment and enforcement of laws and policies that delay marriage, and building community outreach efforts to shift attitudes that perpetuate the practice.

In FY 2015, USAID doubled its investment to more than \$10,000,000 to prevent CEFM and support married children, building on decades of engagement on these issues, including addressing the needs of more than 50 million girls and boys who are already married but have limited access to education, health services and economic opportunities. Although addressing CEFM globally, USAID has funded projects in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda.

- The USAID Vision for Action to Ending Child Marriage & Meeting the Needs of Married Children provided health care and access to education to married children and adolescents and educated students, teachers, parents, and community leaders, through programs including the Zero Tolerance-GBV-Free Schools In Nepal Program, focusing on the importance of delaying marriage and the harmful effects of CEFM.
- USAID also conducted research to study the effectiveness of programs to delay CEFM in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Burkina Faso. Data on the impact of programs in Tanzania and Ethiopia were shared through a global dissemination of results (<http://www.popcouncil.org/research/building-an-evidence-base-to-delay-marriage-in-sub-saharan-africa>) in the fall of 2015.

In addition, in September 2015 USAID released a resource guide on preventing and responding to CEFM. This resource guide provides information on how partners and USAID sectors, missions, and staff can integrate CEFM prevention and response into their programming. USAID will continue to work in partnership with lawmakers, international organizations, the private sector, and change agents at the national, local, and community levels to address the practice of CEFM.

Question. How is the U.S. explicitly integrating prevention of child marriage and assistance to married children into U.S. support for programming in the areas of education, health, law reform and law enforcement, and local governance?

Answer. CEFM occurs in response to a range of complex and interrelated factors, including lack of education, poverty, and discriminatory gender norms and legal and policy frameworks. Consequently, the evidence that we have seen suggests that this issue cannot be addressed through any one particular approach—there is no magic bullet—but is instead most effectively addressed through holistic, multi-sectoral interventions which aim to tackle the multiple drivers of the practice. Accordingly

the United States is addressing CEFM both through targeted programs, as well as integrating it as a focus of our broader foreign assistance programs across a range of sectors.

This includes engaging with communities and traditional leaders to change cultural norms; efforts to address household poverty and overcome the costs of schooling; working to improve the availability and quality of education and making schools safe and girl-friendly; providing skills and services directly to girls—especially married girls—to make them aware of the options and opportunities that are available to them, improve their self-confidence, and raise their aspirations for their lives; and working to ensure that the appropriate policy and legal frameworks are in place and are appropriately implemented and enforced.

That is why we have adopted the approach that I have described in our Let Girls Learn Challenge Fund countries of Malawi, Tanzania, Nepal and Laos. We are designing and piloting comprehensive programs that incorporate all of these activities to ensure that girls are protected from CEFM and are able to attain a quality education that allows them to achieve their full potential. Through our work in these countries, we are engaging with host governments to identify areas where national legal and policy frameworks can be strengthened to promote the rights and empowerment of girls, including through improved implementation and awareness of the rights and protections adolescent girls are granted under the law, to include the prohibitions against CEFM. Our planned efforts in the Let Girls Learn Challenge Fund countries will also deliberately seek to work with local government officials and traditional and religious leaders to help them understand why CEFM is a threat to the health, well-being, and prosperity of everyone in their communities; improve local governance efforts around CEFM; and recruit these key stakeholders as allies in our work, thus promoting the sustainability and effectiveness of our investments.

In addition, the United States invests in education for refugees and host communities through humanitarian and development assistance to international and non-governmental organizations. As part of the Leader's Summit on Refugees, the United States provided nearly \$37 million to UNHCR and \$15 million to UNICEF to fill funding gaps for refugee education through the end of 2016 and to help reach our goal of one million more refugees in school. Our partners are committed to getting more refugee girls in school as we know that ensuring girls stay in school and have continued access to quality education are two effective ways of preventing CEFM.

Globally, to address household poverty and empower women and girls to engage fully in their countries' economic growth, the Department of State recently launched the U.S. State Department Strategy for Women's Economic Development to assist the Department in creating greater economic independence and empowerment for women and girls across our foreign policy strategies and programs. In humanitarian contexts, Safe from the Start is an important initiative to build the capacity of the humanitarian system to reduce risk of gender-based violence (GBV), ensure quality services for survivors through timely and effective humanitarian action, and hold the humanitarian community accountable to a higher standard of addressing the risks faced by women and girls consistently in emergencies. It seeks to transform the international system for humanitarian response so that the needs of women, girls, and others affected by GBV, including CEFM, are a priority in emergencies.

As part of the Department's implementation of the U.S. Strategy to Empower Girls Globally, we have also pledged to promote legal and policy frameworks that empower girls across all of our work, including through U.S. Department of State programs. Promoting the enactment of laws and broader awareness of laws to protect girls against CEFM is a key priority, and will become an even greater focus as the strategy continues to be implemented.

The enforcement of laws against CEFM is something that must be approached thoughtfully and with great caution. At the extreme this could result in the criminalization of parents—who often marry their daughters in response to dire poverty and who may believe that they are acting in their child's best interests. This would ultimately exacerbate that driver for the rest of the family, including potentially increasing the rates of CEFM in that family to compensate for the loss of their income.

That said, through both our programs and our diplomatic efforts, we are working to identify and stop officiants who perpetuate this practice and to deter local government officials from attending illegal marriage ceremonies, which has the effect of sanctioning these events. We are also working to support the efforts of high-level tribal leaders who annul marriages and hold accountable the lower-level tribal leaders that have allowed them to happen.

The Department of State is funding projects in Afghanistan and Syria's neighboring countries that are specifically focused on addressing CEFM. The project in Afghanistan is just starting, but will engage with elders and religious leaders to prevent CEFM through awareness-raising on the negative health, economic and social consequences of this practice for both girls and their families. It also intends to raise their awareness of the customary, religious, traditional, and civic laws that protect the rights of children and protect them against CEFM. The project in Syria's neighboring countries will also work with communities, including local government officials and traditional and religious leaders, to counter the perception that early and forced marriage is a way to protect girls, and to underscore the value of continuing access to education for adolescent girls.

Question. What are the next steps for implementing the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls? How will implementing agencies measure and report on progress?

Answer. As outlined in the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, an interagency working group will measure the progress of the implementation of the strategy. The working group, in consultation with the National Security Council, will meet regularly to coordinate the strategy's implementation. Additionally, implementing agencies will hold consultations with civil society to discuss ongoing efforts and preview future plans for implementation. These consultations will be an opportunity for civil society to continue to provide feedback and inform prospective implementation of the strategy.

For the Department of State, the implementation of the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls will be led by the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues (S/GWI). Since the release of the strategy in March, S/GWI has worked to develop toolkits for our colleagues in embassies around the world that succinctly explain why the strategy was launched and what it intends to achieve, and outline the specific outcomes that the Department of State will pursue in its implementation of the strategy. Importantly, they also provide specific recommendations on the kinds of actions officers can take to advance the Department's implementation of the strategy and examples of what other embassies have done in this regard. These toolkits were recently soft launched to test their effectiveness and S/GWI is working to distribute the toolkits more broadly.

In addition to the toolkits, S/GWI is also working to assemble existing tools and resources online for overseas diplomats and officers across the Department to highlight and address the challenges facing adolescent girls. We are integrating discussion of adolescent girls into ongoing gender working groups that will feed into the interagency working group outlined in the strategy. We have also begun to hold meetings with regional and functional bureaus to explain the intent of the strategy, discuss how the strategy is relevant to their work, and explore specific entry points for increased efforts to empower adolescent girls.

The Department also educates diplomatic personnel on the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls—as well as the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP), the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally, and other gender policies—through a devoted online and in-person course on gender equality and foreign policy at the Foreign Service Institute.

