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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the protection of children and youth in developing countries.

I want to welcome our three guests who are here this morning.

From Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage, we have Mabel van Oranje. Mabel, welcome. We're glad to have you here today.

Ashok Dyalchand is a member of the Institute for Health Management. Welcome, sir. I'm glad to have you here.

We also have Amina Hanga, who is a member of the Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative.

Mabel, we're going to start with your opening remarks. Then you can introduce your colleagues and they will talk very briefly about what they do. That will allow us some time to go around the room and ask some questions about what's going on with your various organizations.

I will turn the floor over to you, Mabel, for your opening remarks, please.

Ms. Mabel van Oranje (Chair, Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage): Thank you very much, honourable chairman and honourable members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[Translation]

It is a pleasure to be here today.

[English]

It's very nice to be here in person and not have to engage with you through a video link.

I am delighted to be joined by my colleagues Amina Hanga from the Isa Wali organization, who works in northern Nigeria to end child marriage, and Dr. Ashok Dyalchand from the Institute for Health Management in India, who was involved in the creation of Girls Not Brides four years ago.

I'll say just a few words about Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage. We are, as the name says, a membership organization, an umbrella partnership of more than 400 members from more than 60 countries all over the world. All are

united in our efforts to bring an end to child marriage in the world. Some of the members are big organizations, big NGOs, such as CARE, Save the Children, and Human Rights Watch. Other ones are much smaller organizations, such as those of Dr. Ashok and Amina, working at the grassroots level.

Let me start by asking you a question. I'm very curious about what you remember of your wedding day. Was it the happiness? Was it the feeling of love? Was it a good party, maybe? Or was your wedding day the day you on which had to leave school? Was it the day you had to leave your family to go and live with a man—or a woman, but we're talking about a man—about twice your age? Was it the day you became pregnant even though you yourself were still a child?

That's the story of Geeta, a young woman I met in Bihar, India, who was forced to marry at the age of 14. When I met her she told me about the fear she felt on her wedding day. She said to me, "I was so young, I did not even know the meaning of marriage, and yet because I was a girl there was nothing I could do to stop this."

Geeta's story is not unique. In fact, every two seconds somewhere in the world a girl gets married before the age of 18; that's one girl, and then another, and another.... That adds up to 50 million girls getting married before the age of 18 every year. In fact, 700 million in the world who are alive today were married before they were 18.

In the developing world we see that one out of every three girls is married before that crucial age and even one out of nine is married before reaching the age of 15. This sometimes happens to girls who are as young as ten or eleven, or even six or seven. It's true that young boys are also sometimes subjected to marriage, but the majority are young girls.

You might wonder where this is happening. This is a global issue. It happens across countries, across cultures, and across religions. It's most common in South Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa. In South Asia 46% of all girls are married by the age of 18 and in sub-Saharan Africa it's 39%. The rates are also high in Latin America: 29%. It's about 18% in the Middle East and North Africa. In East Asia it's 16%.

Disturbingly we see that as soon as conflict reaches an area of the world, for example, the refugee camps with Syrian refugees now, the rates of child marriage immediately go up tremendously. To give you the complete picture, child marriage also happens in some communities in Europe and North America.

The numbers are enormous. Even worse, the consequences are devastating for the girls, for their children, for the communities in which they live, and ultimately for the welfare of the nations in which they live. Child marriage is a major human rights abuse, but it also undermines our efforts to end global poverty.

● (0850)

Let me give you one or two examples. Think about it: we as an international community have said that we want to end maternal mortality. How can you end maternal mortality when you have girls with 13-year-old and 14-year-old bodies delivering babies? These child brides are themselves still children.

In fact, if you are 15 or younger when you have your first child, the chances that you will die in childbirth or that you'll have complications are five times greater than if you are in your early twenties when you have your first child. Similarly, we see that the infants of very young mothers are also much less likely to survive the first year of their lives. Infant mortality is 60% higher for children of those young child brides.

Another issue that I know has been on the Canadian development agenda for a long, long time is the question of education. How can you ever educate girls and make sure that every girl is in secondary school if girls are pulled out of school in order to get married?

This doesn't affect only the earning power of the girls. We know that for each year the girl stays in school, her earning power over the rest of her life increases by 10% to 15%. We also know that the money girls and women earn normally gets reinvested in the community, while unfortunately, men sometimes spend the majority of their earnings on the pleasures of life. How can you make sure that communities become more prosperous if you deny girls an education and the opportunity to earn a proper living?

In fact, child marriage is linked to six of the current eight millennium development goals that have been set to help eradicate poverty—six out of the eight.

You might wonder why this is happening. There is one thing I am absolutely convinced of. Parents in general want the very best for their children, including their girls. However, the reality is that in certain circumstances and in certain communities, it seems that marrying your daughters at a very young age might be in their best interest. Why?

The exact drivers of child marriage vary from one context to another, so the reasons it's happening in India might be slightly different from the reasons it's happening in northern Nigeria, which might again be slightly different from the reasons it's happening in southern Nigeria.

Overall, there seem to be four key drivers. One is poverty. If you live in real poverty, having one less mouth to feed by marrying your daughter off might be a solution that enables you to take better care of the rest of your family. Also, the dowry and bride's price might mean that marrying your daughter at a young age is economically in the best interest of your family.

The second reason is security. Many parents marry their girls off at a young age because otherwise the risks of the girls being sexually harassed and therefore becoming unable to get married later in their

life or dishonouring the family are great. This is one of the drivers that we see in refugee camps. We should not kid ourselves. Early marriage does not provide a safe alternative to these girls because we know that domestic violence in marriages where girls marry young is much higher than domestic violence in marriages where girls marry at a later age.

The third reason is tradition. There are places where girls get married at an early age because that's how things have been done generation after generation. If I have an eight-year-old, a nine-year-old, or a ten-year-old girl whom I don't marry off, you, the whole community, might turn against me or my daughter and think that there is something wrong with her. There might be social pressure that I do this even though it's not in the best interest of my girl or of us as a community.

Last, gender inequality is a real driver. In too many places in the world girls are considered a burden that you need to get rid of as quickly as you can. The reality is that girls are not valued as much as boys, so girls are married early because they are girls.

The numbers are enormous; the implications are devastating, and the drivers of child marriage, as I just mentioned, are complex. For far too long this issue has not been getting the attention it deserves. These girls were basically invisible, but change is happening.

● (0855)

It's thanks to Geeta from Bihar, who nowadays is educating young people about their rights, but also is helping village leaders to understand what the harmful consequences of child marriage are for the girl and for the village. It's thanks to the work of people like Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel, the widow of Nelson Mandela, who have helped to put this taboo issue on the global agenda. For us, it's sometimes hard to do that, to come in as a westerner and say, "This is wrong; don't do this". We might be dismissed as cultural imperialists. But when people like Archbishop Tutu and Graça Machel and Kofi Annan started embracing this issue, nobody could accuse them of being a cultural imperialist, and they could actually start a dialogue that allows all of us now to talk about it.

Change is also happening, thanks to the leadership of Canada and of other countries that have understood that it makes sense to put child marriage firmly on the international development agenda and that this is a smart thing to do. I really want to commend Canada for its visionary approach in this. It's also thanks to the hard work of Dr. Ashok and Amina who have been working on this issue for a long time, but now that their organizations are united in Girls Not Brides, it can help to get much more visibility for the issue.

The change that's happening is fascinating. At the international level, child marriage is now starting to be acknowledged as a serious problem. Thanks to Canada's leadership, together with Zambia, we hope later this week to see the first substantive UN resolution on child marriage adopted. Again, I want to commend Canada for its fantastic leadership on this. Also, working with a whole lot of other states, Canada has helped to make sure that ending child marriage will, hopefully, become a target in the post-2015 development agenda, the agenda that will come after the millennium development goals. More important, global awareness is also starting to translate into change on the ground. We see high-prevalence countries that are now starting to develop national action plans, and we see more money becoming available, including for grassroots organizations.

We know that ultimately change has to take place locally in the lives of the girls, the families, and the communities, because we know, and Dr. Ashok can testify to this, that when communities decide to change, child marriage does stop.

If you're working locally to tackle a tradition as sensitive as child marriage, you need the support of a global movement that helps to educate, raise awareness, and mobilize political and financial support, but that also allows us to learn what is working and what is not working. That's why we created Girls Not Brides, and that's why we're so happy that with Canada and other countries we're creating that global movement.

Because change isn't going to be easy, Girls Not Brides has put together a theory of change. We did that by collaborating with more than 150 experts, including Canadian experts. We'll give all of you a copy. This might look daunting, but it is actually quite neat in that it identifies the four key interventions that are needed in order to create change.

The first one is the empowering of girls. Both Amina and Dr. Ashok will talk about that a little more, what you need to do to empower girls.

The second one is community dialogue with parents, with men and boys, and with traditional and religious leaders, to help them understand that there are alternatives to child marriage that are actually in the interest of the girl and the community.

