United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of the International Day of the Girl Child

11 October 2016

The theme of this International Day of the Girl Child is dedicated to “Child marriage”.

Today in the world, too limited progress has been made in the elimination of early marriage. Every year 15 million girls are married before they reach 18 years old. 1 in 9 girls in the developing world are married by the age of 15. Although in many countries we can assist to a gradual increase in the median age of first marriage, this has been mainly restricted to children from families with higher revenues.

Early marriage is rarely a choice. It is the result of on an intergenerational transmission cycle of poverty, exclusion, discrimination and violence. When a girl is forced to an early marriage, it is not only her future that is being threatened, but the well-being of entire communities. Girls who marry before 18 years old, often leave formal education, depriving societies from precious potential and creativity. They are also more prone to domestic violence as well as early pregnancies and maternal death, throwing a shadow across the world, weakening us all.

Every extra year of schooling for a girl takes them away from poverty, provides them with social networks and raises their expectations about their options in life. And it is not enough to enroll girls -- we must help them to stay in the course, all the way through secondary school. This is the best way to build stronger communities, inclusive and resilient societies. If we act together, this day can mark the beginning of the end of harmful practices like child marriage. It is a development issue, and it is a human rights imperative.

Irina Bokova

DG/ME/ID/2016/33 – Original: English