The Department of State's implementation plan for the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls includes a number of illustrative indicators that embassies and bureaus can use to demonstrate and track their efforts to implement the strategy. S/GWI will integrate its request for information on the Department's implementation of the strategy into the ongoing annual reporting process already underway around efforts to advance women and girls' empowerment through the NAP and GBV Strategy.

Question. Following the Girl Summit held in London in July 2014, the United Nations and donors have been encouraging countries with a high prevalence and/or high burden of child marriage to each develop a national action plan on how they will achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of ending child marriage by 2030.

Could you describe how, and in which countries, the U.S. government is supporting the development of national action plans to end child marriage?

Could you also describe how on the political level, the U.S. is encouraging countries with high rates of child marriage to make it a priority to develop and implement such a plan?

Answer. The United States is an active proponent at United Nations and in other multilateral fora for resolutions condemning CEFM and calling on other states and stakeholders to address this practice. Department officials also raise the issue of CEFM, as appropriate, in meetings with government officials and in bilateral stra-

tegic dialogues. S/GWI in particular engages strategically with host government officials to intervene in cases where governments appear to be stagnating or even backsliding on this issue.

The legal status of CEFM in most U.S. states complicates the efforts of the Department of State to promote the enactment of laws internationally establishing the minimum age of marriage. However, the Department's implementation plan for the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls outlines the intent to encourage governments to develop and implement strategies to prevent CEFM and address its consequences, including protecting girls who have already been married, and to offer policy collaboration and technical support as appropriate in supporting countries who have demonstrated political will to address CEFM.

In developing and implementing the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, the Department has worked closely with Girls Not Brides, a global partnership of more than 600 civil society organizations from over 80 countries committed to ending child marriage. That organization has developed a toolkit to help governments draft national action plans to address child marriage, and local civil society organizations that comprise its local chapters are working closely with governments, including those like Ghana and Mozambique, to help them develop such plans. Under the new strategy, the Department expects to continue to support the efforts of such local organizations and encourage governments to collaborate with them.

Where legal frameworks exist against CEFM, the Department of State engages through programs, diplomacy, and public engagement to promote broader awareness of the laws that are in place. We find often that citizens of countries where CEFM is prohibited under the law are unaware that this practice is criminalized. Simply educating them on their rights and those of their children can be a powerful tool in deterring this practice.

As outlined in the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls Globally, the United States believes that one of the best ways to address CEFM is to ensure girls stay in school. Under the Let Girls Learn initiative, the Department, along with interagency counterparts, has worked to secure a range of commitments from our international counterparts—including the United Kingdom, Korea, Japan, Canada, Mexico, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and Finland—to coordinate efforts and jointly support international diplomacy to improve girls' access to education and address the range of barriers that cause them to drop out of school, including CEFM. These commitments currently total \$600 million dollars. Finally as part of our efforts in the Let Girls Challenge Fund countries of Malawi, Tanzania, Laos, and Nepal—which were selected in part because of their high prevalence of CEFM, as well as the demonstrated political will to address these and other challenges faced by girls in their countries—the United States designs and implements holistic programs to empower adolescent girls, we are working closely with other international donors to ensure that our efforts are closely coordinated, are based on country-specific best practices, and achieve maximum geographic coverage.

In addition, the United States remains actively involved in the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies (Call to Action), now lead by Sweden, including by encouraging States and other organizations that did not sign the communiqué to join the initiative. We are working hard to bring more partners, particularly governments, on board not only to join the Call to Action but also to make commitments in line with the Road Map in order to expand international coordination and prioritization of violence against women and girls, including CEFM.

Question. I was the lead Senate sponsor of the Girls Count Act which seeks to address the lack of birth registry systems around the world that leaves approximately 51 million children annually without proper registration, most of whom are girls. Proof of birth verifies citizenship, nationality, parentage and age, which are critical to ensuring that children remain a part of society and do not fall victim to various forms of exploitation to include child marriage.

This is now the law of the land. Can you please provide an update on its implementation?

Answer. USAID will respond to this Question for the Record directly.

Question. My understanding is that many civil society groups have made recommendations for improving responses when U.S. victims are taken abroad for forced marriages. Please share with the committee what further steps the Department of State has taken since that February 2016 roundtable to better protect U.S. citizens from forced marriages abroad and to improve the Department's ability to respond when they are alerted to such cases, as well as to more closely and regularly coordinate with U.S. NGO stakeholders on these issues.

Answer. To improve the Department's ability to respond to forced marriage cases, the Bureau of Consular Affairs' Overseas Citizens Services directorate (CA/OCS) expanded training opportunities for consular staff. CA/OCS offers a 3-day victim assistance course designed to equip consular staff with the skills needed to effectively assist victims of violent crime. Since January 2016, CA/OCS has incorporated new modules on support for victims of crime, including forced marriage, into the crime victim assistance course and other relevant training programs. Such training programs include the victim assistance courses in Dubai in January 2016 for Near East/South Central Asia region staff, as well as training conducted in Johannesburg in April 2016 for Africa region staff. The next overseas trainings will be offered in November 2016 and February 2017. CA/OCS staff regularly consults with consular staff overseas who respond to these cases.

CA/OCS also expands its reach to U.S. citizens who need assistance overseas through the creation of more customer-centric consular information products. CA/OCS works with stakeholders to make information available to the U.S. public more effective and user-friendly. This includes information on forced marriage and other crime victim issues, travel safety, passport requirements, and additional consular topics.

Given the complexity of forced marriage cases, consular staff tailor responses to individual cases. Factors that affect responses include: host country laws; availability and quality of local resources and support (e.g., shelters and shelter safety); local environment (e.g., the ease and efficacy with which victims can obtain help); logistics (e.g., a victim's distance from a U.S. embassy or consulate, law enforcement, etc.); a country's security environment; and other factors.

CA/OCS values the critical work of foreign and domestic civil society groups in assisting victims of forced marriage, and will continue to work with them to provide the safest and most appropriate response to individual victims, and to discuss broader policy and resource issues.

Question. In Pakistan, how would you describe the extent of the problem of forced marriage and conversion of Christian and Hindu girls particularly in the Sindh and Punjab regions? How is the U.S. government working with Pakistani counterparts to ensure Pakistan adheres to national and international legislation and agreements to protect children and to raise awareness among vulnerable communities who are targeted and victims of forced marriage of children?

Answer. The Aurat Foundation, a non-governmental organization in Pakistan, estimates that there are 1,000 forced conversions of women and girls each year in the country, often as a result of forced marriage or bonded labor. The practice is an abuse of the rights of women and girls and we condemn it in no uncertain terms.

We regularly engage with senior government officials on the importance of respect for religious freedom and human rights. We continue to urge the Government at all levels to protect religious minorities, bring the perpetrators of violence against religious minorities to justice, and fully implement the June 2014 Pakistani Supreme Court order on the rights of members of religious minorities under Pakistan's constitution and international commitments. We were encouraged when, on September 27, Pakistan's National Assembly unanimously passed a landmark bill giving the country's Hindu community the capability to register marriages for the first time. If enacted, the law has the potential to lessen the frequency of forced conversion of Hindu girls. The province of Sindh, where the majority of Pakistan's Hindus live, passed a similar law earlier this year.

As in far too much of the world, Pakistani girls, including religious minorities, face a range of barriers that limit their opportunities to succeed, including gender-based violence. One of the most effective ways to overcome these barriers is by ensuring girls remain in school. Through the Administration's Let Girls Learn initiative in Pakistan, our Embassy in Islamabad is working closely with USAID to coordinate a comprehensive effort to help keep girls in school across the country, including by raising awareness of harmful and traditional practices and gender-based violence against women and girls. In May, the Embassy convened representatives from Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Islamabad Capital Territory, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan to discuss challenges to adolescent girls' education in Pakistan, steps currently being taken to overcome them, and areas to prioritize in supporting and promoting adolescent girls' empowerment and education. In the first phase of the comprehensive effort to help girls enroll and stay in school, Let Girls Learn will create a framework for the United States to engage Pakistani provinces and administrative areas on key barriers to girls' education, including gender-based violence.