The third one is to make sure that adequate provisions are available—services for girls. We need to make sure that if these girls stay out of marriage, they can actually go to school. We need to make sure that when we think about health care services, they're tailored to the needs of young adolescent girls. Often when we look at health care services, including sexual health services, they target adult women but not young girls.

The fourth one that needs to take place is that we need to make sure there are laws that prohibit child marriage, but also, because many countries have those laws, that these laws are actually implemented, and that countries develop comprehensive strategies to tackle this issue. As I mentioned earlier, we see that happening now in a number of countries.

What does it all mean for Canada? As I mentioned, child marriage is linked to many development challenges. Ending child marriage is smart development and a good investment. It will maximize the impact of Canada's foreign policy and development efforts.

I know that your country has made really impressive commitments in the field of maternal, newborn and child health. I also note that there's a continuing commitment to work on education. Integrating child marriage into that work makes complete sense and would actually maximize the impact of those efforts.

I think it's very important to mention that the scale of child marriage is so big that this cannot be a topic for one party, for one parliamentary term, or for one project cycle or program cycle. Efforts to address child marriage must be sustained and require a commitment for the long term.

This is a non-partisan issue, and I have to say that the UN resolution, co-led by Canada, that will be adopted later this week is going to be a historic one. At a time of development aid budget cuts, I think it is wonderful to see that Canada is globally acknowledged for its leadership role in this field.

If I may make five recommendations for what I would love to see Canada do in the future, that would be great.

First, I'd love to see you continue your leadership role working together with countries where child marriage is prevalent and building close partnerships with those countries.

Second, I would encourage you to make a long-term commitment to continue your work in this field, including funding and programming for the long term.

Third, I encourage you to streamline child marriage throughout your development strategy work, including the work in maternal, newborn and child health, as well as education, but also violence against women, etc.

Fourth, it's crucial to make sure that some of the financial support that Canada is giving will actually go to the grassroots organizations that are making a difference in the daily lives of the girls, and in their communities.

Fifth, we need to scale up those programs that are working. Wherever we see that approaches are effective, we need to make sure that they get amplified.

● (0900)

Basically, I'm encouraging you to continue to make, directly and indirectly, a real difference in the lives of those girls. We are, as a world, starting to make progress on this issue, but we need to do much more to match the magnitude of the challenge.

We realize that our goal of changing a social norm is a difficult one. We know that change won't come quickly, but we do know what works to address child marriage. Again, we've tried to map that and we're learning how to skill it.

I'm optimistic because I am convinced that change is actually possible in one generation. I know that because when I travel through those countries where this is highly prevalent, and I ask each girl that I meet what they want for their daughters, these girls say, "We want our daughters to go to school and to only get married when they want and with whom they want."

If we can keep this generation of girls out of marriage, we can be convinced that they will never marry their daughters off when they grow up.

Let there be no doubt: a world without child marriage means a world where everyone is healthier, better educated, more prosperous, and more equal. Let girls be girls and not brides.

Thank you, Chair.

● (0905)

The Chair: Thank you. Ms. van Oranje, you're going to introduce your colleagues as well. Perhaps they can indicate what they do in their organizations.

Ms. Mabel van Oranje: Amina works with the Isa Wali organization in northern Nigeria. I think it would be better if she explained what they do.

Ms. Amina Hanga (Member, Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative, Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage): Good morning. Thank you very much for giving us this opportunity to be here today to talk about child marriage.

Our organization, Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative, is based in Kano, which is in the northwestern part of Nigeria. It's a region that is very conservative and is very patriarchal.

There are lots of issues that women face. There is a low value placed on women. Child marriage is rife, especially in the rural areas more than in the urban areas. Actually in the urban areas it's declining, but in the rural areas it's still very common for girls to be married off at the age of 13, 14, or 15. That's because there's a low value placed on girls.

Poverty is high. There's high illiteracy. There's also ignorance and no appreciation for the value of education, especially for girls.

Our interventions tend to focus on empowering women and girls, providing them with basic literacy, maternal health, and economic empowerment.

For girls, or for mothers especially, we've noticed that when they attend basic literacy programs, they realize that education is very important, and that makes them determined that their daughters should get an education and should finish school.

What we find also is some girls can get enrolled into school, but when they get to secondary school, halfway through they are withdrawn for marriage. Sometimes it is because they have reached the age of puberty. Their bodies are developing, and they are looking mature, and parents would rather have them married off than have them in the public eye, so to speak. They are afraid of the girls bringing shame on the family, that is, maybe having children out of wedlock, or suffering sexual harassment. They would rather marry these girls off.

What we are doing is trying to make them see that as long as girls are not being educated, it creates a whole lot of problems for the girls, for their families and their children, in terms of maternal health risks for the girls. For their children it's malnutrition. Again, it's a vicious cycle because obviously she hasn't been to school, doesn't see the value, so her children don't go to school. All this just continues to perpetuate; it's a vicious cycle.

There are some communities where men don't want their wives to go to hospital because they don't want male doctors or male nurses to examine their wives when they are pregnant. So we say to them that if they don't let their daughters go to school, how can there be female doctors? How can there be female nurses that are going to look after their wives when they are pregnant, when they need to deliver?

In schools you have mostly a lot of male teachers. How can we have female teachers when the girls are not allowed to continue their education and to study any profession of any sort? As long as that's not happening, we are going to continue to have these problems.

This is some of what we do. Of course, it means that girls don't even have access to information, be it on health or anything to do with economic activities.

When they are married, the culture is they cannot go out unless they have permission from their husband, even for maternal health risks. What we find is the woman needs to go to hospital because it's time to have her baby, but the husband is out. Maybe he's out in the fields, or he's travelling out of town. She will not go because she does not have permission from her husband to go to hospital.

If it's a case where she has a problem such as eclampsia, and she's having a fit or something, she dies because they will not let her go to hospital. Her mother-in-law may say, "I had all my children at home so why do you feel you need to go to hospital?" It's also seen as a sign that the woman is not strong. That she had to go to hospital is seen as a failure on her part, especially when it's her first child.

These are all the various issues we come across, so we hold a lot of maternal health education for girls and for women with the basic literacy.

● (0910)

Also, providing them with access to legal aid if there is domestic violence is another issue, especially for young girls who suffer with this. The girls and women themselves tend to have low self-esteem. We try to do life skills education to make them realize that they have value and they should see themselves that way.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll get a quick rundown on your organization, Ashok, and then we'll go around the room, because I know the members are anxious to ask questions as well.

Dr. Ashok Dyalchand (Member, Institute for Health Management, Pachod, Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage): I'm from India. India is a large country. In India, there are currently 113 million adolescent girls. We expect 45%—this is the national average—to get married before 18 years of age, which amounts to 51 million girls. Every year, roughly 8 million to 10 million are getting married and becoming mothers. That's the magnitude of the problem.

We've been doing this now since 1998. We realize that unless there's an integrated approach, we will not be able to really address all of the determinants that result in early marriage and in the disempowerment, the discrimination, for adolescent girls.

There are three components that we are implementing.

First is the empowerment of unmarried adolescent girls, both school-going and non-school-going girls, with an emphasis on girls living in villages and in the slums of India. What do we expect as an outcome of this empowerment? We expect better self-esteem and better self-efficacy in these girls, but above all else, the ability to negotiate with their parents to delay the age of marriage and to continue with their education. The outcomes would be better educated girls and a delayed age of marriage, thereby delaying and preventing some of the very adverse consequences of early marriage.

Second, while we are trying to prevent child marriage, we realize that there are still girls getting married at an early age and that they will continue to get married at an early age. We are providing primary level access to sexual and reproductive health services to these married adolescent girls. The reason this is so is that we have done research which indicates that 75% of these married adolescent girls, girls who get married before 18 years of age, suffer from a severe burden of morbidity, particularly at the time of pregnancy. Unless we address that burden of morbidity, they will suffer the consequences of this for the rest of their lives.

The third piece of the integrated program is dealing with boys and young men and making them gender sensitive, making them caring individuals, and reducing sexual abuse and domestic violence in our communities, because that is an additional load of morbidity that these girls suffer from.

If we do adopt an integrated approach, and if we do have a focused intervention on adolescent girls, we're confident that it would be a much better way of reducing maternal and neonatal mortality worldwide. Globally, there's a trend that there is a reduction in maternal and neonatal mortality. If we were to have a focused intervention for these girls, we would be able to reach our goals much faster. The reason is very simple. Mortality among these girls is five times higher as compared to women of more than 20 years of age. It's a win-win situation if we focus on adolescent girls, both the married and unmarried adolescent girls.

I would like to share this experience with you. We've been doing this since 1998, and at least in India, nobody really talked about this as an important national level issue until 2011, when we were invited to Ethiopia to establish Girls Not Brides. Suddenly, over the last three years, it has become an international issue. It has become a national issue. There are countries talking about it. There are governments that are ready to do something about this grave issue.

● (0915)

One of the things I would really like to leave behind, is that if we do address this huge burden of morbidity that these girls suffer from, we'll be saving billions of dollars every year. That's the kind of expenditure that the costs of early marriage and motherhood have. The thing that we really need to do collectively is ensure that this is on the post-2015 development agenda, because as I said earlier, when internationally there is pressure, there is also national pressure and there is pressure on the states and at the local level to perform.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ashok.

