

STATEMENT ON CHILD MARRIAGES IN ZIMBABWE

We, the undersigned civil society organizations working to advance the rights of women and girls, strongly condemn the continued prevalence of cases of child marriages in Zimbabwe. We urge the relevant authorities to take action to prevent this perpetual vice that continues to erode the dignity and future of the girl child, and to hold perpetrators accountable within the existing legal frameworks.

This comes after [reports](#) of another 15-year-old girl from Chiadzwa Village in Marange, Zimbabwe who had been married off to a 29-year-old man, succumbed to excessive bleeding while giving birth at a faith healer's shrine. This becomes the second known case from Marange following the death of another [14-year-old girl](#) who also passed away under similar circumstances in 2021.

Child marriages are a form of violence against children, wherein the health and development of the girl child is disrupted. Such practices have harmful effects on young girls and pose serious health risks including sexually transmitted diseases and complications from early pregnancies. Adolescent girls are at a higher risk of death due to complications in pregnancy and childbirth compared to adult women. Girls who are married off also tend to discontinue with their studies and are subject to all forms of gender-based violence.

We therefore call on the Government of Zimbabwe, in line with its commitment to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals to prioritise the enactment of the Marriages Bill and mandatory minimum sentencing for sexual offences. This will help end impunity and deter perpetrators from committing further violations. The enactment of the Marriages Bill which sets the minimum age of marriage at eighteen is long overdue. Furthermore, we ask that the government expresses its support to ending child marriages by passing a national law that prohibits the facilitation and solemnization of child marriages in Zimbabwe.

The government should also ensure that all deliveries are conducted in a health institution, in order to avert any death. No woman or girl should die during childbirth. We call on law enforcement agents, and relevant authorities to scale up their surveillance systems, and bring perpetrators to book, regardless of their social, economic, religious or political background. We firmly believe that these deaths could have been prevented, had law enforcement agents arrested the perpetrators for having sex with minors. The young girls could have further qualified for safe abortion services, or supported to give birth in a well-equipped health facility, attended to by qualified health professionals, thus saving their lives. The failure of our system to dictate and respond to cases of child marriages timeously continues to cost lives of girls in our communities. As such we strongly urge the state, duty bearers and stakeholders to stand firm against this vice in their communities and the nation at large.

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