Our Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is working to enhance the capacity of Pakistani women to preserve law and order, pro-

mote gender equality, and serve as role models in the justice system. INL-Pakistan (INL-P) employs a full-time gender advisor whose role is to design, coordinate, implement, and oversee INL-P's gender programming. Through its Gender Program, INL-P is working to improve the safety of women and girls by strengthening civilian law enforcement nationwide. According to Public Radio International, international women's organizations have long recognized the connection between increased women police officers and reducing violence against women, stopping rape, and preventing terrorism. INL programs are helping to strength the role of women police officers through training, infrastructure assistance and equipment, with over 900 women trained and over 1,100 pieces of equipment donated to date.

In addition, INL recently signed an agreement with U.N. Women that will build the capacity of law enforcement, the justice sector, and social service providers to prevent and respond to violence against women in Balochistan, Sindh, and Punjab. INL-P is also supporting gender-sensitivity training as part of the overall human rights training for police, judges, and prosecutors in training academies.

Question. South Asia has the highest prevalence rate of child marriage of any region in the world, with approximately 1 in 2 girls in the region married before the age of 18. The highest rates of child marriage in South Asia are in Bangladesh (52%), India (47%), Nepal (37%) and Afghanistan (33%). Can you please describe for us what actions the U.S. is taking in each of these four countries to help prioritize the eradication of child marriage?

Answer. In South Asia, we have worked through U.S. diplomacy and programing to elevate and prioritize our engagement on CEFM. One of the most effective ways we can counter CEFM is by ensuring adolescent girls remain in school. Last month, President Obama announced Nepal's selection as a Challenge Fund country under the Let Girls Learn Initiative. Through the initiative, the Department of State will work with the Government of Nepal to ensure all girls have the opportunity to learn and thrive free from violence, coordinating closely with other Let Girls Learn partners—including USAID, the Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation—as well as the Department of Defense.

In Nepal, we are also supporting a 3-year, \$5 million collaborative effort with USAID and UNICEF through the Secretary's Full Participation Fund aimed at reducing the prevalence of school-related gender-based violence (GBV) and establishing child- and adolescent-friendly procedures to respond to incidents of GBV when they occur. Through training, mapping of services for GBV survivors, advocacy and awareness raising activities, school actors are gaining knowledge of the impact of GBV, including on CEFM and its legal and social consequences. This project is developing a systematic reporting and referral mechanism to monitor and respond to incidents of school-related GBV.

The United States has raised the empowerment of adolescent girls as a key U.S. priority in India during several U.S.-India Strategic and Commercial Dialogues and Secretary Kerry's diplomatic outreach in India. We continue to urge the Government of India to reconvene the U.S.-India Women's Empowerment Dialogue, launched in 2009 to exchange lessons learned and best practices to address challenges facing women and girls, including CEFM, as one way to deepen our engagement and coordination on this key issue.

In December, Embassy New Delhi will host a mission-wide training on gender integration with focus on preventing and responding to GBV, including CEFM. The training will provide mission staff with culturally specific, gender-sensitive strategies as well as tools and resources to address gender based violence through U.S. diplomacy and programs.

Embassy New Delhi is partnering with Save the Children to combat GBV, including CEFM, in North India through a public advocacy caravan. The roadshow will travel to North India cities, stopping in each city for two days, and will be organized as part of a campaign to address the prevalence of GBV in this region. During each stop, a team of experts, working with local stakeholders and institutions, will hold a series of high-profile street plays, film screenings, and panel discussions.

Since 2014, the Department of State has been in ongoing discussions with the Government of Bangladesh at all levels regarding its proposals to amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act to reduce its legal age of marriage. During the last U.S.-Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue in June, the Government of Bangladesh reaffirmed its commitment to uphold 18 as the legal age of marriage without exceptions. We will continue to engage with the government on its efforts to prevent and respond to early and forced marriage among other initiatives to foster women's empowerment and gender equality.

The Public Affairs Section (PAS) elevates the status of women and girls in Bangladesh by offering cultural and educational programs and through federal assist-

ance awards to civil society organizations working to promote women's rights. The American Center Girls' Club is the centerpiece of a female-focused engagement strategy that has nearly doubled the number of girls and young women ages 14 to 24 that benefit from PAS's educational and cultural programming, opportunities and resources. The club provides a safe space for girls and young women to exercise leadership, build confidence, recognize their value and power, and pursue academic and professional goals. With financial support from S/GWI's Full Participation Fund, PAS awarded a 2-year grant to the Bangladesh Legal Assistance and Services Trust (BLAST) to establish a mobile legal clinic that is increasing access to justice for young and working class women by focusing on divorce, maintenance, property and gender-based violence issues.

The USAID program, "Women and Girls Lead Global" (www.WGLG.org) includes a Bangladesh specific campaign on Child Marriage and Girl's Education. Also, since its inception in 2011, USAID has supported the Protecting Human Rights (PHR) Program that has prevented more than 1,300 child marriages in the program's working areas. The PHR has several activities planned to carry out should parliament pass a new Child Marriage Prohibition Act, 2015 replacing the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929. However, the PHR Program is scheduled to end in March 2017, so very little time remains to prepare.

The United States has prioritized the promotion of gender equality and rights of women in all of our activities in Afghanistan. To this end, we support women's rights civil society organizations to develop their capacity to advocate for women's rights and to monitor the government's implementation of their rights. The Department also is advocating for the full implementation of the Law to Eliminate Violence Against Women (EVAW Law).

One of our flagship programs is a new effort that was announced at the launch of the Adolescent Girl Strategy. In March 2016, Secretary Kerry announced \$7 million for programming to empower adolescent girls in Afghanistan, where the Department of State will fund efforts to change perceptions about CEFM at the district and community level. The Afghanistan initiative will also increase adolescent girls' education through grants for girls to go to school and support for counseling, networks for girls, and training on life and vocational skills.

Question. According to the NGO Girls Not Brides, Brazil ranks fourth in the world in highest absolute number of child marriages. Please describe how the U.S. government, working with our partners in the Western Hemisphere including countries like Brazil and Guatemala, is raising awareness among vulnerable communities who are targets for child marriage?

Answer. According to UNICEF, Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region where CEFM is not declining. Girls are married or enter into informal unions for a variety of reasons, including because of traditional/indigenous practice, pregnancy, protection from violence, and poverty.

Guatemala has one of the highest rates of CEFM in the Western Hemisphere. According to UNICEF, 30 percent of Guatemalan women 20 to 24 years of age were first married or in union by age 18, and seven percent of them by 15 years of age. The practice is most common in indigenous, rural, and poorer populations and is particularly prevalent among Mayan communities, where rates of CEFM are as high as 40 percent. The minimum legal age for marriage in Guatemala is 18, and in November, the Guatemalan Congress eliminated a provision that previously allowed girls to marry at 14 and boys at 16 with parental consent.

Brazil has the highest absolute number of girls who are married or in informal unions in the region. According to data from UNICEF, more than 11 percent of women age 20–24 were married or in informal unions before age 15, and 36 percent of women age 20–24 were married or in informal unions before age 18. The legal minimum age of marriage in Brazil is 18 (age 16 with parental or legal representative consent). However, a recent study of this practice has highlighted that, in contrast to other regions, CEFM in Brazil often takes the form of informal unions rather than formal marriages. Girls are married for a variety of reasons including economic stability, early pregnancy, or lack of educational and economic opportunities.

