

**REMARKS FOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
CHILD MARRIAGE (WYF)**

**21 MAY, 2016, MALAYSIA**

**Mr. Robb Stewart**

**Second Secretary, High Commission of Canada in  
Malaysia**

- Good morning. Bonjour. Selamat pagi.
- On behalf of the Government of Canada, it is my pleasure to participate in today's International Conference on Child Marriage and I wish to thank the World Youth Foundation for the kind invitation.
- This conference is a useful platform for raising awareness and understanding about child, early and forced marriage. But more importantly, events such as this are important for identifying opportunities for youth to play an active role in the movement to end the practice.

- The facts are well known - 15 million girls are married every year around the world before they turn 18. That's 15 million childhoods interrupted. 15 million futures forever changed.
- Canada believes child marriage is a violation of girls' rights. It disrupts their access to education, jeopardizes their health and makes them vulnerable to violence. It also keeps girls from reaching their full potential and from fully contributing to the social and economic growth of their families, communities and countries.
- You may be wondering "why Canada?"
- In fact, Canada has helped to create international momentum against CEFM, and since 2012, we have played a leadership role, including in creating the International Day of the Girl and in successive resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly.
- But why is this a priority for Canada?

- It's simple - because girls matter. The Government of Canada is committed to ending child, early and forced marriage because the impacts of this practice are so profound and so far-reaching.
- We also believe that the protection and empowerment of women and girls is essential for peaceful, prosperous and stable societies.
- Moreover, Canada is committed to this issue because we know that change is possible. In a few short years, international momentum to address this issue has grown exponentially, including the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where governments have identified ending child marriage as a global development target.

- To help turn our global goals into real action, Canada is working with the United Nations and the Human Rights Council, as well as with regional organisations such as the African Union and the Commonwealth to make change.
- We are also supporting programmes at the national and grassroots level. Since October 2013, Canada has invested almost \$80 million in targeted funding to the prevention of child, early and forced marriage. A significant focus of this funding is on empowering girls.
- We firmly believe in working directly with girls to give them the opportunity to build skills and knowledge, understand and exercise their rights and develop support networks.
- Canada contributes funding to help create safe space programmes, which offer life skills, health and financial training and where girls can meet friends and mentors and learn about the services that they can access in their community.

- These types of programmes help to empower girls and their families to become agents of change and help them envisage what alternative roles they can play in their communities and help them forge their own path in life.
- A good example of this type of project is Plan International's I'MPOWER project in Zimbabwe and Bangladesh, which seeks to empower girls at risk of child marriage by building girls' confidence and skills to enable them to make their life choices and realise their self-worth.
- At the national level, strategies to address child, early and forced marriage are emerging in a number of countries. These comprehensive action plans will make it possible to translate our global commitments into the national action which is so critical to ending this practice.

- Looking forward, we must support country efforts to develop national strategies that involve all stakeholders and all sectors. Women and girls need to be at the table when decisions are taken, so that they become an integral part of solutions.
- The Government of Canada firmly believes that young people are critical stakeholders for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the target on ending child marriage.
- The Prime Minister of Canada recently announced that he will be establishing a Youth Advisory Council, consisting of young Canadians from diverse communities and from all regions of Canada.
- This Council will ensure that the Government of Canada does a better job of understanding and addressing the needs of Canada's youth and will provide advice to the Prime Minister on key public policy issues.

- This is an innovative model for engaging young people in the policy process. A model that could be replicated elsewhere – including in our efforts to end child marriage.
- Young people have a critical role to play in advocacy efforts to end this practice and in holding governments accountable for the commitments they have made through the Sustainable Development Goals. I would strongly encourage you to make your voices heard – share the facts and your stories about child marriage including through Facebook and Twitter (#endchildmarriage); and engage with your elected officials to affect change.
- To help ensure that the voices of young people, particularly girls affected by child marriage, are heard on a global scale, Canada has collaborated with Girls Not Brides to develop a photo exhibit entitled ‘Girls’ Voices: Speaking Out Against Child Marriage’. The exhibit tells the story of young girls

affected by child marriage – in their own words. It is being shown around the world and playing a key role in our advocacy efforts to end child marriage. We were pleased to show the exhibit here in Malaysia in February.

- Canada welcomed the leadership of the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, YB Dato' Sri Rohani Abdul Karim who delivered the keynote speech in which she strongly condemned child marriage as a form of violence against children.
- In closing, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will require the active participation of all sectors of society and all types of people including youth. We will only be successful in ending child, early and forced marriage and creating a prosperous, equitable and sustainable world, if we work together.
- We recognise that this is a complex issue, and it is not specific to any one country, culture or religion.

- I am reminded of the words of a wise young woman, Nobel Peace Laureate Malala Yousafzai, who is, I am proud to say, an honorary Canadian citizen.
- Malala recently reminded us that culture is not static. She said, “Culture is not coming from God in the sky. People make it, and can change it when it goes against the best interests of people and basic human rights.
- I look forward to today’s discussion and hearing your ideas for engaging youth in the movement to end child marriage.
- Thank you. Merci. Terima Kasih.