

PRESS RELEASE: Royal Commonwealth Society and Plan UK Release New Statistics on Child Marriage in the Commonwealth



The Royal Commonwealth Society and Plan International UK yesterday launched their latest report, *Preventing Child Marriage in the Commonwealth: the Role of Education*. The launch took place at the 19<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers, a meeting which saw Education Ministers gather to discuss priorities for education in the Commonwealth ahead of the final negotiations over the Education For All and Sustainable Development Goals. The launch was attended by the Minister for Social Services and Community Development from the Bahamas, and youth advocates from Malawi and Barbados spoke.

This report unveils new statistics and data, and is the latest in a series of collaborative research by the RCS and Plan UK into child marriage in the Commonwealth. The statistics, calculated from UNICEF data, show that in the Commonwealth 375 million women alive today were married or entered into union before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, this is over 16 per cent of the Commonwealth's population, amounting to 52 per cent of women over 18 years old. At current prevalence 43 per cent of women are married before they reach 18 years old, amounting to over 44 million 20-24 year olds married as children. Approximately 8.8 million women in the Commonwealth are married as children annually: 24,000 girls every day, 17 girls every minute.

The report documents the evidence that increased educational attainment and attendance correlates to reduced child marriage prevalence, and argues that given this link, Ministers for Education must recognize their role as part of the solution to end child marriage. In the Commonwealth, fewer girls than boys go to school, and as the levels increase, the numbers of girls decrease. The report argues that Ministers for Education must urgently tackle the problem of out of school girls by making schools accessible and safe, and ensuring that girls are able to access a quality, gender-sensitive education.

Commonwealth Education Ministers are meeting at a crucial time, just ahead of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, of which education will be one. This meeting provides the opportunity for Commonwealth Education Ministers to set out their priorities ahead of crucial decision making on education priorities for the next 15 years.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

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The Royal Commonwealth Society is a civil society organisation committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world. Through youth empowerment, education and advocacy, the Royal Commonwealth Society promotes the value and the values of the Commonwealth. We champion human rights, democracy and sustainable development across the 53 member states, which are intrinsically linked through their common history and shared values.

Plan International is a global children's charity. We work with children in the world's poorest countries to help them build a better future. Since 1937 we've been taking action and standing up for every child's right to fulfil their potential by:

- giving children a healthy start in life, including access to safe drinking water
- securing the education of girls and boys
- working with communities to prepare for and survive disasters
- inspiring children to take a lead in decisions that affect their lives
- enabling families to earn a living and plan for their children's future.

With support children, families and entire communities have the power to move themselves from a life of poverty to a future with opportunity. Plan International does what's needed, where it's needed most.