The Department of State and USAID address CEFM in the region through policy and programming engagements on the root causes of the practice. These include addressing poverty and gender-based violence, increasing access to education, and engaging vulnerable populations including indigenous and people of African descent. The Department utilizes the tools and resources of the interagency through the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls and the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally to share best practices with governments and ensure that women and adolescent girls in the Western Hemisphere can reach their full potential. The U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America

aims to address GBV by increasing policing capacity, strengthening the judicial sector, assisting survivors, and facilitating enhanced messaging to increase public awareness of GBV and women's rights. Through the Secretary's Full Participation Fund, Embassy Brasilia is supporting a UNICEF project called "Today a Girl, Tomorrow a Woman" (Hoje Menina, Amanha Mulher) to empower adolescent girls and address issues that affect their lives such as violence and insecurity, health, and education. In Guatemala, USAID is supporting efforts through civil society to disseminate information about the recent law increasing Guatemala's marriage age to community leaders, parents, youth, judges, and mayors in rural areas.

Question. In March, two Nigerian girls were kidnapped and subject to forced conversion and marriage in Northern Nigeria. Only after public outcry and unprecedented public pressure were they ultimately returned. Of course we've seen similar tactics employed by Boko Haram. Would you say this issue is prioritized in our dealings with the Nigerian government? In your view is the Nigerian government and its security forces taking sufficient steps to protect civilians, especially young girls, from this horrific human rights abuse?

Answer. Through the U.S. government's Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, the Department prioritizes efforts to empower adolescent girls so that they are given opportunities to thrive, including in school. This is true for the Chibok girls, as well as the thousands of others affected and held by Boko Haram. We continue to engage and support Nigerian efforts to liberate hundreds of women and children forced into marriage, indoctrinated, and impoverished by Boko Haram. The United States, through USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA), provides life-saving protection services—including health care, livelihoods assistance, and psychosocial support—for displaced women and girls in northeastern Nigeria, particularly survivors of gender-based and those released by Boko Haram. We have also provided trauma counseling and essential humanitarian aid to refugees, internally displaced persons, and other populations of concern affected by this conflict in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, as well.

During my recent visit to Abuja in August, I met with the leaders of the #BringBackOurGirls Campaign, who are anxious for the Chibok girls to be returned. We expressed concerns that the International organizations are doing their best to assist, but the level of humanitarian need remains extremely high and insecurity complicates aid delivery. The U.N. is in the process of rapidly scaling up its response; turning this situation around will require the urgent and robust collective efforts of the Government of Nigeria and the international community.

The Nigerian Defense Headquarters inaugurated a Defense Advisory Committee on Human Rights to monitor and investigate allegations of human rights abuses within the military. While these efforts appear to still be in the very early stages, they are steps in the right direction, we have advocated in addition to the effort outlined above, a nuanced and sustained communication strategy by the Government of Nigeria to the impacted communities, and we hope to see efforts such as these receive the necessary authority, staff, and funding to carry out their mandates.

Question. There have been reports over the years of Coptic Christian women and girls in Egypt being abducted and forced into marriage and to convert to Islam. The State Department has often neglected to give this issue sufficient attention in either the annual TIP report or the IRF report citing insufficient evidence. However multiple NGOs have documented the phenomenon. To what extent is this an issue that the Department is following? Has the Department, including embassy staff, received similar reports of this human rights abuse?

Answer. We closely follow reports of violence against women and religious minorities—including reports of forced marriages and forced conversions—and we consistently call on the Egyptian authorities to investigate and prosecute these crimes. We continue to highlight that a failure to do so has created an environment of impunity that exacerbates sectarian tensions and gender inequality, which hinders a transition to real democracy.

During the past 5 years, the Department has received several reports of Coptic Christian women and girls in Egypt being abducted and forced to convert to Islam. When such reports come to our attention, we take them very seriously and make efforts to determine the details with the NGOs that made the report, church and community leadership in Egypt, and the government as appropriate. The majority of these cases occur in parts of the country that are difficult to access and in which there is frequent conflict within and among the local communities. Despite our efforts, we have not often been able to document or independently verify reports of abduction, although we continue to pursue relevant information and to raise our concerns as appropriate. Nevertheless, we have included reports of cases of abduc-

tion and forced marriage and conversion in the 2011, 2012, and 2014 International Religious Freedom Reports, and the 2015 Report covered the case of a Coptic Christian man who was abducted and forced to convert to Islam.

Coptic Christians face legal and social discrimination, and reports of violence against them often go uninvestigated and unprosecuted by Egyptian authorities. At the same time, Egyptian women and girls of any religion often face deep familial and societal pressures that limit their choice of whom and when to marry as well as violence in their homes, which may motivate them to run away or elope. As we reported in the 2012 International Religious Freedom Report, “Families sometimes claimed kidnapping when women or girls ran away for reasons ranging from abuse to voluntary conversion or elopement.”

Forced conversions and forced or coerced marriages constitute a serious human rights abuse, but the Department only includes such cases in the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report when they amount to human trafficking as defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). Human trafficking and forced marriage intersect when marriage is used in conjunction with force, fraud, coercion, or abuse of power and as a means to subject people—most often women—to conditions of servitude, often in the form of domestic and/or sexual servitude. The 2016 TIP Report acknowledged the heightened vulnerability to trafficking faced by members of religious minorities around the world, stating “traffickers have been known to target women and girls from religious minorities and force them into religious conversions and subsequent marriages, in which they may be subjected to domestic or sexual servitude.” We have not, however, received reports of such cases in Egypt that meet the definition of trafficking outlined in the TVPA.

RESPONSES OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY ANNE RICHARD TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. The Washington Post recently ran a piece titled “The story of a girl married at 11 tracks the horrors of Yemen’s War,” which recounted the plight of a young pre-teen “married” to a 25-year old man and her attempts to flee the forced union. Other recent new stories detailed horrific accounts of refugee girls living in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, some as young as eight being married off to help their desperate families. What sort of programming is the U.S. undertaking to confront this issue?

Answer. We are facing the greatest displacement crisis in history and three-quarters of the displaced are women and children. We know that early marriage is a practice that can increase during times of conflict and displacement. To reduce instances of early marriage, the State Department takes a multi-faceted and comprehensive approach, including funding programs carried out by multilateral and non-governmental organizations.

First, we provide assistance to ensure that the basic needs of vulnerable people—such as shelter, food, clothing, water and sanitation, and healthcare—are met. This helps them survive and also reduces the risk of exploitation and violence. Ideally, we also provide opportunities for vulnerable individuals to gain skills or earn a living. If basic needs are met, families are less likely to turn to other coping mechanisms, including early marriage.

Second, we try to dissuade families and communities from marrying daughters early through education, as well as through programs that seek to provide services and support to girls and their families and to engage the broader community. Engaging families and whole communities is the most sustainable approach. For example, the White House has announced a \$1 million program to help prevent and respond to early marriage in the countries neighboring Syria. This program will increase awareness of the benefits of delaying marriage for both girls and their communities, counter the perception that early and forced marriage is a way to protect girls, and underscore the value of continuing access to education for adolescent girls. Services will also be available to married girls and we will support civil society organizations working to protect at-risk girls.

Third, we require partner organizations to assess the gender dynamics that exist in the countries where they work. We also encourage them to consult affected populations when developing programs.

Fourth, because many refugees in the Middle East do not reside in camps and face additional challenges in obtaining services in cities, we provide programs in camps as well as in cities, where more and more refugees choose to live. Services supported by the United States are grounded in the needs and realities of girls in the places where they live.

