

The International Federation of University Women (IFUW) urges local, national and international policy makers to prioritise the situation of the girl child and legislate to protect against harmful practices

Geneva, Switzerland 11 October 2014 – Today on [International Day of the Girl Child](#), the International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](#)) calls on local and national governments, education, health and justice sectors and international policy makers to prioritise the vulnerable situation of the girl child in public policy campaigns and actions at all levels. Measurable steps must be taken by States, including the introduction of national legislation and the ratification of international commitments such as the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) and the [Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriage](#). Human rights education must also be introduced, both institutionally at schools and informally within communities, in order to raise awareness of the inherently harmful practices that specifically target girls and adolescent young women, including female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage and female infanticide.

President of IFUW Catherine Bell emphasised the staggering numbers and devastating consequences of these practices: “Child marriage and FGM carry serious health risks and can even result in death. Child marriage in particular is also a significant barrier to accessing education, where girls are often taken out of school to tend to domestic duties and raise families. Of the girls and women alive today, 250 million girls were married before the age of 15,¹ while 125 million have been subjected to FGM.² It is simply unacceptable in the 21st century that we allow the perpetuation of these brutal practices. Arguments of culture and tradition must not be abused to provide perpetrators with impunity. The cycle must be broken.”

The girl child - from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and adolescence - must stay a priority in the local, national, regional and international agenda given the increased and continuing vulnerability of girls in many societies across all regions. This is particularly so where girls have a rural or indigenous background, have been displaced by armed conflict or are disabled. Girls of all circumstances, cultures and traditions have the right to a childhood, which includes education up to the highest levels. It is through education that girls are empowered with the skills, knowledge and self-belief necessary to gain personal and financial independence, which reduces their vulnerable position within society and significantly narrows the gender power imbalance.

The International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](#)) is based in Geneva, Switzerland, and has an international membership. Founded in 1919, IFUW is the leading girls’ and women’s global organisation advocating for women’s rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. IFUW is in special consultative status with ECOSOC and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO.

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Learn about our grants & fellowships and our advocacy work. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and Twitter (@IFUWwomen).

¹ UNICEF (2014) http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html.

² World Health Organization (2014) <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>.