We're going to start with the opposition.

Mr. Dewar, you have seven minutes for the opening round.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our guests. I should say, as a local MP from Ottawa, that I welcome you here to Ottawa. There is a very tight history between your royal family and our city. So welcome.

There are so many questions, but I'm quite intrigued by the idea of ensuring that we aren't seen as outsiders coming in. I think we have to be a little humble in our own story.

When my mother was born, she wasn't regarded as a person constitutionally here in Canada, because the Persons case, which we all should know here in Canada, declaring women to be persons, was back in 1929. Women didn't get the vote until 1918 here. I know this sounds great if you're in another country and don't have the vote, or if you're not declared a person as a woman in other countries constitutionally, but we have to understand that this is our narrative and not be arrogant about what we're trying to do here.

I'm very sensitive of the fact that, if we go into, particularly...

By the way, I should note that we usually have women at this committee. It's a bit odd, frankly; normally my colleague H  l  ne Laverdi  re is sitting next to me. My friend Robert is subbing for her. We have parliamentary secretary Lois Brown here. We're working at it.

I just want to say that these aspects that you're talking about—ensuring that we aren't going to be agents of noted imperialism, you said, or of colonialism, which is a hangover in many of these places.... We need to work at the grassroots level.

One area we're looking at as a committee is conflict zones. You touched on this issue. I note that when I was in Iraq in September with a colleague, Mr. Garneau, and the foreign affairs minister, we were hearing stories and were very concerned about what was happening there. I don't have to tell you about what's happening in Jordan: the stories of women being sold. Clearly this is happening elsewhere, but in conflict zones to which we have access through funding and through people who are working on the ground, it seems to me we're not doing enough. It seems to me more could be done, in building schools to accompany these refugee camps and in making sure that there is work there, for families to have cash. That's a program that has been working well. We provide as robust health services as we can, because after all, we know that these people have fled conflict. We know they are in harm's way. They shouldn't be put in further harm's way.

I'd like to hear from you, because we're studying Iraq at committee as well, and obviously the plight of refugees. Perhaps you could tell us about how you get into refugee camps, what kind of work is being done, and how you are making sure, when women and girls are supposedly in a safe place in a refugee camp, they aren't in further danger, which is sadly the case in some of these refugee camps that we speak of.

Ms. Mabel van Oranje: My colleagues in Girls Not Brides themselves do not go straight into refugee camps or do anything on the ground. We are truly a partnership organization, which means that Girls Not Brides itself is a small secretariat—not even 15 staff. Basically we facilitate the work of this growing membership, allowing them to learn from each other, share experiences, do joint advocacy and joint awareness raising. We are more a service organization than a programmatic organization. We help with the development of communication tools, etc., so I do not have first-hand experience of working in the refugee camps.

However, what I understand from people who do work there and from some of our partner organizations—we could put you in contact with some of them, if you're interested, and I think this is a broader problem than just that of the Syrian refugees alone—is that you see a situation in which people end up in what seem to be temporary situations, in camps, and therefore we only give them the basic needs, health and food. But people in too many places in the world end up living in these camps not just for years, but for decades.

I think that as an international community we're not doing enough to think about the long-term perspective for these people, including educational and economic opportunities, etc. I know there are efforts similar to what was being described by my colleagues in terms of girls' empowerment and sensitization of parents and the elderly people in the camps about the dangers of child marriage, but as long as we don't provide good alternatives, it's going to be very hard to keep these increasing levels down.

• (0920)

Mr. Paul Dewar: I have a couple of quick questions, because I only have two minutes.

In terms of legal reform, from what you're stating, obviously that is key. We know that if girls and women have actual legal protection—and I appreciate that there's legal aid work—that's absolutely

critical. Legal reform is obviously something you're working on and advocating, and I'd like to know about that.

Also, I'm delighted to hear you talk about post-2015 MDGs. The question is, who has signed on to this? Do you have champions on this who are saying that for the post-2015 debate they will be the champions of this?

I'm not sure if our government has taken that on. I'd like them to do that. Are there other countries that are saying that for the post-2015 MDGs, we're going to universalize all these ideas? In other words, Canada has to look at itself in the mirror as well as talking about everyone else.

Who is taking this on and championing this issue?

Ms. Mabel van Oranje: First, with regard to post-2015, right now all the member states have negotiated a draft text, the open working group, it's called. There's a draft text now, which has 17 goals, and on average, 10 targets under each goal.

Ending child marriage is part of the third target in the goal about gender equality. As it's phrased right now—end all harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation—we're happy with that. I mean, I would always love to see stronger language, but we can absolutely live with that.

Canada was definitely one of the countries that took the lead in working to see this incorporated, but it also did a lot to reach out to countries that have high prevalence to bring them on board, because ultimately we do want to see leadership from across the globe and not just from a few countries on this issue. What we don't know as we enter the negotiations now for the open working group document is whether there will be pressure to merge some of them. What we don't want to see happen is that child marriage ends up being associated just with violence against girls and women, or just with education, or just with maternal health, or just with equality. That's not what child marriage is. Child marriage is related to all of these things.

The beautiful thing is that very often these development goals are described as we can't measure them, and they're all so wishy-washy. Well, you know what? We can actually measure child marriage. Not only that, we also know that if we're making progress on child marriage, we're making progress on a host of other development issues.

From that perspective, it is a really, really good goal, but we have to see that it doesn't get merged with other things. I know that Canada is working for that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Mr. Anderson, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): I want to thank our guests for being with us this morning.

You mentioned the five priorities that you think Canada should focus on in the future. I want to focus on number four and perhaps number five.

You mentioned that some financial support should go to grassroots organizations. Some of us live a long way from the bureaucratic centre of our countries, and we often feel that programs that are delivered locally have more accountability and usually more effectiveness than things that are delivered from a long way away.

I would ask our two guests, how can the Canadian government help you in terms of delivering your programs on the ground, and where can we improve?

• (0925)

Dr. Ashok Dyalchand: Mr. Chair, on the first question, I think we first need to address why we need to work at the grassroots level. All the innovations we're talking about for delaying marriage, for preventing child marriage, and for protecting married adolescent girls are taking place in the NGO sector. This is happening at the grassroots level.

I would say there are two things that are really required. One is to identify these innovations and to be able to support the innovative work going on in different places. The second thing, which I think is far more important, is that we can't be experimenting and innovating for the rest of our lives. We need to scale these up. We need to be able to evaluate the efficacy of these innovations. We need to be able to scale them up and replicate them. That is where I think you need to be thinking in terms of setting up mechanisms whereby they can be identified, they can be evaluated, and they can be scaled up.

Mr. David Anderson: Are identification and evaluation grassroots—

Dr. Ashok Dyalchand: Innovations?

Mr. David Anderson: No, no; the innovations are, but when you back up and you spend most of your time identifying and evaluating, is that effective on the ground? That's at that other level above again.

Dr. Ashok Dyalchand: I think that kind of identification and evaluation has already been done. It's really a matter of being able to seek out where these innovations exist and scale them up.

Ms. Amina Hanga: I think, also, it's about supporting grassroots organizations. They're within the communities. They work closely with them. They have the trust of the people. If the grassroots organizations were supported, they could reach out more than they are currently able to with the limited resources they have.

Mr. David Anderson: I want to talk a bit about reform. It usually takes place when you can convince everybody in the community that there's some benefit to what's taking place. I'm wondering how you approach men in the community to convince them that there are benefits for them as well, because often people don't give up the power structures easily. You mentioned things like training young women to be nurses and doctors because there's a reason for that. I'm wondering what your approach is in trying to convince the men in the community that giving up the power they've had in that relationship is a good thing for them to consider.

Ms. Amina Hanga: We work with the stakeholders, such traditional institutions as the village heads and the district heads. Once you start at that level, the smaller local heads of the various

villages and the religious rulers themselves have the voice of the people. If they speak, the people tend to listen to them. Once we can persuade them that there is a benefit to having girls go to school, they will pass on these messages and the men will listen to them more than would be the case if we just went directly to talk to the men. They are more or less like the gatekeepers. Once they buy into the idea, then the men.... It's easier for you now to approach the female side of the communities and to be able to work jointly with them. They give their support, which makes it easier than when you just try to go it alone on one side.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you.

Dr. Ashok Dyalchand: There are two answers to your question, sir.

One is that I think all of these years we have been addressing issues related to women and girls, but we've really never considered boys and men. We've never believed that they also had reproductive and sexual health problems that needed to be addressed. One answer to your question is that we need to start addressing the sexual and reproductive health problems of men as well. There are many such problems that exist in these communities.

Another is that I think men need to realize that it is to their advantage not to marry young girls, because if they marry them, they also suffer the consequences of this burden of morbidity that I was referring to. They're the ones who would have to address those problems as well.