Additional examples include the following:

- In Lebanon, we funded a non-governmental organization to identify local agencies that specialize in assisting women and girl survivors of violence in the north and in Bekaa valley. These agencies are conducting training for two clinics so they can appropriately receive and manage gender-based violence cases.
- In Jordan we support the agencies conducting the “Amani” campaign to raise awareness of issues around gender-based violence and child protection, including early marriage. The multi-year campaign has developed materials that help initiate conversations about these issues in Jordan. We also support training judges and police to prevent and respond to early marriage.

Question. Nine of the top 10 countries with the highest rates of early marriage are considered fragile states. Given that the new U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls includes specific attention to both child marriage and adolescent girls displaced by conflict and disaster. How is PRM tracking and reporting on its commitments under the Strategy with regard to programs focused on combatting child marriage in fragile and conflict affected states?

Answer. The Department of State’s implementation plan for the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls Globally includes three specific objectives that the Department has prioritized, and addressing early and forced marriage is one of these. Enhancing and expanding comprehensive programs to empower adolescent girls and address the risk factors that are the drivers of early and forced marriage is one approach that we are adopting in pursuit of this objective, along with diplomacy, public engagement, coordination, and integrating a focus on girls throughout the Department’s operating structure.

Through the Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), funding and support is provided to international and NGO partners to respond to gender-based violence (GBV) among refugee and conflict-affected populations. With our continued support, these organizations are delivering urgently needed food, shelter, water, health care, education, protection, and other services to people affected by conflict. We encourage these partners to ensure that protection responses, including addressing early and forced marriage, are integrated into their programs particularly education, reproductive health, and psycho-social care.

This assistance has advanced programming, research, and innovation aimed at increasing girls’ access to education, training, and skills development as separate from boys recognizing that girls’ developmental and social needs are different during adolescence. These programs, alongside those that engage parents and entire families help to reduce girls’ exposure to violence and exploitation. They also help girls to become valued participants in their communities and contribute to long-term development outcomes.

PRM staff works closely with partners to ensure their programs meet existing standards such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Action and meets with partners regularly to get updates, problem-solve challenges that may come up in the field, as well as feed in real-time learning, so that the work we fund is contextual and culturally appropriate to the country and response.

All of PRM’s efforts are guided by and informed by the Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally, the new U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP). Those strategies have existing monitoring and reporting requirements including indicators that PRM feeds into on a regular basis. We work consistently and closely with our interagency colleagues including USAID to ensure we are coordinated and continuing to make progress on our collective effort to advance U.S. government policies.

Question. What concrete steps is State Department taking to disseminate the strategy to our embassies in fragile and conflict affected states to facilitate ownership of the strategy and build capacity for its implementation at the country level?

Answer. Since the release of the strategy in March, the Secretary’s Office of Global Women’s Issues (S/GWI) has worked to develop toolkits for colleagues in embassies around the world that succinctly explain why the strategy was launched and what it intends to achieve, and outlines the specific outcomes that the State Department will pursue in its implementation of the strategy. Importantly, it also provides specific recommendations on the kinds of actions officers can take to advance State’s implementation of the strategy and examples of what other embassies have done in this regard. These toolkits were recently soft launched to test their effectiveness.

To distribute this toolkit more broadly, S/GWI has prepared a cable that will go out to all embassies that will introduce the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls to a broader audience, explain how it intersects with our other gender

strategies, and outline reporting expectations. This cable will request the designation of strategy leads at each post to facilitate communication and create a network of Department staff working across sectors.

S/GWI is also working to assemble existing tools and resources online for overseas diplomats and officers across the Department to highlight and address the challenges facing adolescent girls. In addition to the toolkits mentioned previously, these includes one pagers with talking points and key statistics for use in op-eds and speeches, and a collection of research and resources related to adolescent girls empowerment.

In Washington we are integrating discussion of adolescent girls into ongoing gender working groups that will feed into the interagency working group outlined into the strategy. We have also begun to hold meetings with regional and functional bureaus to explain intent of the strategy, discuss how it is relevant to their work, and explore specific entry points for increased efforts to empower adolescent girls.

The strategy complements the NAP, which charts the course that the Department, USAID, and Department of Defense take to support women and girls' protection and empowerment in countries affected by war, violence, and insecurity. Together, these documents represent a fundamental shift in how we address conflict prevention and response. Of central importance to adolescent girls in crisis and conflict settings, the NAP outlines actions that increase women and girls' access to health, education, and economic opportunities.

The Department educates diplomatic personnel on these strategies and other gender policies through a devoted online and in-person course on gender equality and foreign policy at the Foreign Service Institute. In addition, the Department has created toolkits for diplomats deploying to U.S. missions around the world on its gender priorities, including on adolescent girls and women, peace, and security. Annual reporting on efforts to advance women and girls' empowerment through the NAP is an additional vehicle through which the Department has socialized gender policies with U.S. in conflict-affected regions while also soliciting input on lessons learned, best practices, achievements, and challenges associated with engaging women and girls in conflict affected regions. PRM is also sharing the strategy and ensuring field staff and partners are familiar with it through orientations, regular communications, and proposal review processes.

Question. What diplomatic efforts is State Department taking to encourage international counterparts to prioritize combatting child, early and forced marriage within their own foreign policy, and in what ways are you coordinating with other donors on policy and programmatic efforts in fragile and conflict affected states where child marriage rates are high?

Answer. The United States is an active proponent at United Nations and in other multilateral fora for resolutions condemning child, early and forced marriage and calling on other states and stakeholders to end this practice. As the lead for this issue, the S/GWI along with other department officials also raise the issue of early and forced marriage, as appropriate in meetings with government officials and in bilateral strategic dialogues.

PRM supports efforts to prevent and respond to early and forced marriage through assistance and diplomatic efforts. This includes bilateral conversations with other donors to share lessons, provide technical insight, and encourage them to adopt similar strategies that have proven to elevate and guide the U.S. government approach to women and girls. For example, PRM recently shared information with a group of European donors about our funding mechanisms and programs to engage men and boys in responding to GBV. We will continue these efforts with other donors, including those from the Global South, to emphasize our work, promote best practices, and encourage them to adopt similar policies like the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls to advance our collective effort around these issues.

We also continue to engage in robust humanitarian diplomacy to:

- Encourage more partners to join the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies (Call to Action) and make commitments in order to expand international coordination;
- Promote policies and programs that support access to and provision of sexual and reproductive health services for crisis-affected individuals;
- Prioritize child protection, education, and youth engagement in humanitarian emergencies;
- Develop policies to better address the unique needs of displaced women, children, and other at-risk populations whether in or out of camps; and
- Integrate the promotion of gender equality into the full range of humanitarian partners and donor planning and activities.

Question. To what extent are you talking with our European allies as it relates to the incidence of child marriage among the refugee populations entering the continent? How are these governments responding to this emerging challenge?

Answer. In 2013, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) launched the Call to Action to mobilize donors, U.N. agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders to protect women and girls in humanitarian emergencies. The Call to Action culminated in a high-level event, co-hosted by the U.K. and Sweden on November 13, 2013. That event produced a ground-breaking communiqué, in which donors and humanitarian agencies signed and committed to preventing violence against women and girls from the start of humanitarian emergencies.

The Call to Action is an important framework to help coordinate efforts with other donors, affected countries, and non-government stakeholders to maximize our impact and change the nature of how we respond to GBV in humanitarian crisis. From 2014–2015, the United States assumed leadership of the Call to Action. Secretary Kerry hosted follow-on Call to Action events on September 22, 2014, and October 1, 2015, in New York during the U.N. General Assembly. The October 2015 event included the unveiling of the Call to Action Road Map which was developed under United States guidance and handover of Call to Action leadership to Sweden.

