



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

His Excellency Kamalesh Sharma
Secretary-General
The Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House
London

11 October 2014

Open letter regarding Child, Early and Forced Marriage in the Commonwealth

Dear Secretary-General,

I write to you on the occasion of **International Day of the Girl Child 2014**, as Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), which has been working to end child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), and gender inequality more broadly, in the Commonwealth. As a multifaceted form of violence against girls which deprives them of the opportunity to have a say in their own futures, CEFM fits with this year's theme for the day, 'Empowering adolescent girls: Ending the cycle of violence'.

I thank you for your work to date to end CEFM, both in association with us at the RCS, and also in a broader capacity. We recognise your efforts in hosting the roundtable discussion on CEFM in 2013; the leadership the Commonwealth has shown in pushing forward the Plan of Action on Gender Equality; and statements committing to end CEFM at the 2011 and 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings.

The coming 12 months are important for gender equality, with the post-2015 sustainable development agenda being negotiated by UN member states ahead of a final decision in September. Next year also sees the conclusion of the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender Equality. In conjunction with Girls Not Brides, the RCS wrote to the UN Secretary-General, urging him to emphasise in his upcoming synthesis report that ending CEFM must be comprehensively addressed in the Post-2015 development framework.

The RCS stands ready to support you in your work to end CEFM in the Commonwealth, as mandated by Commonwealth Heads of Government in the 2013 CHOGM communiqué and in line with goals 1 and 2 of your Strategic Plan. I urge the Commonwealth Secretariat in particular to deliver a strong new Plan of Action on Gender Equality for 2016 onwards, which includes a commitment to end CEFM; and to use your permanent seat at the UN to ensure a strong position on CEFM in the post-2015 development agenda.

As you know, CEFM is a development and rights challenge that robs 15 million girls of their future annually and holds them – and their countries – back from achieving their full potential. The practice has impeded six of the eight Millennium Development Goals. Ending CEFM is a concrete and measurable target that will contribute significantly to the achievement of gender equality while also accelerating efforts to achieve new development goals. As such ending CEFM must be prioritised by all Commonwealth member states.

I thank you again for your leadership. I look forward to continuing to work together to create a world without child marriage – which will be a world in which everyone will be better educated, healthier, more prosperous and more equal.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Lake
Director, Royal Commonwealth Society