How does one deal with communities? The way we've gone about it, and it's been most successful, is to adopt two approaches. One is a social norms approach in which you actually deal with entire communities to change social norms, for example, the norm that condones domestic violence. It's men who will be able to change that norm. Young boys in one community started a campaign that said that real men don't marry little girls; they marry women. That changed the entire norm of early marriage in that particular community.

One is the social norms level, the community level, and the other is the perceived level, where norms are perceived at the individual level. Working at the individual level with counselling and with interpersonal communication, one can change individual behaviours.

• (0930)

Mr. David Anderson: Can I ask you how that applies to the notion of honour as well? I made a note here. How do we replace this obsession with honour with a sense of responsibility?

We've talked here about some of the violence in refugee camps. Paul brought that up. When we try to explore the issue of sexual violence in refugee camps, for example, no one wants to talk about it. Everyone wants to pretend it doesn't happen, because it's actually an issue of honour in many different ways.

I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about that. How do you change that cultural perception, or is that along the lines of what you've just been talking about?

The Chair: Dr. Dyalchand, would you make a very quick response because he's just over his time.

Dr. Ashok Dyalchand: We don't have experience working in conflict zones and with communities that are suffering from that, but sexual abuse is happening in other communities as well. The way one deals with that kind of issue really is, as I said, to make the men understand that it is to their advantage, it is to their benefit, to bring this down. It is changing the narrative of masculinity in these communities by changing the social norm.

Mr. David Anderson: Amina, do you have anything to say to that?

The Chair: Sorry, David, we'll have to catch you on the next round.

Mr. Garneau, for seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Witnesses, thank you for the work you do and for explaining it so clearly.

I was struck by the mention of the four drivers: poverty, security, tradition, and gender inequality. Each of those in its own way is a daunting challenge, so I got a good sense of the magnitude of the challenge.

You are an NGO. You've described to some extent what you do to try to make people aware of the fact that there are many more disadvantages to child marriage.

Mr. Dyalchand, in the case of India, and Ms. Hanga, in the case of Nigeria, are governments in those countries seized with this? Are they participating in any way to address the issue? Do they see the same value in eliminating child marriage as obviously you do?

Ms. Amina Hanga: In northwestern Nigeria particularly it's not really child marriage that's talked about; it's more to do with education. I know that, for instance, in Kano state, the governor has been very supportive of girls' education. He makes sure there's public transportation to take girls to and from school and makes education free, even though there are hidden costs. Those are the issues that really make it difficult for very poor families: buying uniforms, buying books, and things like that.

There's also a lot of support for economic empowerment because of the poverty issue. They give grants to women for income generating activities. In that way, that's what's been going on.

Child marriage as a topic in itself is not really brought out into the open. It's a very sensitive issue. It's a Muslim community. People tend to misinterpret child marriage as being a religious thing, whereas it's actually cultural. The focus tends to be on education, so that's how we've been going around child marriage, actually.

• (0935)

Dr. Ashok Dyalchand: In India, earlier in 2014, the Government of India came up with a very good, comprehensive, integrated adolescent health and development policy. The problem in India is that the formulation takes place at the federal level, whereas implementation takes place at the state level, and there lies the major

gap between policy formulation and its implementation, simply because this is the state's subject.

That is where I would really like to endorse what Princess Mabel has already said. This is the reason we need to be looking at grassroots level work and supporting it at the state level, so that at the state level, if a change occurs, we can take that state as an example and bring about a change in other states and at the federal level. That's the kind of policy change and policy advocacy we're trying to achieve.

Mr. Marc Garneau: You described a rural setting where village leaders are approached and they are told about the disadvantages of child marriage. They, hopefully, see the value of what you have told them and they can transmit that downward.

I'm interested in the non-rural setting, the cities. Is there a different approach? I had the sense from what you were talking about that child marriage was not quite as common in urban centres. Could you speak to the urban challenge?

Ms. Amina Hanga: Child marriage is really on the decrease in urban centres. That's because there are more facilities available like schools and jobs, so people can see the benefits of having an education. Because you have a mix of both educated and non-educated all living together, even those who are not really educated can see from those who are getting an education that they are able to have a better lifestyle. It encourages them to also put their own children in school, whereas in the rural communities, what you find is even for the few who may be educated, they tend to migrate to the urban areas leaving the non-educated ones still in the rural areas. If a whole lot of them are living together, and everybody is not educated, they don't see any problem. Even though they are experiencing lots of challenges, there's no value in education. That's not really an issue in the urban areas.

Sometimes it's a bit more about forced marriages, but it's still more rural areas that experience these problems. That's why we focus on the rural areas and not the urban areas. Of course, there are a lot of non-governmental organizations working in the urban areas as well, so they have a lot of opportunities.

Mr. Marc Garneau: If Canada provides funding to an organization such as yours, how is that money used? I want to understand more of the nitty-gritty details of what happens to that funding.

Dr. Ashok Dyalchand: What we are using that funding for is to purchase bicycles for girls to go to school. Only a tenth of the villages have schools up to secondary education. If a girl has to continue her education, she has to go to a neighbouring village to be able to do so. Bicycles increase their mobility. Providing them with bicycles is a great opportunity; it's a great intervention to continue with their higher education.

We provide them with cheap tablets to be able to learn 21st century skills. Why should they be stitching, sewing, or doing some of the older traditional things that really do not improve their livelihood? What we are trying to do is provide them with modern skills that they can use in their careers in the future. That's really where the money is spent. It is spent in providing health care to adolescent girls. Huge costs are involved, and our realization is that, unless it's provided at the primary level, unless morbidity is identified at the primary level and referral made to health facilities, their morbidity is not going to be addressed. It's basically these three areas of increasing education, of empowering them, and of providing health care.

• (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garneau.

We only have about five minutes left. We're going to give Mr. Goldring about two minutes and then we're going to give Mr. Stoffer two minutes.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you very much for being here.

Princess Mabel, it's heartening to see your passion for this very important issue.

Dr. Ashok, I was in Ethiopia looking at some of the wonderful work that Canada has been doing there on child nutrition and birthing care. I can certainly see that this issue of child marriages effectively is very much a part of the issue and part of the problem. It was been briefly discussed that you have an issue at the United Nations where you're going to be getting some form of a proclamation from them, I suppose, and it has been mentioned that, perhaps at the government level, more could be done than just at the local level.

There's one other level here, too. In Ethiopia it was very evident to me that that's rather the birthplace of orthodoxy. There are the religious elements, because ultimately, this does go to the community churches. Just speaking on the orthodoxy, although there are Muslims there too, but on the orthodoxy level, there are world bodies, and there is a world body of parliamentarians of some 25 countries that sit and discuss these types of issues.

My question is whether you have considered taking your presentation, as you are here today, to bodies like that that have direct input to the patriarchs, the metropolitans of their various religions. Perhaps some social benefit could come down from the higher echelon levels to the communities themselves, too. Is this being considered as an avenue of approach for discussion?

Ms. Mabel van Oranje: It definitely is. The reality is not one religion says to marry your girls at a young age, and too often the religious leaders are either involved in the act of marriage or at least they're not doing enough to stop it. We also know of examples whereby religious leaders are in their community saying that this is not the right thing to do.

For the last four years we have tried to reach out through various channels to engage with religious leaders. Sometimes we get a good response, and at other times it is very difficult. Unfortunately, the

whole field of religious leadership is very much dominated by men and very often girls and women are not yet high enough on their agenda. We will continue to work with them because we see openings and we see enlightened religious leaders across all religions, at a high level but also at the grassroots level. We know they're going to be crucial in creating the change we want to see.

Mr. Peter Goldring: In many of these countries of course the religious leaders are more highly respected than their own governments. Given the situation where it's relatively peaceful, as Ethiopia was, I would think that going to the top of the religions to see if they can have impact down through the level of their authorities....

Ms. Mabel van Oranje: The "Developmental Bible" was developed in Ethiopia. Every Saturday or Sunday when the preaching takes place, they're links to development issues. It's very interesting, and they now want to translate it into a "Developmental Koran".

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Stoffer, you have just two minutes, sir.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Thank you very much.

I have many questions. My daughter went to Tanzania a couple of years ago on Project TEMBO. She keeps in contact with those girls and women about the educational opportunities they have had, and their growth and development is quite amazing. I honestly believe that education is the key.

Ms. van Oranje, we've talked about what governments have been doing. Have you gone to organizations like the Gates Foundation? Their network of tablets and the Internet, the 21st century educational opportunities.... Have you approached those types of organizations for assistance?

I personally want to say, Madam, [*Member speaks in Dutch*].

Ms. Mabel van Oranje: We are in contact with the Gates Foundation. The encouraging news is that where the Gates Foundation's development work was very much focused on agricultural and food issues and health issues, they've now realized that some of the softer issues, especially girls and women, need to be addressed if you want to make progress on these measurable issues. In the last few months Melinda Gates has announced a big initiative around girls and women, and we're in regular contact with her.

I can assure you that we realize this issue can only change if everybody works together. Governments in our prevalence countries, governments like yours that can make money available, UN institutions, grassroots groups, human rights groups, religious leaders, traditional leaders, all have to work together. If we all work together and create an integrated approach, we're going to make a difference.