The United States remains actively involved in the Call to Action, now led by Sweden, including by encouraging States and other organizations that did not sign the communiqué to join the initiative. We are working hard to bring more partners, particularly governments, on board not only to join the Call to Action but also to make commitments in line with the Road Map in order to expand international coordination and prioritization of violence against women and girls. In the last month, we have reached out to six governments to join the Call to Action in advance of the U.N. General Assembly. We also continue regular calls with the States and Donors working group to coordinate closely with other governments and donors on this issue of GBV in emergencies. This includes partners like the U.K. Department for International Development, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Irish Aid, European Community Humanitarian Office, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, among others.

Through ongoing conversations we aim to show European governments what has worked well, share lessons, and learn more about how to better address this issue. To date, the Call to Action is an important framework to help coordinate efforts with other donors, affected countries, and non-government stakeholders to maximize our impact and change the nature of how we respond to GBV in humanitarian crises, including those targeted towards girls and early and forced marriage. However, this is not the only forum that is used to influence other governments and track their responses to important issues like early and forced marriage. As an example, PRM and USAID/OFDA recently held a call with the European Commission on United States government programming to engage men and boys in the prevention of gender-based violence, including early and forced marriage, and address the issues boys face when they are survivors of sexual violence. In that call, the United States government shared best practices to date including learning and areas for programs to be taken to scale.

RESPONSES OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY ANNE RICHARD AND AMBASSADOR CATHY RUSSELL TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question. When crisis strikes, refugee and internally displaced girls are the first to become “invisible”—kept at home to manage more adult responsibilities or for their own protection. Lacking skills, information, and resources these girls are vulnerable to a multitude of risks, not limited to exploitation and child marriage. Because they are not “seen” or counted immediately following displacement, emergency programming does not adequately address their needs or concerns. The U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls makes no explicit commitment to gather data, disaggregated by age and sex, to capture the full scope of the problem as it relates to displaced adolescent girls. I am concerned that because girls are “invisible” during emergencies and that without timely and accurate data, girls will be “lost.”

- What steps are the Department of State and USAID taking to assess the number and needs of displaced girls and adolescents? Recognizing gathering data in an emergency is difficult, what steps are being taken to ensure that State and USAID, as the largest global donors to emergency, are setting high standards for ensuring emergency assessments include disaggregated data by age and sex?

- Will this information be available publicly? Is there a timeline (for example, within 30 days of a disaster declaration) for when this disaggregated data can be collected? If not, why not?
- What efforts have the Bureau of Population Refugee and Migration taken to encourage the U.N., especially UNHCR, as well as other implementing partners to ensure this information is being gathered and shared?

Answer. The United States government provides support to international and NGO partners to respond to gender-based violence (GBV), including early and forced marriage of girls, and violence against children among refugee, natural disaster, and conflict-affected populations through GBV and child protection programs. With our continued support, these organizations are delivering urgently needed food, shelter, water, health care, education, protection, and other services to people affected by displacement. We encourage all partners to ensure that protection responses, including those which address early and forced marriage, are integrated into their programs particularly education, reproductive health, and psycho-social care. We do this in the following ways:

- The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) require NGO partners to submit a gender analysis in program applications submitted for funding.
- PRM and USAID/OFDA ensure proposals and reporting submitted with a gender component or gender-related indicators are reviewed and evaluated by a Gender/GBV and/or Protection expert.
- USAID/OFDA subsequently requires that every proposal submitted for funding has integrated and mainstreamed protection across all of its proposed sectors to demonstrate how their activities will address and mitigate risks, such as those particularly faced by women and girls in crisis.
- PRM and USAID/OFDA require NGO partners to submit quarterly reports in line with their program design.
- PRM and USAID/OFDA regularly monitor protection and gender mainstreaming, GBV, and child protection programs through site visits, phone calls, meetings, briefings, etc.
- PRM encourages partners to provide gender and age disaggregated data in their proposals for relevant and appropriate indicators, as well as in their quarterly reporting.
- USAID/OFDA is also working with partners to develop tools to better address the unique needs of adolescent girls in emergencies, including mapping existing services, adapting design and implementation of programming that addresses critical needs across sectors for adolescents, particularly adolescent girls.

PRM and OFDA work closely with partners to ensure their programs meet existing standards such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Action (IASC GBV Guidelines) and meet with partners regularly to get updates, problem-solve challenges that may come up in the field, as well as feed in real-time learning, so that the work we fund is contextual and culturally appropriate to the country and response. At every stage, the United States government advocates and asks questions about sex-disaggregated data and adherence to the IASC GBV Guidelines, which provides guidance as well as gender and GBV-specific indicators that can be incorporated into program design to address many of these risks. As per the IASC GBV Guidelines, United States government staff is trained and integrate into their monitoring of international and NGO partners the following considerations:

- GBV prevention and response is a priority, as we know that life-saving interventions should be included in the earliest stages of any emergency.
- Assessments should always build upon and never duplicate existing data or information that is already available.
- Assessments should be done at the outset of program planning and at regular intervals for monitoring and evaluation purposes. However, while the provision of data is critical in informing programming, we should never use the absence of "data" as an excuse for not prioritizing GBV response activities at the earliest stages of an emergency.
- All assessments, including those that focus on issues that extend beyond GBV, should be done according to ethical and safety standards, in a participatory nature, and never put the beneficiaries at risk.
- GBV Assessments should be undertaken to generate sex-disaggregated data and information that highlights the gaps and needs of women and girls as well to inform new programming.

The Department of State has a close relationship with the United National High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who receives funding to institutionalize and

prioritize GBV from the outset of every emergency under Safe from the Start. The Department regularly encourages and supports UNHCR efforts to undertake safe and ethical emergency assessments in new and protracted conflicts. UNHCR, as part of the global task team, is also supporting the rollout and implementation of the GBV Information Management System (more information here: <http://www.gbvim.com/>). This system is the standard for collecting ethical GBV information in emergency contexts and has procedures for compiling and sharing that data with relevant stakeholders early in an emergency.

All of the U.S. government's efforts are guided by and informed by the Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally, the new U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. These strategies have existing monitoring and reporting requirements including indicators that PRM feeds into on a regular basis. We work consistently and closely with our interagency colleagues inside the Department of State and USAID to ensure we are coordinated and continuing to make progress on our collective efforts to advance U.S. government policies. This includes assessing and responding to the needs of displaced women and girls.

Question. Launched 3 years ago, the United States leadership on Safe from the Start is now losing momentum. One objective of Safe from the Start was to increase accountability within the international humanitarian architecture by prioritizing gender-based violence prevention. NGOs are required on the front end to conduct a gender analysis as part of their proposals. Why are NGOs not required to routinely report on GBV issues, such as in their quarterly reporting mechanism, during program implementation to ensure accountability in addressing GBV?

Answer. Despite significant focus, attention, and investment in these issues over the last decade, gaps still remain in preventing and responding to GBV, particularly during the earliest, and often most critical, stages of an emergency. Recognizing these challenges, the Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), together with USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) developed a framework for action in the spring of 2013 to analyze these challenges, identify solutions, and mobilize the humanitarian community to take concrete action to address GBV more effectively in emergencies. As a result of this framework, Secretary Kerry launched Safe from the Start in September 2013. Safe from the Start is a U.S. government initiative to build the capacity of the humanitarian system to reduce risk of GBV and ensure quality services for survivors through timely and effective humanitarian action, and hold the humanitarian community accountable to a higher standard of addressing the risks faced by women and girls consistently in emergencies. It seeks to transform the international system for humanitarian response so that the needs of women, girls, and others affected by GBV are a priority in emergencies. We do not believe that Safe from the Start is losing momentum; we actually believe significant strides have been made. The initiative has made important inroads in changing the way that humanitarian partners implement programming to ensure that GBV is prioritized in humanitarian emergencies. The impacts of these investments need to be assessed over time, given that these activities aim to help build the capacity of the system to change the way in which organizations respond—this does not occur overnight and is quite different from assessing the impact of a typical emergency response where one typically sees the impact more immediately.

