



Human Rights Council – 19th Session

7 March 2012

Item 3: Report of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children.

Oral statement

Speaker: Silvia Palomba

Check against Delivery

Madam President,

This statement is delivered by Franciscans International (FI) on behalf of World Vision (WV), Edmund Rice International (ERI), and Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI).

We would like to draw the attention of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children to the issue of **child marriage in India**.

We are seriously concerned that sex-selective abortions and female infanticide, coupled with the persistent lack of adequate systems of birth and marriage registration, have increased the number of child marriages in India in recent years.

The perception of girls as social and financial burdens on their families is often the cause of gender selection and early marriages. Young girls are frequently forced into marriage to preserve their chastity and/or to relieve families from the social obligation of providing a dowry.

Moreover, gender selection and female feticide have contributed to the distorted gender ratio affecting India today. As a result of this imbalance, families often accept the best offer they receive from potential husbands or middle men, regardless of the conditions which might be imposed on the child-bride. The girls face the possibility of becoming sexual slaves, domestic workers, or end up otherwise exploited by their husbands and family.

Our organizations urge the Government of India to:

- a) Adopt and implement a holistic National Action Plan for the eradication of child marriages, and provide for long term strategies and adequate budgeting, while reinforcing the provisions envisaged in the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.
- b) Amend the existing legislative framework to guarantee effective birth registration mechanisms and provide for new legislation which establish an efficient system of compulsory registration of marriages and establish monitoring bodies to oversee the enactment of the law.
- c) Raise awareness and organize capacity building initiatives on the issue of child marriage, especially in the rural areas and for tribal and lower caste communities, in collaboration with community based organizations, civil society and faith-based groups.

Thank you.