We know that changing social norms is very difficult. One of the great examples is foot binding in China. It existed for hundreds of years. Do you know how many years it took to change it? Twenty, because at some point the honourable thing wasn't to bind the feet of your daughters any longer; the honourable thing became not to bind the feet of your daughters. If we can reach that tipping point thanks to the work of these guys, we're going to have a world without child marriage.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

To our witnesses, I thank you very much.

We're going to end this part of the meeting and get our next witnesses in.

• (0945)

(Pause)

• (0955)

The Chair: I want to welcome our next round of panellists.

From Plan International Canada Inc., we have Rosemary McCarney, who is the president and chief executive officer. Welcome. We are glad to have you here today.

From CARE Canada, we have Jackie Wright, who is the vice-president of international programs. Jackie, we're glad to have you here.

Joining us via telephone, we have Cicely McWilliam, who is the senior adviser of policies for campaigns from Save the Children Canada. Cicely, welcome.

I'm going to start with Rosemary for her opening presentation. Then we'll go to Jacquelyn. Then we'll finish up with Cicely. I will recognize you when it's time to go.

Rosemary, we'll turn it over to you.

Ms. Rosemary McCarney (President and Chief Executive Officer, Plan International Canada Inc.): Good morning. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear today.

I'd like to use the time to speak specifically about some practical measures that the Government of Canada can take to bolster child protection efforts around the world.

As the chair mentioned, I am the president and CEO of Plan International Canada. Plan Canada is one of the world's oldest and largest development agencies. We have no political or religious affiliation. We operate in over 80 countries around the world. We like to say that we have over 75 years of lessons that are hard learned in the development sector.

I noticed the questions earlier around war and conflict. In fact, Plan Canada was founded in the Spanish Civil War, where we worked with children found in the streets who were orphaned by that very long civil war. Since then we've evolved into a global humanitarian organization focused on the rights of children in over 103,000 communities across those 80 countries around the world.

Our child-centred community development approach to the work we do is anchored in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which directs our work in health, education, sanitation, sustainable

livelihoods, water, and conflict. At Plan Canada, we make a minimum 10-year commitment to each of those 103,000 communities, so that we can very much focus on capacity building at that level.

We welcome the committee's decision to conduct this study. It is certainly due. Canada has an enormous opportunity to carve out a global leadership role in this important area that has been long neglected. We're also very pleased to see the formation of the new child protection and child marriage units in DFATD, and we welcome the openness to discussing how we can shape a policy and programming approach that will be globally first class.

There are two comments I'd like to make just before touching on child, early and forced marriage. One is on private sector partnerships and development.

I'd like to start by highlighting the network, as I'm also here representing the International Child Protection Network of Canada. One of the highlighted recommendations concerns the implementation of children's rights and business principles. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Canada has a responsibility to see that its development partners, including the private sector, are respected and that they support children's rights and protection in their overseas operations. As Canada moves towards a greater emphasis on public-private partnerships for development, which we highly support, clear standards and expectations must be articulated in terms of how we do business overseas.

As part of a comprehensive due diligence process, we encourage the government to actively promote the necessary tools and resources to see that these business principles respecting children's rights are put into place. As a first step, this would include integrating the children's rights and business principles into the terms of reference, for example, for all DFATD private sector partners. We also recommend that we convene a workshop with all of the relevant partners to develop a common understanding of what the principles mean and how we can successfully implement them and work together with monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms. I'm certain it is an extraordinary tool. It is early days, and we think there is great opportunity for Canada on this.

The second small area that I'd like to touch on is the post-millennium development goals. The international development agenda has been framed by the millennium development goals for the last 14 and a half years. Child protection was absent in the millennium development goals, yet persistent violations of children's rights and their protection hinders our overall development successes and the achievement of these goals in general. We all know this, and obviously the members of this committee are very committed to child protection.

The recent open working group identified 17 areas of focus for the post-millennium development goals agenda, none of which included child protection. While we would like to see a stand-alone child protection initiative in the post-2015 agenda, the network has made a series of specific recommendations which we'll submit following this hearing, including, for example, an indicator to track progress on the elimination of violence against children, and an indicator to track the increase in the number of safe and decent working opportunities for our young people.

Moving to child, early and forced marriage, I think we all know that this is one of the most egregious failures of child protection. We are looking for Canada's support for the inclusion of an explicit goal on gender equality which would include a specific target to end child, early and forced marriage within the past-2015 agenda.

On the issue of child, early and forced marriage, Plan Canada compiled a policy paper that articulates lessons from our programmatic experience in this area, which we'll submit for consideration to the committee.

Not surprisingly, what we found is that one of the most effective ways to reduce child marriage is to increase girls' access to at least nine years of quality education. We know from our programmatic experience on the ground and from research, longitudinal data, that if we can get girls into secondary school, they're six times less likely to be married off as children when compared to girls who've completed primary education only.

But the schools we send these girls to have to be safe. They have to be safe from sexual and gender-based violence, including harassment from teachers and peers, so that parents can be convinced to send their children to school as a safer alternative than marriage, which is often their motivation. Our research, though, shows that violence against girls continues to be pervasive in the institution that all of us should be able to trust the most: their schools.

We're also pleased to see at the international level a very important piece, the UN action on the resolution, which I know you're all very familiar with. Plan Canada has worked very extensively over the last couple of years with the Canadian missions in New York and Geneva toward this resolution. A sound, reasonable resolution at the United Nations is an important tool for us all to work on to hold accountable the nation-states, member states, on progress toward eliminating child, early and forced marriage.

On the ground programmatically, because Plan Canada is a programmatically driven entity, we would call on the Government of Canada to take concrete action to end forced marriage by developing a robust programmatic initiative that challenges child, early and forced marriage at multiple levels simultaneously. This should include a dedicated new funding envelope for child, early and forced marriage similar to the START mechanism of the older Foreign Affairs, because it's important that we put together not just the advocacy and our voice at the global level, where Canada is considered a well-regarded champion, but that we match that with real action on the ground.

When I say multiple levels simultaneously, what I mean is working with those who would actively challenge and oppose child, early and forced marriage. Our experience shows that best practices

across a range of countries include dialogue and action at the community and family household level—we can't come helicoptering in from afar. Best practices also include peer-to-peer participation, engaging young people in this, and I can share with you best practices in this in Bangladesh; engaging religious, traditional, and community leaders—the best practices in places like Mali; engaging men and boys, which you've already highlighted; and increasing awareness and enforcement of the law against child marriage where many parents don't know that they're breaking the law.

Also very important is that we don't leave behind the women and girls who are already married. We recommend that the government invest in projects to support young women and girls who've already been married off, including their re-entry into school, where often they're forbidden from attending once married; vocational opportunities; and access to maternal, newborn, and child health care, including sexual and reproductive health. We can't give up on or abandon those children who've already been married off, because they will quickly become child mothers of a new generation of children.

The next and second to last piece I would ask is that we look at systems strengthening. Broadly speaking, one of our most important lessons learned is that our responses to early forced marriage as well as all our child protection interventions have to be integrated and rooted within strong child-based community protection systems and national child protection mechanisms. It means that we have to be mindful of the many ways that a single child might be vulnerable so that one intervention doesn't actually set the child up for more vulnerability; for example, if we take action to protect a young girl at school only to see her abused on the way home. We may work with youth to convince parents to stop a marriage, but if we fail to work with the traditional and religious leaders, that girl could face violent or serious social repercussions that would set us back further; so one step forward, two steps backward.

● (1000)

Canada is one of the first countries, one of the first donors, to actually take a system-strengthening approach to child protection. What I mean by that is it is looking at the broad social welfare framework, recognizing that poverty and social exclusion operate on a myriad of levels and that there are a range of complex contributing factors to child early forced marriage like violence, natural disasters, war and conflict, trafficking, harmful traditional practices. It's a systems approach, as we all know.

From a policy perspective, I recognize it's challenging. One donor can't do everything. One member state can't do everything. What we can do is see that at least a systems analysis is undertaken before we start making investments, before we start jumping in with well-intentioned interventions to look at where the gaps are, whom we need to partner with, who are the decision-makers and influencers, and how we coordinate action. That will increase the overall capacity of the system to protect children and youth.

Finally, I want to highlight gender equality and gender-based violence. If we want our interventions to be effective, if we want our investments to get a good return, we have to be mindful of the underlying causes of gender inequality or how gender beliefs and practices manifest in so many ways in a young girl's life. We may work with girls themselves to build knowledge of their rights, but without economic alternatives for them, they're unlikely to be able to delay entering into a forced marriage. Once Canada was a leader on gender equality recognized around the world. It's time for us to take that leadership back. There's so much history and experience in DFATD on this. Integrating gender equality across all our interventions and supporting those issues addressing girls' vulnerability will build an internationally recognized reputation for Canada, without question.