Approximately \$55 million is being channeled by the U.S. government through this initiative since 2013 to build and strengthen the core capacity of humanitarian partners to address GBV from the earliest phases of an emergency. Given the focus on capacity building, institutionalization, and integration of GBV prevention and response into other programs efforts, it is too early to assess or evaluate the full impact of Safe from the Start. The United States government is currently preparing plans to evaluate Safe from the Start programs to date. This evaluation would assess what has worked, what has not worked, and what needs to be improved moving forward. We know from anecdotal information and program reports that there have been many successes under Safe from the Start, including the deployment of experts on protection and GBV at the onset of emergencies and the provision of core services to respond to the needs of survivors.

In an effort to realize the objectives of Safe from the Start, USAID/OFDA is supporting the Real-Time Accountability Partnership (RTAP), a joint project between OFDA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, OCHA, and the International Rescue Committee. The RTAP is a global, multi-agency initiative that aims to harness the collective power of the humanitarian community to ensure that all individuals, particularly women and girls, are free from the threat of GBV. Specifically, the RTAP's goal

is that all actors prioritize and coordinate GBV response services and integrate GBV prevention across sectors from the outset of an emergency.

In addition to Safe from the Start, we also continue to engage in robust humanitarian diplomacy to:

- Promote policies and programs that support access to and provision of sexual and reproductive health services for crisis-affected individuals;
- Prioritize child protection, education, and youth engagement in humanitarian emergencies;
- Develop policies to better address the unique needs of displaced women, children, and other at-risk populations whether in or out of camps; and
- Integrate the promotion of gender equality into the full range of humanitarian partners and donor planning and activities.

All of these efforts are to increase accountability and improve life-saving GBV responses in acute emergencies. The Call to Action is an important framework to help coordinate efforts with other donors, affected countries, and non-government stakeholders to maximize our impact and change the nature of how we respond to GBV in humanitarian crises, including those targeted towards girls and early and forced marriage. From 2014–2015, the United States assumed leadership of the Call to Action. The United States remains actively involved in the Call to Action including by encouraging States and other organizations that did not sign the communique to join the initiative and make commitments in line with the Call to Action Road Map.

We are also working hard to encourage more partners, particularly governments, to join the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies and make commitments in order to expand international coordination and prioritization of violence against women and girls. In the last month, we have reached out to six governments to join the Call to Action in advance of the U.N. General Assembly.

On a programmatic level, PRM requires that all partners who receive funding submit detailed quarterly reports on their activities, which are closely reviewed. Reports are required to include information about accountability to affected populations and explain how beneficiaries have been involved in program implementation and how their feedback has been incorporated into performance monitoring and program improvement. At PRM, accountability of affected populations is closely tied to our work around gender and GBV mainstreaming and promoted within all of the programs and sectors that receive financial support.

Question. Every day, 39,000 girls under the age of 18 become child brides. In the midst of emergencies, including war and natural disasters, adolescent girls have a unique set of vulnerabilities: their age and gender makes them more vulnerable to sexual violence and they lack critical information and skills to help them make informed decisions. When traditional protection mechanisms erode during times of crisis, families marry girls off in order to protect them, viewing marriage as an alternate protection mechanism and even seeing early marriage as an opportunity for girls to have a better life.

- What specific actions are the State Department and USAID taking to address the unique vulnerabilities of refugee and IDP girls and adolescents, especially as they relate to early marriage? Please provide specific, concrete, tangible actions.

Answer: The United States government takes a holistic approach to ending early and forced marriage. We know that the vulnerabilities of refugee and displaced girls are exacerbated in times of crisis. This means that the already ingrained social norms that discriminate against women and girls become compounded with the loss protection mechanisms, support, and services that individuals and families may have received pre-displacement. The United States government aims to not only address the exacerbating factors that perpetuate early and forced marriage in displacement but also the underlying root causes. We believe that addressing such issues as discrimination and oppression of women and girls can change social dynamics that fuel early and forced marriage and give the communities' opportunity to transform harmful norms so that countries are more likely to transition into stability and peace. We have seen time and again, that women and girls may be able to express themselves and make decisions in displacement in ways that they never could before. In situations where men are no longer seen as the only head-of-household, women and girls may have opportunity to speak, earn a livelihood, and go to school. The United States government believes that these are opportunities we should build upon to encourage, support, and educate women and girls as well as their communities which may have otherwise not been possible.

To address early and forced marriage, the United States government delivers integrated programs in refugee and displaced contexts around the world. We believe

that addressing this complex and serious problem requires a multi-faceted response and a comprehensive approach. This is why we work to end this practice through education, and programs to combat gender-based violence, improve sexual and reproductive health and rights, increase livelihoods, and encourage other types of protection such as child protection. These programs aim to provide services and support to girls who have experienced all types of violence. They also work to engage parents, caregivers, and community leaders in order to address the norms that both cause and perpetuate early and forced marriage.

The Department has a number of programs in place to address child marriage in conflict affected and fragile states. For example:

- In November 2015, the White House announced that the Department would undertake a new \$1,000,000 effort in one or more of Syria's neighboring countries impacted by the Syrian refugee crisis to help prevent and respond to early and forced marriage. Activities will focus on increasing awareness of the benefits of delaying marriage for both girls and their communities, countering the perception that early and forced marriage is a way to protect girls, and underscoring the value of continuing access to education for adolescent girls. Efforts will also aim to reach already married girls with services and to support civil society organizations working to protect at-risk girls.
- In March 2016, Secretary Kerry announced \$7 million in programming to empower adolescent girls in Afghanistan, where the Department of State will fund efforts to change perceptions about child marriage at the district and community level through grants for girls to go to school and counseling, networks for girls, and training on life and vocational skills.

The United States government gives funding to multilateral and NGO partners to implement life-saving and critical programs for adolescent girls. We require partners to assess the gender dynamics that exist in any country in which they are proposing programs. We also encourage them to take specific and targeted approaches to working with women, men, boys, and girls. We know that adolescent girls face unique problems and have needs that are specific to them in crisis and conflict. We must ensure that they do not slip through the cracks but that we focus our efforts on protecting and empowering them. This is why Secretary Kerry launched Safe from the Start in September 2013.

This initiative as well as other United States government assistance has supported programming, research, and innovation aimed at increasing girls' access to education, training, and skills development as separate from boys, recognizing that girls' developmental and social needs are different during adolescence. These programs, alongside those that engage parents and entire families, help to reduce girls' exposure to violence and exploitation. They also help girls to become valued participants in their communities and contribute to long-term development outcomes.

Other specialized programs aimed at preventing and responding to violence that are supported by the United State government, include:

- Medical care and counseling services for GBV survivors,
- Child protection case management support for vulnerable children and their families,
- Safe learning and healing spaces for children, particularly girls, and
- Awareness-raising and programs that transform the behaviors which support early and forced marriage, as well as human trafficking, child labor, and a wide range of gender-based violence so that refugees understand their rights and the resources available to them.

For instance, PRM and USAID/OFDA protection partners identified early and forced marriage as a critical issue facing Syrian and Iraqi adolescent girls and are addressing it through nuanced and targeted age-appropriate child protection interventions focusing on access to informal education, psychosocial support, and building life and resiliency skills.

Additionally, we support host governments and U.N. agencies to increase their capacity to provide services and addresses these issues. In Jordan, we support the Family Protection Department, affiliated with the Jordanian Public Security Department, to strengthen its capacity to address GBV and provide psychosocial support services in the northern part of the country. In Iraq, UNHCR works through its partners to raise awareness of GBV in the refugee and displaced populations, establish women's centers in camps, and carry out training on GBV core concepts and case management. Several PRM partners also work to develop referral pathways among local relief agencies, as well as encourage higher enrollment of girls in formal education programs.