As part of that, I want to draw your attention to Plan's recommendations in its report, "A girl's right to learn without fear". There are practical steps that Canada and governments can take to address the issue of gender-based violence in and around schools. It is pervasive and universal. The abduction of the Nigerian girls while heinous was just an extreme example of what 500 million to 1.5 billion children go through on a daily basis, violations of their rights to protection, education, and their very survival.

So, an international UN resolution investing on the ground in smart programming.... Don't forget the children who are already married off. Focus on system strengthening. Then there's that cross-cutting need for attention on gender equality and gender-based violence. It is multiple and it needs to happen simultaneously. There isn't a hierarchy of sequencing we can suggest because while violence against children is unjustifiable, it's also preventable.

I encourage you to look at the solutions proposed in the report. What I hope is that we can carve out a role for Canada where child protection is one of our foreign policy priorities. There are a lot of children around the world waiting for Canada's leadership.

Thank you.

●(1005)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. McCarney.

Jackie Wright, we're going to turn it over to you for 10 minutes, please.

Ms. Jacquelyn Wright (Vice-President, International Programs, CARE Canada): I would like to thank you for the invitation to appear before you and submit my testimony on behalf of CARE Canada. I do send regrets from Gillian Barth, our president and CEO, who's attending our board meeting as we speak.

As many of you know, CARE Canada is a member of the global CARE federation. CARE, like Plan, has been around for 75 or more years, hailing back to the Second World War with the care package

we all think of back then. Of course, we've evolved tremendously since then, and we are present in more than 80 countries. Our approach to development and humanitarian assistance is based on the empowerment of women and girls. Because of our expertise in this area we are a major partner in the Muskoka initiative aimed at improving maternal, newborn and child health. We have also been the recipient of START funding for programming on child, early and forced marriage, particularly in Ghana and Ethiopia.

The issue this committee is studying today, the protection of children and the prevention of human trafficking, early and forced marriage, the sex trade, female genital mutilation, and the online abuse of children, is one that is very much aligned with our mission. Based on CARE's experience in developing countries, whether through long-term programming or emergency relief, I can certainly speak about the challenges we face as we tackle these issues, with the exception of online abuse.

The first thing I should mention is that in all the countries where we work, we see that girls and women are disproportionately affected by poverty and discrimination. This poverty comes from a chronic scarcity of basic necessities: clean water, food, and protection from deadly diseases such as malaria or dengue fever. The scramble to survive on limited resources inevitably creates a pecking order, the bottom of which is almost always occupied by young girls.

Once you are considered expendable, the road from being pulled out of school to help with chores, to going to bed hungry during lean seasons or times of crisis, to becoming a victim of gender-based violence can be surprisingly short.

"Gender-based violence" is a bit of a jargon term. What does it mean? It usually means that young girls and women are being intimidated and abused, often sexually, because they are perceived as weaker, too often because nobody is there to defend them and they just don't have the knowledge and means to defend themselves. Vulnerability leads to marginalization and isolation, making it even more difficult for agencies such as ours to reach and help these girls.

Lack of education for girls contributes to early marriage, higher birth rates, and deliveries with complications that can lead to death or permanent disabilities because the body of a 12-year-old is not ready to conceive and give birth, and an 18-year-old should not be raising three or four kids, certainly not without an education, an income, and a safe place to live.

Many of these girls—we can't really call them mothers when it was never their decision to bear children before becoming adults—do not live within proximity of a health facility. If they do, they are often discouraged by their husband from seeking medical care in a clinic because of lack of money to pay for the services or the cost of transportation to get there.

Having had no access to prenatal care, they will often give birth alone, without a trained birth attendant. If there are complications with the delivery, nobody will be there to provide emergency assistance. This means that a young girl will die from hemorrhage without even knowing what is happening to her. Quite apart from the searing pain, can you imagine the dread of feeling the life slip away from you as you are trying to give life?

Because their bodies are still so small, many of the young girls who do live through difficult deliveries will suffer from something called fistula. Without going into all the medical details, this condition is a tear of the tissue around the pelvic bone, and it occurs when labour is obstructed for several days. It renders girls permanently incontinent, which only increases their level of isolation and vulnerability.

In a conflict setting, like we have seen in South Sudan right now, the threat and damage done by gender-based violence grows exponentially. For a concise yet very informative review of the situation there, I invite you to read our report, "The Girl Has No Rights: Gender-Based Violence in South Sudan". I have submitted a copy with my testimony.

We know that child, early and forced marriage is especially pernicious because it pushes young girls farther and farther beyond the reach of those who would help them. If they are shunned by their community, what happens to their children? Who takes care of them? Who takes on the responsibility of protecting them from abuse, exploitation, and neglect?

• (1010)

What are we at CARE doing to counter the effects of child, early and forced marriage? In my introduction I mentioned that CARE was the recipient of START funding for projects in Ghana and Ethiopia. Last year we were successful in receiving funding but unfortunately, by the time we received the funding there were only four months left to program. While we were able to achieve some results, the time period was detrimental.

Our initiative in Ghana's upper west district was one of awareness raising and education. With our civil society partner we organized workshops with local authorities and traditional leaders to sensitize them to the harms associated with child, early and forced marriage. We also created girls' clubs in schools where we trained girls in leadership skills, so they could share knowledge and caution peers and their families. We put on a five-day camp where 80 young girls received more extensive training in the hope that they will become champions of marriage after the legal age, which in Ghana is 18.

In Ethiopia we used our flagship Village Savings and Loan Association, or VSLA, programming to empower girls who are already married by showing them the basics of saving and financial planning. This created a platform for us to interact with them and

provide them with tools that will help them become more self-sufficient.

While all these interventions are inspiring and indeed showing results, the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage across so many communities remains highly problematic. Child, early and forced marriage is a practice that is cultural, generational, but also motivated by economic circumstances, as I alluded to earlier. Reversing something that is so ingrained in the fabric of a community is not done in four months, and it's not done even in four years.

By way of comparison, let's look at a customary practice here in Canada. Do you remember back in the 1960s and 1970s when most people drove around without wearing a seatbelt? It may not surprise you that Ontario was the first province to enact mandatory seatbelt use back in 1976, but that was after much lobbying by road safety advocates, public awareness campaigns, and of course, an incremental march toward a political will to legislate. It did not happen overnight even here in Canada. In fact, in other parts of the country, it took many years to convince the public.

Going back to Ghana and Ethiopia or many of these countries, the belief that a man can take a young girl as his wife is much more intimate than the belief that we can't wear our seatbelts. We cannot expect too quickly or easily to reverse thinking and practices that have been passed down and encouraged for generations, especially when they are also perceived as essential to a family's economic sustainability.

When we are able to change hearts and minds, and authorities become willing to enforce the laws that are on the books, what happens to these girls? They may be rescued from an early marriage, but who will take them in? Often the families do not want them and there are no shelters for them, no referral services, no child welfare agencies with trained staff that will provide a safe place to stay and help them get an education. Short-term funding does not allow for any of this. It may allow us to say we are addressing the problem, but it does not give us the right to think that we are. If we are going to see results, real comprehensive results, we need to make this a long-term development priority. That means that child, early and forced marriage must be at or very near the top of the pile on the desk of Minister Paradis.

If we are serious about this issue and want Canada to have an impact, it will take a sustained and concerted effort. A number of NGOs have expertise in this area and best practices do exist. What we need now is focus, patience, and the funding to back up the commitment. As we develop the post-2015 sustainable development goals, we need to focus on substantive solutions that strengthen child protection systems, provide vocational training, and promote economic empowerment. In crafting these solutions, our approach must be inclusive. This means working with men and boys as well as women and girls, and it also means going beyond prevention efforts and addressing the plight of girls who have already been married.

I will stop there.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to your questions.

• (1015)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Wright.

We'll go over to the teleconference now. Ms. McWilliam, you have the floor.

Ms. Cicely McWilliam (Senior Advisor, Policies and Campaigns, Save the Children Canada): Honourable committee chair, members of Parliament, the clerk of the committee, and esteemed colleagues, Save the Children is honoured to appear today before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs to talk to you about Canada's role particularly as it relates to the prevention of human trafficking and early and forced marriage.

I wish to extend the regrets of Patricia Erb, the CEO of Save the Children, who was unable to attend today because she is travelling.

As you know, Save the Children is the world's leading independent organization for children working in 120 countries. We were established almost 100 years ago; our anniversary will be very soon. We build our expertise through our work around the world in partnership with local organizations and governments. Child protection is an area of particular focus for us and is one of the reasons that Save the Children led in the formation of the International Child Protection Network of Canada, mentioned earlier by Rosemary McCarney. This is a coalition of Canadian NGOs that was formed in 2013 to share knowledge and experience on child protection programming and to engage the government and the public in this critical development issue.

Save the Children believes that child protection is vital to ensuring that the equal rights of girls and boys can be fulfilled. The simple fact is that if children are exploited, abused, or neglected, it is unlikely that they will lead healthy, educated, and empowered lives. Child protection is therefore a minimum requirement to meet our political and ethical responsibilities to girls and boys,

But protection should not be at an end in itself. Our ultimate goal should be to enable children to become healthy, educated, empowered citizens, engaged political, social, and economic actors, and young leaders. To achieve this goal, we understand that protection should integrate the three following critical approaches: investing in the participation of children, understanding how the potential of each child can be leveraged and maximized; investing in the prevention of violence, including early forced marriage and child trafficking; and focusing on the root causes that lead to the

exploitation, abuse, and neglect of children, integrating our response into a systems approach to child protection.

Obviously, underpinning those approaches there needs to be gender equality. This is a priority area for Save the Children Canada. We believe that the two thematic areas, child protection and gender equality, are inextricably linked. We recognize that girls and boys face different child protection risks and challenges, but if we are to make real change for girls and women, boys and men have to be part of the solution. We need not only to address the inequality faced by girls and women, but also the limitations that this discrimination imposes on boys and men. Only in promoting and enabling gender equality can we ensure that no harm comes to children, end discrimination, and advance our vision of a world in which every child attains an equal right to survival, protection, and development.

Why is child participation so important? Ultimately children themselves, while they experience vulnerability, have tremendous potential. They are also able to articulate what the greatest risks are that they face. A proper weighting in child protection of building systems and responses means listening to the voices of girls and boys and facilitating a space in which they can seek information and build their own understanding, as well as shape their own destiny and our responses as development actors.

An example of how important this is is found in child trafficking. While of course children are trafficked and we need improved laws, enforcement, and child protection systems to address this criminal activity, often there are pull mechanisms that come into play, whereby children make the choice to leave their own homes and communities and then are exploited in their effort to seek out safer environments or economic opportunity. This was a primary example of the work we have done in child trafficking in West Africa, where for years the migration of girls and boys was simply understood through the trafficking lens. What became apparent once we listened to what girls and boys were saying is that they were leaving for a variety of reasons—poverty, abuse within their own families, sometimes just for the adventure of the trip or for the experience, because it was deeply rooted in their cultures—and the trafficking and exploitation came after the initial choice was made by them to leave their homes and families. If we're going to respond to their needs and actually try to mitigate the dangers that they experience, you have to understand that the initial choice to leave was their own.

•(1020)

Engaging children in meaningful participation allows us to more accurately understand the root causes and to address the potential violence. We believe it is vital for the Government of Canada to ensure that meaningful participation of girls and boys is integrated into its work on child protection, and that programs are planned and executed in partnership with civil society organizations that are best placed to encourage this participation. Child protection programs should include sufficient time and funds to ensure that this participation is equitable and meaningful. Other colleagues have talked about the importance of a strong prevention framework. This is obviously important as it relates to understanding the root causes.

In terms of child, early and forced marriage, recently Save the Children was working through a DFATD supported program with the Nagaad community organization in Somalia. What came to be obvious was that the knowledge from this partnership enabled us to identify that one of the key drivers of early marriage in the area where we were working was social isolation. Parents, as others have said, were afraid that their daughters would lose their virginity before marriage, or that they would be socially ostracized if they were to stay unmarried, so they kept them at home and away from school. As a result, girls were not properly informed of the risks and were seeking their own escape from their domestic burdens, and often again would choose or would seek out marriage themselves. Again, that's another example where by working with communities, community organizations, and with girls themselves we were able to identify the kinds of programming that would educate and support girls in making different choices for themselves and support families in making different choices.

We call on the Canadian government to ensure that its leadership on child protection takes a holistic approach that addresses in a sustainable way the root causes and engages entire communities in working to end the violence that children often experience. That involves definitely a protection system that engages legislation and policy mechanisms that serve the service and social welfare systems at the national and local levels, that addresses the cultural framework and practices, and as I said previously, ensures the participation of children.

One of the things that Save the Children has been keenly engaged with is the conversation around sustainable economic growth. Poverty is an underlying driver in many instances when it comes to both trafficking and early and forced marriage. The children's rights and business principles launched in 2012 were developed by Save the Children, UNICEF, and the UN Global Compact in response to a call from the UN for companies to better address the rights of children. They're a guide intended to encourage business to respect and support the rights of children. Through its engagement with the private sector, the Government of Canada should work to see that all its partners adhere to the children's rights and business principles.

Addressing the vulnerabilities and potential that children face, whether it's at work and the exploitation at work and sexual exploitation at work... We call on the government to continue its efforts to support girls and boys who are working. Many of the children we're talking about who face trafficking or early and forced marriage are also children who are facing the potential of working, or are working. Providing equal access to quality education, market-

oriented training, and decent working opportunities for children can help break the cycle of poverty for families and communities as well as break the cycle of early and forced marriage and trafficking.

•(1025)

To conclude, we would like to call on the Canadian government to ensure that girls and boys can participate equitably and meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives, prioritize, identify, and address root causes of violence, as well as mandate the work we do collectively—governments, civil society, and children—through a systems approach to respond to violence, to incorporate a response, and to encourage the private sector to engage meaningfully in that collective work as well.

I'd like to thank you for allowing us to speak today.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McWilliam.

I've been led to believe there are going to be votes, which is not a problem. We can finish up here. I want to suggest that we have one round, six minutes each from each party, and that will take us pretty much to quarter to the hour, even though bells will start sometime before then. Then we can make sure everyone gets a chance to ask some questions.

I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Dewar, for six minutes, please.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you to our witnesses. I want to start off with Ms. Wright.

You said something that caught my attention, and that is the funding itself and the fact that you were having to wait for government, for the department, to process your application.

First of all, is this something that the other witnesses have been affected by? Ms. Wright, in terms of dollars and cents, how much of a delay did that have on your program? We're interested in high impact here, and of course you're interested in getting as many dollars as you can, and they are scarce sometimes. What impact did that have on your program? You touched on it. I'd just like to hear from the other witnesses if they have had the same experience.

Ms. Jacquelyn Wright: Yes. To be fair, I think that this was really innovative funding, and it was a little bit of a learning experiment as well, so I don't want to be totally negative about it at all.

The impact was that we had to choose programming that built on other programming so that we weren't starting fresh. In fact we were quite surprised that we were able to do something in a four-month period, which sounds very short, and it is, but we were able to manage to do that.

The next iteration of this is coming along very shortly, and there is longer-term funding available, and we have been apprised of that opportunity. I'm not sure exactly what the length is going to be, but it will be much longer than the first round.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Are you applying through START? That's been...the recasting. I know they were going to redo it, and now we're hearing it's just going to stay as it was. Is that your understanding?

Ms. Jacquelyn Wright: Yes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: It's through START, what we knew before.

Ms. Jacquelyn Wright: Yes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'd like to ask the other witnesses if they have had any similar experience in terms of program funding delays and getting confirmation of funding.

Ms. Cicely McWilliam: In fact we had I think it was the same tranche of funding that my colleague from CARE is referencing. We had that short timeframe to respond. As she said, I think it was an innovative piece. We knew the parameters were tight going in. We're pleased to be able to have a really good response by building on programming that already existed.

In general, I think most of my colleagues would agree that the key ultimately is that we need to have processes that are fast on our end and that ultimately have longer horizons for successful implementation. I think that would be just a general statement in order to be able to do the work we want to do effectively.

Mr. Paul Dewar: If I may, just before you answer, Ms. McCarney, I have two questions for you, and then you can build it in because our time is short.

There's that question for your organization, but I have two other questions based on your presentation. One is the issue—and I'm glad you mentioned it; it is something that I think we need to underline not to forget, and I think you all agree on this—of those girls who already have been married and the access particularly to health services.

One of the points of disagreement with the government that we have is that there needs to be a full complement of reproductive health choices for women. Please talk about that, about the whole suite of reproductive services for women that they would receive here in Canada, but seemingly we are not making them available where it is available in other countries.

Also, there's the global education fund. We were hoping to hear an announcement in June. We were hoping to hear an announcement recently. Can you talk about the importance of funding that particular organization? High impact is about education, as we've discussed here, so please touch on that.

If there's any remaining time, we'll hear from the other two witnesses.

• (1030)

Ms. Rosemary McCarney: I can speak quickly.

In terms of the funding, it's often contextual and I think Jackie and Cicely have both mentioned that. It's often very contextualized, whether it's a rapid response or new innovation. I think what's more important is the other end. You can be slow getting started as long as there's enough time to actually get it well grounded and be able to monitor and evaluate, so you know what to do next. So it's contextualized.

In terms of those already married, what's really important for that group of women is how we can re-empower them within the state of marriage, in a marriage they didn't select. How do we actually involve the husbands, the parents, the in-laws, the teachers, the community leaders, in enabling them to get back to school, regardless of marriage? What you're trying to do, obviously, is to postpone the onset of early pregnancy. It's bad enough we couldn't stop the marriage, but at least let's stop the onset of a child pregnancy, a child birthing a child. Getting them back into school is probably our best way to do that, because we know that will stretch out that process. Fundamentally, it's important that they have access to the things they should have, such as health care.

With respect to the range of reproductive and health care, under Canada's maternal, newborn and child health initiative, access to contraception has been a strong part of the Muskoka initiative since 2010 and continues to be, and that's important.