Question. The reasons behind child marriage vary from context to context: In some places, young girls may be married early to protect them from exploitation, whereas in other contexts, young girls may be married to bring their families a dowry. To eradicate the practice of child marriage, it is critical that donors and implementers understand the community and family dynamics that drive families to marry their girls at a young age.

- In protracted emergencies like Syria, has the State Department and USAID analyzed the specific drivers of why girls are married at a young age, and what specific interventions would be most useful to prevent child marriages in different context? What are those interventions?
- What actions are USAID and the State Department taking to elevate girls as a vulnerable group and prioritize them so their voices are considered and incorporated into both emergency and non-emergency programming?

Answer. We are facing the greatest refugee and displacement crisis since World War II. This demands a proactive policy and programmatic approach that addresses the significant needs of women and girls around the world. We know that countries where rights are respected, where opportunity abounds, where women and girls have the same opportunities as men and boys, are safer, more prosperous, and more secure. Therefore, we must include specific perspectives of women and girls in our planning, in our bilateral and multilateral discussions, and our programming so that we see a reduction in violence against women and girls and an increase in access to education, livelihoods, health, psycho-social and other services.

With over 70 percent of those affected by conflict being women and children and the average refugee being displaced nearly two decades, we must rise to the challenge of developing unique solutions that respond to the long-term needs of these communities. This means increasing programming as well as research that build an evidence base for what works in crisis contexts. While much has been done to understand the issues linked to early and forced marriage by numerous research organizations, humanitarian organizations, and coalitions, more needs to be done to test and prove the impact of humanitarian services and programs in order to advance our collective efforts. Programming to address violence against women and girls is still very new in the humanitarian arena compared to other sectors and we admittedly need to continue our collective work until this field is as advanced and sophisticated as other sectors such as health, nutrition, and hygiene.

At the same time, we know from practice and years of programming in this field both in the U.S. and abroad that integrated programming that engages families and whole communities is the most sustainable approach. We must ensure that girls are part of the larger change in their communities in order to transform their futures and increase their opportunities. We support the approach of working “with girls” instead of for them given what we know about their resilience, power, and potential. We must rewrite the narrative that portrays girls as victims by allowing them a leadership role as we create and implement programs. This will allow girls to be empowered and become future leaders of the communities where they live.

In displacement, we believe that early and forced marriage is perpetuated not only by a crisis, natural disaster, or the risk associated with conflict but the underlying inequalities that exist around the world. In many societies, women and girls are seen as second-class citizens and discriminated against from an early age. Therefore, any program working to address violence that girls experience must take this reality into account.

Whether within Syria, Iraq, or in a refugee hosting country, the U.S. government works closely with multilateral partners like the U.N., national and international non-governmental organizations, other donors, and government actors to identify the concerns of girls and deliver a coordinated response to the complex humanitarian needs of all women and girls. Many Syrian refugees do not reside in camps and face additional challenges in obtaining services in urban areas. In Lebanon, we are funding a non-governmental organization to map local agencies that specialize in assisting women and girl survivors of violence in the north and Bekaa valley and who are conducting intensive GBV capacity development training for two clinics so they can appropriately receive and manage GBV cases.

The United States government supports programs around the world that address early and forced marriage. These programs take a comprehensive approach to addressing deep seated discrimination and oppression of girls as well as the immediate risks that they might face in displacement. Partners, funded by the U.S. government, typically undertake quick, emergency assessments to understand the specific dynamics in a particular community. From there, they set up services that include child-friendly spaces, case management, psycho-social support, education, health and reproductive health, and legal assistance. After the immediate days of a conflict or crisis, these organizations also work to implement long-term behavior change and

prevention programs that engage men, boys, and whole communities to change the underlying gender inequalities that perpetuate and condone early and forced marriage.

In addition to emergency assessments, the United States government supports UNHCR's community-based approach which is "a way of working in partnership with persons of concern during all stages". This approach pushes the humanitarian community and U.S. government partners to understand and consider the context, including the gender dynamics, of any community before responding and recognizes that more effective and sustainable outcomes are those that come from community consultations.

The United States, through PRM, supported the Women's Refugee Commission and UNHCR-led Global Youth Consultations (GYRC) that occurred in 2015 and 2016. The GRYC provided an opportunity for refugee youth to discuss issues that affect them with host country youth and representatives from the United Nations, NGOs, and government officials. The refugee youth themselves, many of which were young women, were able to fully participate in the processes leading up to the Consultations and to inform and shape the dialogue and outcomes. The GRYC placed youth at the center of participation and decision making processes that affect them and recognized their potential. This project ended with a Stakeholder Dialogue in Geneva in June where youth from various national consultations presented outcomes and recommendations in the form of the Core Action for Refugee Youth to key international agencies, organizations, and governments. We are currently looking at ways in which we can further support and amplify these core actions into our policies and programming.

Question. We know that the escalation of the armed conflict in Yemen has catapulted women and girls there into a humanitarian catastrophe. Given the unique impact of conflict on women and girls, what is the administration doing to ensure that the U.N. deploys a gender advisor in Yemen so that a gender analysis is conducted at all stages of the crisis?

Answer. We remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Yemen. The United States is committed to helping the millions of men, women, and children who continue to suffer in Yemen and across the region because of this crisis. Since FY 2015, the U.S. government has provided more than \$500 million in humanitarian aid for Yemen and for those in the region affected by the current crisis there. This aid has included the provision of food, water, health care, shelter, and other emergency relief.

The United States government takes protection issues very seriously and is a leading advocate for women and girls worldwide through Safe from the Start. We provide support to a variety of humanitarian agencies that provide protection services in Yemen, including the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is the protection cluster lead, as well as IOM, UNICEF, and INGOs. Recently, an individual was temporarily deployed to act as a senior inter-agency resource and to take on the role of interim protection cluster coordinator. The coordinator looked at the national responses to, in particular, IDP situations of concern, including gender issues. The United States also supports OCHA's Gender Capacity (GenCap) and Protection Capacity (ProCap) rosters. At the request of OCHA, GenCap deployed a senior gender advisor in January of this year to support the humanitarian response in Yemen for a 4-month period, including ensuring a gender analysis was incorporated into the development of the 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan.

Expatriate deployments to Yemen are generally quite difficult due to visa restrictions for individuals of certain nationalities, security concerns, and other issues, but we continue to reinforce to the U.N. the importance of these deployments. The U.N. remains committed to ensuring it has both adequate quantity and quality of staff working in Yemen, in particular people who have experience working in other Level Three emergencies. We continue to encourage the U.N., particularly UNHCR as the protection cluster lead and the U.N. Special Envoy as lead on peace negotiations, to integrate women's voices and a gender perspective into conflict resolution and security deliberations while committing staff and specialized training to this end, including gender advisors. We also continue to encourage and support programs like the one U.N. Women sponsored earlier this year. The organization brought seven Yemeni women to Kuwait from May 7–10 to meet with both negotiating delegations and diplomats working on finding a solution to the conflict in Yemen. U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Matthew Tueller met with these women bilaterally and heard their suggestions on increasing women's participation.

U.S. engagement also includes encouraging UNHCR to attract and train an adequate number of fully-trained staff to serve as cluster coordinators worldwide, but

particularly in Yemen. We also continue to urge the U.N. to deploy adequate staff with gender expertise, to regularly consult with Yemeni women leaders to ensure women's perspectives are part of decision-making in all phases of the conflict and during the rebuilding period, and to impress upon U.N. agencies the importance of mainstreaming gender in the humanitarian response.