In terms of access to abortion, I think the Canadian Network for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health has said that is an area that other donors will take up and have taken up. In most countries, what we would ask for is that it be rare, legal, and safe. In most countries in which we all work, it is none of those. It's not available and it's not legal. We can't work against the laws of a particular country, so it's limited, regardless of policy. Other donors are trying to change laws, etc., sometimes effectively, sometimes not quite so effectively.

In terms of those girls who have been forced into a marriage without their choice and before an appropriate age, our job is to protect them. We know that if there is a silver bullet in all of this, it is getting girls back into school and keeping them in school through a very vulnerable stage of their life, and puberty is the most vulnerable. As the mother of three children, I know and we all know how anxious we get as parents when our children hit puberty. It's a very important piece.

The other piece that my colleagues have mentioned is to get the boys involved, and get them to be the advocates for the girls as well. Due to the narrow definition of masculinity, they are often being forced into situations not of their choosing. This is fundamentally important. Gender equality, or inequality, isn't working for them either.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hawn, for six minutes.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'll do with three or four and pass it on to Mr. Schellenberger.

First, I want Plan Canada to know I've asked for goats for Christmas.

Ms. McWilliam, you started talking about engaging the private sector. Could you be specific on some ideas of how you would make that happen?

• (1035)

Ms. Cicely McWilliam: Certainly.

In the case of child trafficking in particular, you can look to the mining sector or to other major infrastructure development activities in the developing world and see that there is a great risk oftentimes at those sites, where children are being trafficked and sexually exploited. That would be an example of where proactive engagement on the part of a company, in terms of dealing with and training their personnel, as well as the security companies they work with or the security folks who directly work for them, would be an important piece of work to be done. Also, it's not only a matter of those kinds of site-specific problems.

Poverty is a huge driver in terms of early marriage and child trafficking, as well as child labour. The issue also around ensuring that you provide decent employment for parents and caregivers of children will have a tremendous mitigating effect and will provide the space for children to potentially go to school or get vocational training, and not necessarily put them into situations where families feel forced for economic reasons to place their children in arranged or forced marriages, or who feel that their children must leave the home in order to ensure that the family is economically stable.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

Ms. Wright, I think I'll go to you with this one.

In about a minute and a half, can you tell me if we should be attaching strings in our international development assistance? Should strings be attached to attainment of goals? Are strings counterproductive? As you know, we want the money to get down to the grassroots level, and there's corruption in a lot of those places. Should we attach strings, or are strings counterproductive?

Ms. Jacquelyn Wright: That's a loaded question.

I think it's important to understand that agencies like ours are independent. We don't take sides. We're neutral, so political strings attached would not work for us. It doesn't allow us the access that we require to the vulnerable populations. As for whether that can work in a parallel system, I don't think I'm qualified to answer that question.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Okay. That's fair enough.

Ms. Cicely McWilliam: Would you mind if I took a quick stab at that?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Go ahead.

Ms. Cicely McWilliam: Ultimately, in order to succeed, effective aid recognizes that country ownership is very important. While there are certainly cases of corruption, that's why it is so important to work with.... Save the Children works with governments as well as communities, and we seek to bridge the gap.

We also build the resilience of communities in regard to their being able to place demands on their government. For example, in the health sector and area, we do a lot of budget tracking, which helps communities identify how the money is flowing from the national level down to the community level, to ensure that those funds are being spent appropriately.

On child protection, there are so few countries where we're working that have actual proper systems that get down to the community level, so that kind of budget tracking would not be

particularly effective since there are no systems there from which to track.

That would be your answer in relation to this area.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you for that.

I've saved Mr. Schellenberger a minute.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Schellenberger.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you.

If our daughters or granddaughters were raped or abused, we would take them in our arms, we would cuddle them, and we'd give them love and support. You have said that in most countries these girls would be banned from the family. Is this a religious trait or tradition?

• (1040)

Ms. Rosemary McCarney: Well, it's neither. It's not a religious trait nor a tradition. I would argue that we don't do so well with our own girls either.

Ms. Jacquelyn Wright: Yes.

Ms. Rosemary McCarney: As we know, and certainly much more clearly over the last few weeks, girls and women hesitate to report for exactly the reasons that they will be stigmatized, or rejected, or questioned in terms of their veracity. This is universal and pervasive.

We know that in Canada one in four girls reports to us that they're sexually assaulted before the age of 16, as do 15% of boys. I am never in a classroom with young children where I'm not counting one, two, three, four, and one, two, three, four, yet I wonder.... In terms of the reporting and the confidence to report, I think what's fundamentally important is for us to create safe individuals and safe institutions so children feel that they can come forward. If that doesn't work at the family level, can it work at the health clinic level or can it work at the school level? It's so important that we're able to create a safe environment for children and girls to report these abuses, an environment where they know they will receive the support they need.

I don't think it's unique to religion or societies. It's an issue that we need to get on top of as a planet: we need to get ahead of almost the habituation or the normalcy of gender-based violence.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Wright, very quickly, and then we're going to go to Mr. Garneau.

Ms. Jacquelyn Wright: I just want to say that a lot of it is around economic drivers. We tend to go to the religious or the cultural, but really, sometimes it's just about survival, and this is a way that has worked for them over the generations.

Of course, now we realize that it's not. We're coming to that realization ourselves, but also, as you work with people and talk to them about it, they realize it too. But that's a long, long process.

The Chair: Thank you. That's probably an answer that needs a little more than 30 seconds as well. We realize that.

Mr. Garneau.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Witnesses, thank you for all the work that you do.

I think that this week we are celebrating or highlighting the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. I guess we still have some way to go, including in our own country, as you've pointed out.

I want to focus more on girls. I'm not minimizing what's happening to boys, and they very much have to be part of the solution and men as well, but it is girls who are forced into marriages and become child brides and are victims of sex trafficking and female genital mutilation. More than one person has spoken to us today about the importance of empowering girls, and I couldn't agree more. However, when I think about empowering girls, I'm thinking about some of the obstacles they face with respect to certain religions, with respect to deeply ingrained cultural traditions.

This question is for all of you. It's my only question. Could you give me some indication of how the empowerment is happening despite all of these very daunting challenges that girls face?

Ms. Cicely McWilliam: Ultimately, we find that oftentimes—and I think this was mentioned in the first suite of speakers this morning—working with religious leaders and community leaders, most of whom are male, is actually a very good way of highlighting why change is important and what the benefit is to the family, the community, if girls are empowered.

Certainly, we've seen this in northern Nigeria where we have been working in the same areas where you see Boko Haram, for example, and a number of the communities.... I think you saw that with the parents of the young girls who were kidnapped. It was the fathers as well as the mothers who were saying that they wanted their daughters to be educated and that for them it was the future, which made what happened to them all the more heartrending. We also heard that in urban settings they've seen a decrease in the number of child marriages, in large part because the norm had shifted, as my colleague from CARE talked about. When you see around you that more children are going to school and more girls are going to school, then the norm shifts. Really, it is through this constant engagement and repetition of the importance of education and the opportunities that girls being educated can bring not only to themselves but also to their communities and to their families that will really be the tipping point for change when it comes to empowerment.

If you just focus the message narrowly on that individual girl's empowerment, you're likely not to be as successful, to be honest, as

if you contextualized it within how it will be a betterment for family and community as a whole.

• (1045)

Ms. Rosemary McCarney: What I would add to my colleague's comments is that education is what empowers girls. If a girl is able to attend school and get through the transition to secondary school, if we redefine primary education or basic education to be at least nine years and get them through that vulnerable stage, they learn about their rights, and they gain a confidence to assert those rights. Then they're able to get a good job or a decent job and be empowered at a household level as an economic contributor. It's a vital force of empowerment. But we can't put all of this on the backs of young girls. We need the traditional and religious leaders, such as the Sultan of Dosso in Niger, who is one of the most outspoken advocates for girls' protection and ending girls' early and forced marriage in a country where it's universal. There's the Zimbabwe religious leaders, through the DFATD program, who came to together and created a national broadcast and created a signing agreement that they would step up to end. It's bringing in all of those. There are the wedding busters in Bangladesh, young boys who go house to house when they hear about a child marriage about to take place and advocate on behalf of them.

We can't put all of it on the backs of girls. Empower the girls, yes, but make sure all of us step up to our obligations and our responsibilities.

Ms. Jacquelyn Wright: I would just add that this has to be seen under the umbrella of poverty and the injustice of poverty and the inequality of power associated with that at all levels. If we want to take a holistic approach, seeing it under that umbrella is really going to help us.

In the Village Savings and Loan Association program that we run in many countries, but in particular in Ethiopia, this is a platform that allows for economic empowerment of community members—not just women, not just men, not just girls, but the community. We know that is one of the most successful ways to empower the communities. In turn, if they are empowered and they have the ability to make different choices, and they have the income, maybe they won't take that child bride price. It's about looking at the root causes and the drivers of those inequalities in poverty. I think my colleagues are right that if we focus that too narrowly, people just may not choose to listen.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all the time we have.

Witnesses, thank you very much for being here today.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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